

DOES WALDORF EDUCATION OFFER A WELL-ROUNDED AND INTEGRATED  
EXPERIENCE THAT PREPARES STUDENTS FOR HIGHER GRADES AND LIFE  
IN GENERAL?

By

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## ABSTRACT

### DOES WALDORF EDUCATION OFFER A WELL-ROUNDED AND INTEGRATED EXPERIENCE THAT PREPARES STUDENTS FOR HIGHER GRADES AND LIFE IN GENERAL?

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This thesis research focuses on the study of Waldorf education and how it benefits the whole child. It begins by looking at Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf educational program and its foundational history and then takes an in depth look at the key elements of its rich philosophy and pedagogy. The literature review focuses on the key question, 'Does this 100 year-old teaching philosophy encourage a more well-rounded and integrated educational experience than traditional public schools?' The review highlights four broad topics in relationship to Waldorf education. These include: Educating the Whole Child; Education for the Three Stages of Childhood; Early Childhood Education; and Integrated Education. The review also compares Waldorf education to traditional schools. A mixed methods research project was conducted to go more in depth into the topic of the value of Waldorf education. The overall concentration of the mixed methods research was to answer two central questions. The first question was, 'How do parents feel about their children's Waldorf education?' The second question was, 'What aspects of their children's Waldorf school experiences are important?' The study was carried out by conducting interviews and surveys with Waldorf parents. The interviews focused on

the aspects of children's Waldorf education that influences their present and future schooling and beyond. The survey focused on two questions, 'Does Waldorf curriculum offer a well-rounded education?' and 'Does Waldorf curriculum prepare students for the upper grades and life more generally?' The study revealed that parents highlighted many key elements they feel are integral to educating the whole child - hands, heart, and head. The interview research showed that parents place a high value on many themes some of which include: Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practices; Special Techniques for Teaching Math; Nature Connections and Science Lessons; The Arts Curriculum; and Social-Emotional Development. The survey research disclosed some important themes described by the statistical data and Pearson Correlations. Some of these themes are: How Academics are Taught using a Waldorf Curriculum; Holistic Education and Educating the Whole Child – Hands, Heart, and Head in Relationship to Waldorf Education; and the Importance of Math Being Taught through the Waldorf Curriculum. The results were clear – parents do appreciate their children's Waldorf education. They feel that it is a fundamental curricular program that helps their children to benefit from its important strategies, achieve their optimal development, and become prepared for upper grades and life in general.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century widespread public schools as we define them today were opened to urban and suburban neighborhood children for the first time in world history. Many economically developed nations began to offer free education to their young citizens. During the 1800's public schools grew and evolved to reflect the pedagogical understandings of the time. Traditional education was created to have a teacher-centered classroom setting where students would learn a distinct set of studies.

As schools progressed in industrialized countries during the early twentieth century, new educational philosophies were developed. In response to the human experiences that were happening during World War I, some school philosophies were formed that included more holistic approaches. The steady rise of public unrest due to the ongoing problems caused by world war activated a new teaching philosophy and pedagogy (Coulter, 1991). This new teaching philosophy, created in 1919, was Waldorf Education and was created to rebuild world peace, and reduce the negative effects of world war and the hostilities that ensued.

Waldorf Education was established to help humanity evolve by teaching its youngest citizens about world peace, diversity, tolerance, and how to develop a deeper connection to nature. Looking through the lenses of his multicultural childhood, growing up in the rural mountain areas of Austria, and the ongoing threat of WWI, Rudolf Steiner created Waldorf Education (Hemleben, 1975). He understood that the world was being affected negatively by industrialization and that nurturing the whole child could help

bring more peace to humanity (Coulter, 1991). He recognized that humans were heading down a path that could lead to devastation. In response to that realization he created a peaceful approach to education that could help repair some of the cultural and class differences that were broken down by the war in Europe and around the world (Coulter, 1991). Steiner offered hope for a new society, one that could be liberated from the very powerful modern state (Uhrmacher, 1995).

During this time there was steady progress in the scientific understanding of child development. Rudolf Steiner utilized the contemporary views of Child Development as well as his background in working with young people to create a school pedagogy that nurtures the whole child (Hemleben, 1975). He understood that the way to heal and help humanity was to care for and uplift its fledgling citizens.

He intuited that the masculine aspects of war needed to be counter-balanced with the feminine aspects of nurturing the inner child (Coulter, 1991). His pedagogical style would teach young people how to love and cherish the natural and physical world, while at the same time developing a deeper understanding of academics and the arts (Hemleben, 1975). He endeavored to do this by rebuilding the imaginations and senses of the children who had been exposed to a hardened world through the experiences of world war (Coulter, 1991).

Rudolf Steiner created and led the first Waldorf School for the children of the factory workers at the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory. It was called the “Free School” (Coulter, 1991). Emil Molt, the owner of the factory, wanted to open up and offer a school that could serve the factory workers and their children. These workers came from

diverse cultures, languages, and backgrounds. In collaboration with Emil Molt, Rudolf created a school that was open to all children and had a philosophy that integrated the basic goodness and inner knowing of children, while teaching them academics and arts, and how to open up their hearts (Barnes, 1991; Coulter, 1991; Hemleben, 1975).

Steiner thought that it was important to create an education that would best serve children from diverse backgrounds, languages, cultures, and social classes. He wanted them to acquire the ability to handle overwhelming situations and overcome the hardships of living in an industrial world. He believed that as cultures became more technologically developed they needed to also become more aware of their capacity to become whole human beings and resist the modern pressures toward dehumanization (Easton, 1997).

By creating Waldorf education, Steiner was able to develop a sustainable school philosophy that has lasted 100 years and continues to grow annually around the world. His academic and educational research has been called some of the best-kept secrets of the twentieth century (Barnes, 1991; Dahlin, 2009). His lasting pedagogical ideas have presented important curricular concepts that are widely used in many types of education around the world to this day.

By studying, utilizing, and promoting Waldorf education humanity can rebuild our world for the better. We can heal the disastrous wounds of our past, reshape the philosophy of how to nurture the human race, build trust among the world's citizens, and support the environment and ecosystems of the planet. Waldorf education is a remedy

for the maladies of mankind and can enlighten and rebuild our future, our stability, and our existence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Life as a whole is a unity,  
and we must not only consider the child,  
But the whole of life;  
we must look at the whole human being.*

Rudolf Steiner

### Introduction

This literature review will take an in depth look at Rudolf Steiner’s Waldorf educational program as well as key elements of its rich philosophy and pedagogy. The themes related to Waldorf Education are fruitful, varied, and numerous. The extensive topics of Waldorf Education and its abundant characteristics cannot be completely covered in this review. Rather, this review will cover several important features that relate to the well-rounded and comprehensive aspects of Waldorf Education. These topics include: educating the whole child; education for the three stages of childhood; early childhood education; and integrated education. This review will attempt to cover these topics while answering the question, “Does this 100 year-old teaching philosophy encourage a more well-rounded and integrated educational experience than traditional public schools?”

## Educating the Whole Child

Waldorf Education is a school philosophy that encourages educating children through a wide range of learning experiences that nurture the whole child (Foster, 1984; Reinsmith, 1989). In contrast, traditional schools seem to focus almost entirely on only one part of the body, the brain and its intellectual capacity (Iannone & Obenauf, 1999; Ogletree, 1991). The curriculum used in Waldorf Schools is well-rounded and strives...“to develop the aesthetic, spiritual, and interpersonal sensibilities of the child in ways that enrich, enliven and reinforce intellectual knowing.... by engaging the whole child in the learning process, hands, heart, and head” as stated by Easton (1997, p. 88). This unique curriculum is designed to be appropriate for each of the three stages in succession i.e.: developing the hands in early childhood, the heart in middle childhood, and then the head in later childhood, young adulthood, and beyond.

A significant feature of Steiner’s viewpoint is that it is based on the theory of the human being as a threefold individual composed of the body, the soul, and the spirit of mind (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Foster, 1984; Guthrie, 2003; Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). The human soul, which goes between the body, and the spirit of mind, has the ability to will, feel, and think (Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). According to Steiner and his Waldorf educational philosophy, it is the purpose of education to exercise and care for the body, the soul, and the spirit of mind. Education needs to nourish the body, the soul, and the spirit of mind to become receptive, adaptable, and readily accessible to the individual human ego later in adult life (Guthrie, 2003).



This connection of the body, soul, and spirit of mind unfolds into three developmental stages on the path to adulthood: early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. To obtain full expression of the human self as an adult, a child must go through these three stages that last approximately seven years each (Barnes 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). These seven-year stages allow the human being to: be fully nurtured; be given time to completely develop; and cultivate and care for all of the distinct aspects of the body, soul, and mind.

Often, during these three phases of childhood, children are exposed to the one-sided teaching methods of traditional schools. These methods seem to limit the true rewards of education in childhood by teaching solely to the mind with an emphasis on reading and writing in the grades, kindergarten, and early childhood (Clouder, 2004; Hutchins, 2009). Teachers and psychologists have compelling evidence that premature intellectual development may delay learning and cause emotional and social problems for students during their school career (Ogletree, 1974). Emphasis on premature intellectual development undervalues deeper thought processes while focusing only on the ‘spirit of the mind’ (Nicholson, 2000; Ogletree, 1974) and neglecting the body and soul. The traditional approach to education teaches only to the left side of the brain, while neglecting the right side of the brain, and limiting the cognitive capacities of children (Petrash, 2010). Ogletree (1974) states, “What may be sacrificed is the full development of the brain” (p. 350). By developing less of their brain capacity, traditional school students potentially become economically obsolete with their limited skillset (Petrash,

2010). As they are growing into young adults many of these students do not develop to their full capacity and potential.

Waldorf Education is a school philosophy that encourages educating children through a wide range of learning experiences that nurture the whole child. The curriculum used in Waldorf Schools is well-rounded and strives to develop the aesthetic, spiritual, and interpersonal sensibilities of the child in ways that enrich, enliven and reinforce intellectual knowing (Easton, 1997; Hemleben, 1975). After completing a Waldorf school experience many students have said they recognize that the arts curriculum plays a significant role in the process of learning to think holistically about what is important in life. Many of these students have strong social interests that transcend their own self-involvement: the desire to help less privileged people, protect animals, and preserve the natural environment (Easton, 1995). Waldorf school philosophy nurtures the engagement of, “the whole child in the learning process, head, heart, and hands” (Easton, 1997).

The fullest expression of a child’s potential is supported through a Waldorf Education that nurtures the whole child during the course of the three developmental phases of willing, feeling, *and* thinking (Chauncey, 2006; Easton, 1997; Nicholson, 2000; Ogletree, 1974; Petrash, 2010; Smolen, 1998; Uhrmacher, 1993). Guthrie (2003) states, “The true fruits of education in childhood come to full expression in the later years of human life” (p. 2365). This full fruition of the human potential evolves through the gentle development of all three stages of childhood (Barnes, 1991). If we want our

children to fully develop all parts of their lives than we must, as educators, nurture the development of the body, the soul, and the spirit of mind.

### Education for the Three Stages of Childhood

Steiner transferred the developmental process of educating the whole child into his educational pedagogy. The three stages were carefully thought out and organized into a curriculum that followed the development of children at each age and stage of their formative years (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Larrison et al., 2012; Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989) (Appendix A). Fundamental to Steiner's educational philosophy is the progression of the body, the soul, and the spirit of mind harmonizing together through the three stages of willing, feeling, and thinking (Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Through traditional education only one stage of the young human is nurtured, the stage that develops the mind and thinking (Petrash, 2010). This traditional school philosophy of developing the mind and thinking is meant for the older adolescent childhood experience, not for the early childhood and middle childhood experiences.

Formal education overlooks the importance of teaching to the stage of development the child is in. Rather, it teaches abstract concepts to students beyond their level of ability and can actually damage their self-esteem and formal learning later on (Clouder, 2004; Hutchins, 2009; Larrison et al., 2012; O'Connor & Angus, 2014; Ogletree, 1974; Ogletree, 1991). The full expression of a young child growing up to adulthood rises through the development of all three phases of childhood, not just the development of the thinking phase (Reinsmith, 1989; Smolen, 1998; Uhrmacher, 1995).

Children must experience all three stages of willing, feeling, and thinking to fully progress into their maximum abilities and strengths for their early life and their whole existence over time.

During the first phase, from birth to about seven years old, the life body gradually enters the physical body, which ends in the change of teeth. During the second phase, from seven to fourteen years, the soul body accesses the physical body that results in the reproductive changes that occur at puberty. In the last phase, from fourteen years old and ending around age twenty-one, the ego slowly imbues the life body, the physical body, and the soul body (Barnes 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). This ultimate culmination creates the individual's ability to have greater knowledge and to be aware of it. Guthrie (2003) states, "Consciousness is transformed into self-consciousness" (p. 3265). These three stages, fully experienced through Waldorf Education, culminate the young human into a wholly advanced being (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Marshak, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989).

#### Stage One: Zero to Seven Year Olds

Throughout the first phase the young child, from zero to seven years old, learns from the cognitive faculty of imitation (Nicholson, 2000). The body initiates willing through physical development and by copying what is demonstrated. By utilizing imitation the child is able to connect to their immediate environment and engage their own will (Barnes 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Intellectualization is not yet developed (Guthrie, 2003). Rather, the awakening

aptitude of imagination is extremely aware and open for the very young child (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997). The imagination works with simulation and replication to develop the physical body.

The zero to seven year old absorbs the world mainly through their five senses and responds in the most active way of showing their awareness, through imitation. All senses speak to the infant, toddler, preschooler and primary school student while sounds, touch, gestures, light and emotions are sensitively comprehended (Barnes, 1991). Barnes (1991) states, “These influences are absorbed by the still-malleable physical organism and affect the body for a lifetime” (p. 52). Transitioning very young children to a formal classroom setting, and rushing them into a scholastic environment with limited free play and few imitative processes, is an unnecessary and unhelpful disruption to a child’s natural learning (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009; Larrison et al., 2012; Marshak, 2003; O’Connor & Angus, 2014).

In order to develop children to their full capacity, adult caregivers of the very young need to create environments that are worthy of children’s imitation and their physical development (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; O’Connor & Angus, 2014). Very young children are extremely aware of and connected to their physical surroundings. There should be plenty of opportunity for imitation, physical activity, and creative play. In the classroom environment stories, songs, puppet shows, quality materials, and imaginative lessons are necessary to help develop a zero to seven year old to their fullest potential (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Lyon, 2016; O’Connor & Angus, 2014). If the classroom environment is conducive to play and imaginative replication

then students will have the ability to develop their brain to its maximum capacity. Playfulness, physical activity, and imagination are the fundamental characteristics for the development of genius (Petrash, 2010). Imagination, imitation, well thought out classroom environments, interactive learning, and play are all vital to young children reaching their greatest potential during this early time of their lives (Clouder, 2004; Hutchins, 2009).

Allowing the zero to seven year old child to focus on the important task of developing their physical body through play first, can encourage the child to reach complete bodily health and vitality needed later in life (Barnes, 1991; Reinsmith, 1989). Pushing very young children, in traditional education, to meet the impulsive, intellectual demands of early cognitive learning robs them of true health in their overall lifetime (Barnes, 1991; Hutchins, 2009; Larrison et al., 2012). Young students need to be playing, doing movement activities, and learning through kinesthetic interchanges (Darian, 2012). Educating the very young child with lively lessons that encourage physical growth, language development, and curiosity, will naturally lay a solid foundation for the later development of imagination, feeling, and thinking that comes during the second stage of childhood development (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997). Play is essential for young children to fully progress all the way through the first stage of development.

Educators must support their very young students to evolve gently, on their own timeline (House, 2013; Marshak, 2003). If educators push children to learn skills when they are not developmentally ready, as in many traditional school programs, there are

risks of frustrating children, increasing their anxiety, damaging their self-esteem, and negatively impacting their long-term motivation to learn (Hutchins, 2009; Larrison et al., 2012; O'Connor & Angus, 2014; Uhrmacher, 1995). Allowing the young child to mature properly will insure that she is ready for the second phase of childhood development and the school achievement that comes with this phase (Hutchins, 2009).

### Stage Two: Seven to Fourteen Year Olds

The second stage of development, also called middle childhood, begins when children are around seven years old and progresses until they are about fourteen years old. At the beginning of this stage we see the second set of teeth visibly pushing out the first set. This bodily change brings forth the child's greater physical development and the perceptible breaking through of the etheric body (Guthrie, 2003; Uhrmacher, 1995). The etheric body, meaning the life force or vital energy of the child, is released and becomes the vehicle for the development of character, temperament, habits, feelings, and memory (Guthrie, 2003). The influential forces that formed the child are released and evolve into a deeper awakening of the imagination and feeling (Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Now the child is ready to explore the whole world as she did in the first stage of development, but on a more conscious and emotionally aware level (Reinsmith, 1989).

The most important element of these seven years is the development of the inner soul or "feeling life" (Reinsmith, 1989, p. 81). The inner soul is transformed through the use of the imagination and by being involved in interactive endeavors (Barnes, 1991;

Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Iannone & Obenauf, 1999; Nicholson, 2000; Ogletree, 1974). Elementary children embark on the expansion of their inner nature through the disciplined force of imagination (Reinsmith, 1989). Human feeling and emotional awakening through the imagination are the primary concentrations of this stage of development (Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). These elementary years are the time for educating young students through academic lessons that ignite the active imagination to open up the “feeling intelligence” (Barnes, 1991, p. 53).

This “time of feeling” (Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 390) and inward formation permits teachers to work on the children’s development of habits and memory in their academic endeavors. This is the time to: learn the four math operations in first grade through kingdom stories; memorize math facts through circle multiplication; understand harder math concepts through world stories and drawings; and create beautifully illustrated math fraction trees or place value tables. Traditional education seems to miss the opportunity of this stage by primarily teaching to the cognitive functions of the child (Larrison et al., 2012; Nicholson, 2000; Uhrmacher, 1991). In contrast, Waldorf Education helps children to awaken their feelings, and become artists as well as scholars through the academic world presented by story, parable, legend, and myth (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Iannone & Obenauf, 1999; Ogletree, 1974; Reinsmith, 1989). Children draw sustenance from integrated educational encounters that advance conscious feelings connected to their inner being. This feeling of consciousness helps them to develop academic capabilities as well (Easton, 1997). Waldorf Education imbues the feeling sense into every aspect of the elementary student’s learning experiences (Barnes,



1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989). This is why these seven years of middle childhood are referred to as the golden years of *feeling*, thinking, and learning (Edmunds, 1975).

During the middle childhood years from second grade to eighth grade the educator's goal is to...“transform all that the child needs to know about the world into the language of the imagination” as stated by Barnes (1991, p. 52). Barnes (1991) further goes on to say, ...“Whatever speaks to the child's imagination and is truly felt, stirs and activates the feelings and is remembered and learned” (p. 53). The child sees the world through the eyes of an artist and imagines the pictorial world more consciously (Ogletree, 1974; Reinsmith, 1989). Global stories and math concepts come alive through opportunities to create mental pictures that do not require immediate interactive experience, as in the first stage of development (Ogletree, 1974; Uhrmacher, 1995).

When children are able to use their imaginative capacities they can envision the natural world more clearly (Kane, 2011; Reinsmith, 1989). The expanded emotional awareness and sense development of middle childhood students are prerequisites to introducing all forms of science in more complex formats. This ability to visualize the environmental world more readily, lends itself to teaching science lessons on a deeper level.

It is this development of the faculty of feeling through imagination which lies at the foundation of Goethean science and Waldorf education (Oberski & McNally, 2006). Steiner edited the nineteenth century philosopher Goethe's technical studies. These works included studying science and developing a philosophy of the experiential miracle

of nature (Oberski & McNally, 2006). Steiner used this understanding of Goethe's work, to connect the phenomenon of the natural world to the holistic and spiritual insights of human nature and the middle childhood experience (Oberski & McNally, 2006).

Science is an important part of the curriculum that is more intricately taught (Nicholson, 2000) during this middle stage of child development and then again in late childhood. In Waldorf education science comes alive through experiencing the biological, physical and social sciences more deeply in all the grades (Easton, 1997; Kikas, 1998; Uhrmacher, 1995). The Waldorf curriculum encourages teachers to have students research animals in fourth and fifth grade, take multiple field trips to nature in Transitional kindergarten through eighth grades, and participate in elaborate and interesting science experiments in junior high school (McComas, 2008). In third grade students go on a farm trip where they work on a ranch with cultivating tools; interact and care for farm animals; and learn about how foods are sustainably grown, harvested, or garnered from the animals. They continue to experience 4H programs where they study various animals through the grades; visit local farms or community gardens; or have specialists visit the classrooms with expertise in wild or domestic animals. They also visit local parks, nature centers, or ecosystems to learn about biology, oceanography, physics, mineralogy, geography, and geology (Kikas, 1998; Uhrmacher, 1995; Wright, 2013). They participate in several backpacking trips in grades six through eight. The Science curriculum is more developed and emphasized through hands-on, interactive lessons that are taught during this second stage of childhood in Waldorf education (Uhrmacher, 1995).

In contrast to the rich middle childhood experience of Waldorf education, traditional education seems to predominantly use a simpler method of teaching. It teaches only to the mental capacities of students. Unfortunately traditional education appears to mainly focus on objective goals related to the functions of reading and writing, and the conventions of spelling and grammar (Larrison et al., 2012; O'Connor & Angus, 2014; Souto-Manning & James, 2008). The nurturing sense of feeling through imagination, which is integral to the development of the middle childhood student, is lost to mechanics. But in Waldorf Education students develop new capacities through their blossoming imaginations by experiencing art, animated stories, directed play, interactive science, nature connections, empathy building, handworking lessons, assorted musical skills, collaborative math, and transcendental mythology (Iannone & Obenauf, 1999; Ogletree, 1974; Petrash, 2010).

During middle childhood Waldorf students are exposed to a wide variety of visual, auditory, tactile, musical, artistic, and kinesthetic lessons (Easton, 1997; Petrash, 2010). Through this integration and differentiation of lessons children connect more deeply to their feelings and their five senses. This is a time when the five senses are stimulated through differentiation of activities (Easton, 1997) like creative movement, playing musical instruments, learning in the outdoors, knitting socks or hats, designing a wide range of artistic presentations, listening to magical stories, and learning academic lessons through hands-on activities. These types of learning help to get the innovative juices of the body, spirit and mind flowing. This creative flow of the imagination helps students to learn all subjects more consciously (Kane, 2011).

At this middle childhood stage children comprehend primarily through image and tempo, and newly learned information reaches deep into their rhythmic system, i.e. their heart and lungs (Uhrmacher, 1995). The child has a strong desire to learn everything inwardly using forms of rhythm and beat (Ogletree et al., 1970; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1993). By teaching through differentiated lessons, as well as rhythm and beat, an educator can connect to the needs of their elementary students on a more integrated level (Uhrmacher, 1995). Learning flute in transitional kindergarten through eighth grades, violin in fourth through fifth grades, and later acquiring other instruments during middle childhood, imbues the young scholar with a sense of artistic expression, an awareness of the beauty of sound, and the understanding of the mathematical sequence of music and rhythm.

Another integral aspect of the second stage of development is a student's need for a strong connection to her teacher. The right authority creates the right rapport between the child and the teacher (Nicholson, 2000). In Waldorf education teachers engage in a *looping* system where they stay with the class of students for two or three years or longer. This creates a strong sense of stability, predictability, and calmness for the children and the teacher alike. Teacher demeanor has a significant impact on students' motivation and intrinsic desire to learn and can affect other factors such as competence and school performance (Shankland, Franca, Genolini, Guelfi, and Ionescu, 2009).

In traditional education teachers often teach the same grade every year. Because of this stagnancy and redundancy the teacher's demeanor often emanates impersonal detachment while lacking enthusiasm, leading to a withering affect on student's cognition

(Kane, 2011). Often students in traditional education feel less connection to their teacher, knowing they will have a new one for the next grade. Thus it is imperative that children have a sound, personal interaction with their teacher.

During the middle of this second stage of child development, around the age of nine, students have a shift in their consciousness. This is termed the nine-year change (Nicholson, 2000; Uhrmacher, 1995). The student is beginning to look for a sense of authority and an awareness of which adults they can connect to, trust, and respect. At times they may begin to rebel and misbehave at this middle stage of development. During this nine-year change the child releases the inherent belief in everything the teacher says to an intrinsic need for explanation (Uhrmacher, 1995).

The teacher must not only model moral authority, but also present appropriate materials and classroom aesthetics that arouse the child's feelings. Real, living supplies experienced through scientific and mathematical play stimulate neurological development (O'Connor & Angus 2012). Quality, natural materials bring a sense of beauty and artistic expression to the child's experience, teaching students that appealing conditions are important for quality of life (Uhrmacher, 1993). Teachers can provide high quality wooden coloring pencils, oil and chalk pastels, small and large blank journals for main lesson books, beautifully portrayed chalk drawings of the main lesson on the chalkboard, and pleasing classroom adornments that promote the lessons through visual appreciation. Steiner also encouraged teachers to paint their classrooms with a layering method by making swirls of color. This technique, called lazure painting, uses reddish hues in

primary grades and bluish ones in upper grades. It is meant to incite the student's feeling sense (Uhrmacher, 1995).

Giving the middle childhood student opportunities to develop their burgeoning sense of emotional awareness and feeling is important in this second stage. Imbuing their lessons with imagination and a sense of nature and beauty is integral to students' optimal development. Exposure to a mix of differentiated lessons, a capable teacher with good leadership qualities, natural materials to use for their lessons, and an aesthetically pleasing classroom, will help students to develop feelings that form the basis for the later development of the mind in the third stage (Barnes, 1991; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995).

### Stage Three: Fourteen to Twenty-One Year Olds

The third and final stage of development culminates around the age of fourteen with the onset of puberty (Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989). The body of consciousness or the "soul" body, can be released now that it has been completely nurtured through the imagination and feelings during the second stage (Guthrie, 2003; Uhrmacher, 1995). During this stage the "personality" that has developed, gradually surrenders to "individuality" (Guthrie, 2003, p. 2365). The young human being is quietly maturing while their persona is emerging with the manifestation of the spirit of mind (Barnes, 1991). This stage culminates into the expansion of the spirit of the mind and the concentrated development of cognition. A direct effect of this new level of consciousness

that young students gain, is the heightened expansion of one's own intelligence (Barnes, 1991; Guthrie, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989).

The human intelligence and spirit of mind is significantly developing during this final stage of child development. Some important qualities unfolding in this final stage are how to develop a deeper capacity for thinking, an inherent sense of understanding judgment, and the ability to discern opinions in a more abstract way (Uhrmacher, 1995).

In an effort to fully develop this multi-faceted perception of holistic thinking, an appreciation for beauty must be presented, as well as a sense of ethical and social responsibility (Chauncey, 2006). These morals must be integrated into all subject areas of the adolescent's education. This is achieved in part through demonstrating integrated information in lessons and encouraging a sense of how knowledge is gained and used (Easton, 1997). Teachers have meaningful discussions with students to embed moral truths in their learning (Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989). Teachers also strive to continue to develop student's artistic awareness and connection to the beautiful creations of nature and man. Service to others and serving the well being of society at large is promoted to help develop morality, ethics, and compassion (Chauncey, 2006). Developing deeper cognition and moral judgment with social consciousness is paramount in adolescence and during this third stage of development.

Many students attending traditional high schools have been exposed primarily to cognitive learning since their early childhoods (Clouder, 2004). This potentially causes two major deficits for children during their final stage of maturity. One deficit is the loss of important progressions in their physical body due to limited exposure to imitation and

play in the first stage. The second deficit is the loss of growth in their soul body through lack of experiencing lessons that imbue feelings of beauty and compassion during the second stage (Barnes, 1991; Easton, 1997; Guthrie, 2003; Marshak, 2003; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Many of these young students do not have the roots of their learning grounded in the matrix of will and feeling. As a result, depth of intelligence has not fully developed into clear, experienced thought (Barnes, 1991). Educators must continue to imbue their lessons with physical experiences and beauty to help encourage proper knowledge and training for the older child.

During adolescence students have a strong capacity to develop abstract thinking (Reinsmith, 1989). They are encouraged to form their own opinions and to question ideas more theoretically (Uhrmacher, 1995). This is the best time to encourage students to exercise their intellectual intelligence and to challenge newly discovered ideas of human thinking (Guthrie, 2003). Often high school students receive traditional educations that encourage very little personal connection to their learning. In contrast, Waldorf high school students pursue special projects, engaging subjects, and elective activities to enhance personal connection (Barnes, 1991). Young people need encounters that help them to comprehend and contemplate the associations between ideas presented to them in different subject areas, and the need to make abstract conclusions about what is meaningful to them (Easton, 1997; Uhrmacher, 1995).

The instruction of the whole child is one of the most important aspects of Steiner's educational pedagogy. To give every child time to develop through each stage is a true gift. If a child has gone through all three developmental stages "properly" then



the human being is finally “born” at the age of twenty-one (Reinsmith, 1989). Waldorf Education encourages the whole development of the physical body, the soul body, and the spirit of mind at just the right time in childhood (Ogletree, 1974). As stated by Foster (1984), “Children learn with their entire being” (p. 229) and develop completely in every respect. Encouraging students to unfold at their own pace and at the right time can give them a love of learning for their lifetime (Easton, 1997).

### Early Childhood Education

The early years of schooling for a child can have the most beneficial affects on their future success as young students, and later in life as adults (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009; Uhrmacher, 1995). Waldorf early childhood education programs, preschools, kindergartens, and primary school classrooms, encourage young learners up to around the age of eight, to develop at their own pace through many important learning strategies (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009). Primary to these Waldorf learning strategies is: the importance of play and movement; the effect of the learning environment; the use of integrated learning through developmentally appropriate practices; and finally the importance of storytelling (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009). Rather than focusing on these important learning strategies, traditional schools seem to encourage formal education and understanding how to read and write in the early years which can negatively affect long-term achievement, especially for boys (Clouder, 2004; Hutchins, 2009; O’Connor & Angus, 2014; Ogletree, 1974). Contrary to the strategies of

traditional education, the importance of imitative play is central to the Waldorf early childhood pedagogy (Clouder, 2004).

Play is the most important aspect of early childhood and is at the heart of the Waldorf school setting (Clouder, 2003; Easton, 1997; James & Souto-Manning, 2008; Nicholson, 2000). When young children play they learn a variety of important life skills including: development of cognitive and social capacities; early processing of math concepts; promotion of problem solving skills; support of language development; encouragement to express emotions; as well as time to do physical exercise (Clouder, 2003; Easton, 1997; Nicholson, 2000). Waldorf schools do not emphasize the one-sided education of the intellect like traditional schools (Uhrmacher, 1995). Instead they encourage very young children to learn through activities that involve play and movement (Darian, 2012). Students enjoy the experience of doing activities, creating with their hands, and making body movement the representation of their inner visions (Reinsmith, 1989). Young humans enjoy the expression of their will through movement (Barnes, 1991; Guthrie, 2003; Nicholson, 2000).

Movement activities are utilized throughout the daily curriculum for Waldorf early childhood and primary school classes (Darian, 2012). The main lessons for this younger age group consist of singing games, rhymes, puppet play, free play at centers that imitate adult activities, block building, large motor movements, and storytelling activities that develop the entire physical body (Foster, 1984; Uhrmacher, 1995). When young students learn through movement they gain positive benefits including: enhanced physical, social-emotional, and academic capabilities; aiding cognitive processes;

preparation for more sedentary work; the importance of remedial work integrated into daily lessons; and using movement to begin to express stillness for focusing attention and energy (Darian, 2012). In traditional schools very young students are encouraged to sit and do paper and pencil subject matter activities (Hutchins, 2009). In Waldorf early childhood education classrooms, very little sedentary subject matter is taught (Iannone & Obenauf, 1999). Instead play and movement are integrated into all academic aspects of learning and are greatly enhanced by the environment of the school setting (Darian, 2012).

The classroom environment in Waldorf schools encourages a genuine display of unforced forms as well as organic natural materials (Foster, 1984; Uhrmacher, 1993). The classroom walls often are painted with soft pastels. Baskets are filled with natural toys including pinecones, rocks, branches, handmade wood blocks, or natural fibers such as wool, silk scarves and lightweight blankets for making forts or using as costumes. Wooden trains, trucks, and other push toys are available, as well as, dolls, dress-up clothes, blankets, pillows, a play kitchen area, a loft, or a playhouse (Foster, 1984). Drawing and painting materials as well as clay modeling supplies are regularly available (James & Souto-Manning, 2008). Classrooms are safe environments that encourage and support the holistic progression of the child (Clouder, 2004; Marshak, 2003). Surroundings that includes natural toys and art supplies, a safe, nurturing area, and lots of opportunities for meaningful imitation, enhance the integrated learning experiences of the young child.

During the early childhood years Waldorf teachers de-emphasize academics and encourage integrated learning of all subject areas. In contrast traditional education seems to over-emphasize academics and the intellect during the early childhood years (Clouder, 2003; Ogletree, 1991). Early childhood Waldorf school experiences offer comprehensive programs that are a source of stimulation for the child's development (Nicholson, 2000). Students experience learning through singing, acting, dancing, rhythm and rhyme, imitation, and kinesthetic and creative movement. They recite verses, perform singing games, and experience math lessons through the engagement of the developing imagination (Easton, 1997; Foster, 1984). These creative movement exercises are important integrative teaching strategies that build harmony and are developmentally appropriate for the very young child.

Through hands-on learning experiences young students are given time to develop their whole minds and bodies. They are able to advance their visual systems, speech and auditory abilities, sensory integration, and small and large motor skills (Hutchins, 2009). Learning in this way gives children the gift of time where they are not forced into early academics (Hutchins, 2009; Marshak, 2003). There is no downward pressure from formalized instruction that could undermine children's natural motivation for learning, and could possibly set them up for future feelings of failure (Clouder, 2004; Hutchins, 2009; Larrison et al., 2012; Ogletree, 1974; Ogletree, 1991). It is developmentally appropriate to offer integrative lessons that are harmonious to the young child's natural need for active and creative learning (Clouder, 2004) In Waldorf pedagogy early

childhood educational instructors teach through the use of music, creative movement, rhythmical experiences, imitative free play, and storytelling.

The Waldorf curriculum teaches literacy, language development, and further expression of the will through storytelling (Hutchins, 2009). Storytelling incorporates the use of image and rhythm, which in turn enhances the young child's willingness to learn. It also captures students' awareness and relays information through teaching techniques that are encouraging (Uhrmacher, 1993). In traditional education teachers generally read stories and books to the students and then have them read on their own. The magic of hearing a story told to the child by a storyteller is lost to the teacher's intellectualization of the book. When a storyteller looks each student in the eyes with passion and fervor for the story, the narrative excitement that the story conveys permeates into the imagination, and helps to build memories in the young child (Kane, 2011).

Stories teach young students about feelings, compassion, and morality. They also help to develop oral and written language, and bridge emerging cognition with creativity, social interactions, movement, and simple academics (James & Souto-Manning, 2008). The alphabet comes alive through stories that enhance the symbols and sounds for each letter (Foster, 1984; Uhrmacher, 1995). International fairy tales and artistic activities introduce the letters. They also provide an imaginative foundation for weaving characters, kingdoms, and other symbolic qualities into the child's experience (Kane, 2011). In early childhood education teachers can use storytelling to help students develop a love of stories. They can also highlight an appreciation for the magic, fantasy, imagination, and meaningful engagement that will happen through the world of literature

over their lifetime (O'Connor & Angus, 2012). In Waldorf pedagogy storytelling is an important integrative, educational tool.

Early childhood education has the potential to help young humans develop their intelligence to its highest capacity (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009). Through the encouragement of play and movement young students learn more. They also need a nurturing learning environment and exposure to the magic of storytelling (Lyon, 2016; O'Connor & Angus, 2012; Uhrmacher 1995). Furthermore, by integrating all subjects in the curriculum, young students are able to interweave their comprehension and connect to their learning in a deeper and more meaningful way (Reinsmith, 1989).

### Integrated Education

Integrated education is a key element of the teaching strategies of Waldorf methodology. It is a meaningful approach of teaching to the whole child through all the stages of development (Reinsmith, 1989). Steiner organized his teaching program into an “ascending spiral approach” (Nicholson, 2000, p.578). The pedagogy and curriculum are designed to be appropriate for each of the three stages in succession i.e.: developing the hands in early childhood, the heart in middle childhood, and then the head in later childhood, young adulthood, and over the course of one’s life.

The ascending spiral approach presents content to students in each of the three stages based on the prior knowledge and prior learning experiences they encountered in the previous phase. Steiner designed the integration of subjects in the curriculum to meet the child’s evolving consciousness for each grade level (Uhrmacher, 1995). By

integrating learning and using the Waldorf pedagogy, educators are able to incite students to tap into their multiple intelligences, artistic abilities, natural wonder, and experiential acquisition of all subjects (Barnes, 1991; Chauncey, 2006; House, 2013; Nicholson, 2000; Oberski & McNally, 2006; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995).

In Waldorf education integrated learning moves through an ascending spiral of knowledge. Barnes (1991) states, “through this spiral teachers lay the ground for a gradual, vertical integration that deepens and widens each subject experience, and, at the same time, keeps it moving with the other aspects of knowledge” (p. 53). The topics build upon one another and strengthen students’ intelligences over the course of going up through the grades.

The spiral of knowledge is built through “the main lesson” (Reinsmith, 1989, p. 87). The main lesson is an intensive, daily, uninterrupted, two-hour block of learning (Larrison et al., 2012; Uhrmacher, 1995). These concentrated blocks of study focus on one subject for several weeks at a time (Barnes, 1991; Iannone & Obenauf; 1999). Students create beautifully decorated, handmade “main lesson books” (Nicholson, 2000, p. 578). In these main lesson books they essentially write and illustrate their own schoolbooks, which culminate into textbooks, artistic representations, and assessment portfolios of each individual’s academic work (Chauncey, 2006; Nicholson, 2000; Ogletree, 1974). Many of the main lessons of the curriculum ascend up the spiral through varying degrees of depth and complexity over the course of that year or in subsequent grade levels (Nicholson, 2000).

Steiner designed his integrated system of learning to accommodate to the developmental level of the age and stage of the child (Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989) (Appendix A). Ogletree (1974) states, “subjects are arranged in sequence so that they are compatible with the child’s psychological or cognitive development” (p.347). In this way students are able to develop a significant ability to make meaning that is recognized in the brain sciences as critical for learning (Larrison et al., 2012). The Waldorf reading and storytelling programs follow a sequence of literature that is connected to the child’s mode of thinking at each grade (Ogletree, 1974). The same sequence is followed for math, science, and all other subject areas (Iannone & Obenauf; 1999; Nicholson, 2000; Ogletree, 1991; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Nothing is taught before the child’s brain is ready for it. According to Steiner, the sequence follows the evolution of man’s consciousness that parallels the unfolding of children’s own inner consciousness (Reinsmith, 1989; Ogletree, 1974).

The sequence follows a scheduled order through the grades that touches the child’s awareness for that age (Kane, 2011). In the preschool and kindergarten years student learning is play based and concentrates on fantasy (Souto-Manning & James, 2008). This is where the ascending spiral goes up the knowledge accumulation of the imagination through imitation and play. Young children’s overall development is enhanced by the ascending spiral of knowledge through movement, music, interactive play, and hands-on learning.

Beginning in middle childhood integrated education becomes more concentrated. Waldorf Language Arts main lessons circulate around folk tales, legends, mythology,



parables, and imagery from around the world. World fairy tales are taught in kindergarten and first grade. Fables, animal stories, and saints are demonstrated in second grade. Native American legends and Old Testament stories are shared in the third grade (Easton, 1997). Norse mythology is explained in fourth grade. Indian, Persian, Egyptian-Chaldean mythology as well as Greek legends and history are illustrated in the fifth grade. Roman times, medieval history, and the Middle Ages around the world are imparted in sixth grade (Nicholson, 2000; Uhrmacher, 1995). Global Renaissance and the Age of Discovery are revealed in the seventh grade, and Modern World History is communicated in the eighth grade (Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). These themes ascend the spiral of knowledge by addressing both the feeling sense and the imagination of the middle childhood student (Larrison et al., 2012; Ogletree, 1974; Uhrmacher, 1995).

The main lessons are fully integrated across disciplines by including reading, writing, social studies, math, science, art, and music, as well as ethics and moral lessons into the main lesson blocks (Uhrmacher, 1995). For example, students may learn about ancient Greece by: listening to Greek stories told by the teacher; reading ancient Greek myths or modern juvenile stories such as the Percy Jackson series; painting and drawing pictures of Greek gods and goddesses and other characters; acting out a Greek legend; learning the Greek alphabet and how to use it to write in their reports and main lesson books; learning Greek geometry or Pythagoras' triangle; or preparing for and attending a Greek Olympics where they practice, learn, and compete with other Waldorf school students by participating in real events such as archery, discus throw, long jump and

javelin. This integrative approach to teaching and educating young people helps to intensify the learning and cement the overall experiences into their long-term memory.

While students are learning through the grades in Waldorf education they are continually being exposed to integrated nature and science lessons through: the natural rhythms of the earth; its cycles, seasons, weather patterns, ecosystems, and wildlife; and humans' deep interconnection to the planet itself (Kikas, 1998; McComas, 2008; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). Very young, middle childhood, and adolescent students are in a phase of feeling where the rhythmic system prevails. Due to this enhanced stage of emotional awareness teachers try to teach pictorially, artistically, and imaginatively (Uhrmacher, 1995) when they teach nature-based science. A sense of instinctive wonder is enhanced through integrated lessons. Science and nature are taught through art, imagery, hands-on interactive lessons, experiments, and direct experiences with the outdoors (Chauncey, 2006; Kane, 2011; McComas, 2008; Nicholson, 2000; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995).

The integration of the subjects in Waldorf education can be very conducive to the enhancement of multiple intelligences, artistic expression, natural wonder, and experiential acquisition. Integrated learning develops multiple intelligences by addressing the education of the whole child (Nicholson, 2000). Lessons that teach to multiple intelligences enhance all the ways humans learn including: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential (Nicholson, 2000; Souto-Manning & James, 2008; Wilson, 1994).

Artistic expression and creativity are also essential elements of integrated education. Students learn more deeply through experiences with images, sounds, and textures that stimulate their senses, feelings, and imaginations when they are creating works of art (Chauncey, 2006; Easton, 1997; Reinsmith, 1989). All basic content, including language arts, math, science, and social studies are addressed through the integration of the subjects and are taught to incite deeper meaning through the stages and grade levels (Larrison et al., 2012) while demonstrating meaningful artistic expression.

Experiential learning is of utmost importance in Waldorf education. Students learn language arts through kinesthetic experiences like singing games, interactive dances, and memorizing intricate poems, verses, and chants that have powerful vocabulary and contextual language (Ogletree, 1974; Reinsmith, 1989; Uhrmacher, 1995). They practice science and math by engaging directly with nature, using natural supplies, observing and working in the outdoors, using rhythms with movement and singing (Chauncey, 2006; Kane, 2011; Reinsmith, 1989) and participating in 4H programs. All areas of learning are enhanced through the integrated learning process of Waldorf education.

Integrated learning is one of the most consequential aspects of the Waldorf curriculum. The ascending spiral of knowledge helps students to enhance their multiple intelligences and become image specialists and experienced artists (Nicholson, 2000). Children are able to develop more skills in science, math, social studies, writing, and literacy due to the integrated educational experience offered to them through Waldorf curriculum. As children advance through the ages and stages of Waldorf education they

develop their sense of natural wonder in a more meaningful way (Uhrmacher, 1995). Students directly interact with their education through hands-on learning, kinesthetic lessons, imaginative experiences, interactive movement, artistic creation, and musical involvements. Integrated education helps students to become more intelligent, well-rounded, creative, and ready to attain a good life with meaning and relevance (Ogletree, 1991; Uhrmacher, 1995). Being exposed to integrated education helps Waldorf students succeed more in upper grades and young adulthood. The benefits of learning this way are felt for the rest of their lives.

### Conclusion

The Waldorf school philosophy was originally created in 1919, 100 years ago, to serve a diverse community of factory workers' children who had varying languages, cultures, and life experiences. This extraordinary educational system has evolved around the world today to serve a wide range of students coming from a distinct array of abilities and backgrounds.

Waldorf pedagogy and holistic education was designed to enhance a child's whole experience in school. The central features of Steiner's schooling system are to teach children according to their stages of development - early, middle, or late childhood. The three stages correspond to a particular development of that time in the child's life. Early childhood is the time that develops the willing and doing of the body, or the *hands*. Middle childhood, is the time that develops the feeling and emotional awareness of the soul, or the *heart*. And late childhood is the time that develops the thinking or

intellectualization of the spirit of the mind, or the *head*. In other words the three phases of childhood are meant to emphasize the current stage a human child is in: the hands, heart, or head.

The central concentrations of Waldorf education are: to engage in a well-rounded experience in academic subjects; to develop the refinement of artistic abilities; to be exposed to the beauty of the natural world; and to acquire a deep moral sense and connection to humanity. The essential emphasis of Waldorf education is to offer children an integrated academic experience while teaching them to be good citizens, find loveliness in the world, and have meaning in all of their learning. By focusing the instruction on this all-inclusive learning approach, students are given a comprehensive, interactive, and experiential education that creates more knowledgeable, creative, and aware students and future citizens.

This literature review has demonstrated how Waldorf Education helps students to have a more balanced and all-inclusive academic experience than students who attend traditional public schools. First, this review shows that Waldorf Education offers learning that nurtures the whole child by focusing on the whole human being hands, heart, head. Waldorf education assists the entire human being to develop to its full potential.

Next, this study discusses how Waldorf Education helps teachers to reflect on the importance of the three stages of development from early childhood to age twenty-one. Being taught through the lessons that the Waldorf curriculum presents, helps children to grow gently through the three stages and reach their optimal development over time.

After that, this review exhibits how Waldorf Education nurtures and preserves the very young child's innocence and need for gradual and playful learning. Early childhood education in Waldorf schools is the foundation for all future learning for the child. It helps to gently prepare students for the challenges and rigorous learning of upper grades, young adulthood, and the rest of their lives.

Finally, this literature review shows how Waldorf Education advances children's intellectual capacity and deeper understanding of the subjects through integrated education and the ascending spiral of knowledge. This review shows how Steiner's education interweaves the curricular subjects with integration, ascension, and depth. The assimilation approach allows for children to learn more than one topic at a time and at the right stage of development.

In all of these ways this literature study shows how Waldorf Education is well-rounded and uses a holistic approach. As opposed to traditional education this curricular strategy focuses on the whole child, hands, heart, and head, which in the long run leads to perfect health. This philosophy encourages the potential of each and every student it touches and tries to imbue a multifaceted sense of nurturing and learning. Waldorf education helps to bring more creativity, more knowledge, more care to the world. It helps more humans to reach their optimal potential on the doorsteps of their futures. The resultant qualities of gratitude, openness, wonder, and reverence are the basis for the kind of knowledge and social awareness that the world needs today (Barnes, 1991; Reinsmith, 1989). Steiner's pedagogical approach helps to heal humanity, one student at a time, and

brings a promise of hope for the living potential of our communities, our nations, and the entire world.

## METHODS

### Introduction

This research was a mixed methods study using interview and survey data. The research goal for the interviews was to ask parents what aspects of their child's Waldorf education influenced their present and future schooling and beyond. The research goals for the survey were to examine: how parent's feel about their children's Waldorf education; which Waldorf student experiences are deemed important by their parents; whether Waldorf curriculum offers a well-rounded education; and whether Waldorf education prepares students for the upper grades and life more generally.

### Participants

Phase one included fifteen interviewees who are parents of Waldorf students. These parents represented 32 current and former Waldorf students. All of the students graduated from, are currently attending, or attended a Waldorf elementary and junior high school for four years or more. Five children attended a Waldorf homeschool program for one to four years.

The parent interviewee group represented 11 schools that the 32 current and former Waldorf students are still attending or did attend. These included: two northern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf charter schools (one current and one former); two southern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf charter schools; one southern California transitional kindergarten through



sixth grade Waldorf charter school; one central California preschool through third grade private Waldorf school; one kindergarten through eighth grade private Waldorf school and one private Waldorf high school, both in northern California; and three Waldorf homeschool programs, one in northern California, one in central California, and one in southern California.

Four of the interviewees are parents of current students from the northern California Waldorf school. Three of those four parents homeschooled one of their children for one to four years prior to sending their child to the Waldorf charter school. One of those four parents grew up in Austria and was exposed to Waldorf education as a child. One interviewee had one child attend the current northern California Waldorf school, and one child attend both current and former northern California Waldorf charter schools. One parent homeschooled her older child with Waldorf curriculum through the central California transitional kindergarten through third grade private Waldorf school, and sent her younger child to a private Waldorf school. She was also a kindergarten teacher at the private Waldorf school.

One interviewee had the broader experience of being a parent of three children and had one child attend one of the southern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf schools, one child attend the current northern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf charter school, and one child attend both. Another parent who has three Waldorf educated children also conveyed a wider viewpoint for the interview. He is currently a five-year board member of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and was a co-founder and an administrator for five years of a

southern California transitional kindergarten through sixth grade Waldorf charter school. He sent his first child to that school, as well as one of the southern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf charter schools. He currently works as a school psychologist at the northern California Waldorf charter school where his first child graduated last year and his other two children currently attend.

Three of the interviewees are currently classified staff members of the northern California Waldorf charter school and they represent both northern California transitional kindergarten through eighth grade charter Waldorf schools. One of them also had children attend a private kindergarten through eighth grade Waldorf school and a private Waldorf high school, both in San Francisco. Four of the interviewees are presently Waldorf certificated teachers at the current northern California Waldorf charter school. The last interviewee is presently an administrator of the northern California Waldorf charter school as well, and had two children attend both the current and former northern California Waldorf charter schools and one child attend the current one only. That interviewee was also one of the lead people to start the current northern California Waldorf charter school, and she started up a Waldorf preschool, years before, as well.

After the completion of the interviews, or phase one of the research, a survey was developed for phase two. It was emailed to all parents, with known email addresses, of the 232 current students enrolled at the northern California Waldorf charter school for the 2017-2018 school year. By the time the study closed 54 survey responses were received, for a response rate of 24 percent. The parents' answers to the question, 'How many

children do you have that now attend or have attended a Waldorf school?’ represented a total of 104 Waldorf students.

These 104 students correspond to 21 transitional kindergarteners through second graders, 31 third through fifth graders, and 27 sixth through eighth graders. That makes a total of 79 Waldorf students out of the 232 that are currently enrolled at the northern California Waldorf charter school in transitional kindergarten through eighth grades. The survey data represents 79 students or 34 percent out of the 232 total students currently attending the northern California Waldorf charter school for the 2017-2018 school year. The survey also represented older students to make the aforementioned total of 104. Many older students who had previously attended Waldorf school were represented in their parents’ responses. These include: 14 ninth through twelfth graders, four high school graduates, five college students, and two students who are out of school. The total for students who had attended Waldorf school earlier in their educational career was 25.

### Instrumentation

To conduct the interview portion of the research a six-question interview was developed. The interview questions were formed to address topics related to Waldorf students’ experiences and how they learn at Waldorf schools and through the curricular programs. The interviews were conducted with careful planning and simple instruments.

The instruments used for the interviews consisted of: a copy of the interview questions (Appendix B); a composition book to take notes of the interviewee’s responses;

the interview schedule; an iPad video recorder; a quiet place to conduct the interview with comfortable chairs and a table; and a copy of the 'Informed Consent' consent form which described the purpose of the study, the importance and benefits of the interviewees' input in regards to the study, and that there were no risks involved in participating in the study (Appendix C).

After the completion of the interviews for phase one of the research, a survey was developed for phase two, with questions that reflected the results of the interview responses. The survey focused on four main topics: parent's personal reflections of their child's experiences in Waldorf School; how Waldorf curriculum supports learning in all subject areas; the importance of academics, art, science and social-emotional development in Waldorf education; and the overall benefits of Waldorf education for life in general. The survey was 64 questions in length. It was emailed to the parents with known email addresses of the 232 current students who attended the northern California Waldorf charter school during the 2017-2018 school year.

The materials used for the survey portion of the research included the following: transcriptions and coding data from the interviews; master email address list for parents of the approximately 232 students from the northern California Waldorf charter school (accessed through the school secretary); an anonymous Google Forms survey with an attached 'Informed Consent' consent form which described: the purpose of the study, the importance and benefits of the interviewees' input in regards to the study, and that there were no risks involved in participating in the study (Appendix D); an Excel spreadsheet generated by the Google Forms survey to copy and paste into a statistical software

program; and Minitab, the statistical software program that provided tools to analyze the results and find meaningful conclusions. A copy of the finalized survey was also submitted for an IRB (Institutional Review Board) evaluation and revision before the survey was conducted.

### Procedure

Phase one of the study involved interviewing a convenience sample of 15 parents of children who now attend, or did attend, a Waldorf charter elementary school after receiving IRB approval. Originally I was only going to interview five parents but I decided to increase the number from five to fifteen when early interviews suggested a broader range of perceptions.

The interview's purpose was to examine what aspects of Waldorf education parents feel affect their children's present and future schooling and beyond. The interview questions were organized by three broad topics including: parents' personal experiences with their children's Waldorf education; parents' feelings about how academics, art, and science are taught using the Waldorf methodology; and how elementary Waldorf education influences children's social experiences and their futures.

After identifying the sample of 15 parents to be interviewed, phone calls were made to each interviewee to invite them to participate in the interview (Appendix E). We also discussed setting up a time and place to conduct the interview. Two days before the interview an email was sent to the interviewee that included: a reminder of the appointment and the time and place; a description of the length of the interview; a

reiteration of the promise of confidentiality; and the importance of informed consent to do the interview. The email also contained a copy of the interview questions and the 'Informed Consent' form for the interviewee to review prior to the meeting.

Over the course of the interview study it became apparent that some of the participants were unable to set up a time to meet with me in person but really wanted to take part in the research. This occurred with five out of the 15 interview participants. I offered those five interviewees the option of filling out the 'Informed Consent' form and interview questions paper. Those five participants were able to respond to the interview questions document with details about their and their children's Waldorf school experiences. The five completed interview questionnaires turned out to be significant accounts of the interview research as well.

On the days of the other ten interviews I arrived five to ten minutes early to do preparations including testing the recording device and going over the 'Informed Consent' form. After settling into our interviewing space I would explain the 'Informed Consent' form and have the interviewee sign it. Then I would start the iPad video recorder and begin to ask a series of six questions in a semi-structured interview format. Using a semi-structured interview format allowed me the freedom to interject an important follow-up question or two, so as to delve deeper into the interviewees' responses. The interviews generally took between thirty and sixty minutes depending on the interviewee's level of engagement. I would take notes as well, while interviewing and recording the discussions.

Later all 15 of the interviews were transcribed from the video recordings and from the interview questions' documentations. The interview transcriptions were then analyzed using qualitative thematic coding. Common themes that were evident in the transcriptions were designated and examined. Those themes helped to continue the research and guide the quantitative investigation.

After completing the interviews, the survey was developed on the basis of the interview data collected in phase one and the themes that were generated from that coding process. The Google Forms survey was sent to parents, with known email addresses, of the 232 currently enrolled students at a Waldorf charter school in northern California. The survey was created on Google Forms using the premade blank quiz form. The survey consisted of informational inquiries, demographics, and open responses. The survey contained 64 questions in total.

An invitational email was sent that contained: information about the survey, the benefits of participating in the survey, and an 'Informed Consent' button to click on if the parent wanted to consent and take part in the survey. Parents could click on the button that said, 'End the consent form and survey now' if they did not want to take the survey. The survey took between twelve and fifteen minutes to complete.

The survey was sent out through the school's master parent email list. I had the school secretary send out the initial survey email invitation in April. Then the school secretary assisted me to send out five follow-up notices of the email invitation to take the survey. These five follow-up notices were sent out over the course of the last three months of the 2017-2018 school year and into the summer break. They were sent out as

reminders for those who wanted to take the survey and hadn't had a chance to do it yet.

A final thank you email was sent to all participants.

### Analysis

After completing the individual interviews, watching the videos of the interviews, studying the paper interview responses, and transcribing the interviewees' responses, I began to create some qualitative thematic codes to represent the narratives. I broke up the interviewees' answers to the six questions into codes. Themes were developed based on the many codes I extracted from the interview transcriptions. Many of the parents' responses showed a consistency in their answers in relation to the other interviewees' reactions. This consistency helped me narrow down the themes that were worked out for the codes. The themes that I created for the codes include: child development and developmentally appropriate practices; special techniques for teaching reading, writing, and math; the importance of nature connections and science lessons; arts education; extracurricular classes; social-emotional development; and preparation for high school, college, and life in general. These themes were consistently mentioned in the interviewees' reactions and helped to generate the subjects for the survey questions.

The questions put into the survey were based on the research that was done for the Literature Review of this thesis and the results of the 15 interviews that were conducted. The themes that I based the survey questions on included the same themes as mentioned above, i.e.: child development and developmentally appropriate practices; special techniques for teaching reading, writing, and math; the importance of nature connections



and science lessons; arts education; extracurricular classes; social-emotional development; and preparation for high school, college, and life in general. These themes were expanded into a variety of questions, 64 in total, which would summarize the overall experiences that the parents had with their children's Waldorf education.

As the parents answered the survey questions, the Google Forms program collected, analyzed, and calculated the results. The Google Forms program automatically generated quantitative data from the responses using percentages, pie charts, and bar graphs. That numerical data was collected from the Google Forms survey and downloaded at the end of the data collection to a password-protected file on the researcher's computer for statistical analysis. The quantitative data from the surveys was exported to an Excel spreadsheet generated by Google Docs and Forms. The Excel spreadsheet data was then copied and pasted into Minitab and the data was analyzed using basic statistical analysis. Pearson Correlation tests and Descriptive Statistics were conducted in Minitab to show a connection between many aspects of the questions in the survey. The tests were related to the following generic themes: how valuable various aspects of Waldorf education are; how important it is to learn various academic subjects through Waldorf education; how Waldorf education affects children's social-emotional development; and how Waldorf education influences children's present and future schooling experiences as well as their lives after completing schooling.

## RESULTS

This mixed method study was conducted to obtain insight into outcomes from Waldorf education and its categorical effects on students over the short and long term. Qualitative research results are represented through the interview data and quantitative research findings through the survey questionnaire data. The results of both of these investigations presented a diverse array of responses and characterized several key points for how parents and their children experience Waldorf education.

### Interviews

For the qualitative data research interview discussions were organized and directed. A total of 15 interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the main question, “What aspects of a child’s Waldorf education influences their present and future schooling and beyond”? The study explores parent’s view of whether their children’s overall experience with Waldorf education is advantageous to their schooling and other parts of their lives. The interview questions were organized by three broad ideas related to the following concepts: parents’ personal experiences with their children’s Waldorf education; parents’ feelings about how academics, art, social studies, and science are taught using the Waldorf methodology; and how elementary Waldorf education influences children’s social experiences and their futures. Several themes were generated from the interviewee’s answers.

The interview data had many thought-provoking and consistent themes that were brought up in response to the three broad ideas mentioned above. The responses were: child development and developmentally appropriate practices; special techniques for teaching math; the importance of nature connections and science lessons; arts education; extracurricular classes; social-emotional development; and preparation for high school, college, and life in general. As a result of the three broad concepts of the interview questions, parents were able to delve more deeply into their experiences with Waldorf education. They were also able to give more specific responses that enhanced the seven aforementioned themes.

#### Child Development and Developmentally Appropriate Practices

All 15 interviewees referred to themes of ‘child development and developmentally appropriate practices.’ The quotes that generated this theme were numerous. This theme was reflected in quotes such as, “My child had the opportunity to learn through many modalities,” and, “I was initially attracted to the Waldorf philosophy because they educate the whole child.” Other comments included, “Waldorf adheres to developmentally appropriate timelines”, and “I really like it as it looks at the child’s development.” One parent said that, “Waldorf education meets the child where they are”, while another parent commented, “They teach to the child’s spirit and unique temperament.” One parent, who is also a fourth and fifth grade Waldorf teacher, commented, “the main lesson speaks to the children by ages and subject matter.” A Waldorf kindergarten teacher and parent of two said that Waldorf education, “...appeals

to all intelligences and teaches to the multiple intelligences” and it has the, “correct timing of fitting with child development and Jean Piaget’s stages” of cognitive development. One final comment from a parent who is also a first-third grade Waldorf teacher said that her daughter “was honored for her strengths and given time to develop in the areas that she struggled with.” All of these responses illustrate that parents see the integral importance of how Waldorf techniques and modalities work directly with children’s growth in a developmentally appropriate way.

### Special Techniques for Teaching Math

Another significant theme that was brought up many times in the interviews was ‘special techniques for teaching reading, writing and math’. Nine out of 15 parents had important comments to say about how students in Waldorf schools benefit from these methods. There were many meaningful math program observations by parents. One parent who had the diverse experience and wider view of her three children attending three different Waldorf programs said that, “Waldorf lessons are experiential and enriching which make for deeper learning.” She also said that, “learning math through the use of songs and art allows the child’s brain to absorb more” and “ingrains the knowledge into the long-term memory.” A Waldorf charter schoolteacher said the math curriculum the students use in the Waldorf junior high is the same as the one used in the local high school. That consistency helped her daughters a lot. She also stated that, “the math and science taught at the Waldorf school really prepared her two daughters for the

math and science taught at the high school”. Parents really feel that the techniques for teaching math in Waldorf schools are very important for education.

### Language Arts

Ten of the 15 parents commented on Language Arts in the Waldorf curriculum. A parent who grew up in Austria and went to Waldorf influenced schools said that, “the oral learning of poems and songs builds a richness of language and memory.” She also stated that, “being exposed to so many stories and rich storytelling enhances memory and develops compassion in children.” A current Waldorf charter school administrator stated that, “imaginative and creative play is the foundation for abstract and critical thinking skills” needed for academic learning. A fourth and fifth grade Waldorf charter schoolteacher was quoted as saying, “story-based learning helps with writing skills” and a Waldorf charter school classified employee commented that, “learning academics through rhythm and repetition is great”. A parent who is a board member of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and a school psychologist at a northern California charter Waldorf school shared that “the main lessons in Waldorf education encourage abilities in creative and scientific writing”. One final comment from another parent of three Waldorf educated children said, “the Main Lesson books teach about organization, neatness, and doing your best work”. Parents presented many important ideas about how academics are taught in Waldorf schools.

Two other noteworthy ideas were presented by parents in regards to how Language Arts are taught in Waldorf education as opposed to how they are taught in

traditional public education. They noted that Waldorf education's approach of teaching Language Arts is more compelling through storytelling, rich language, and interactive experiences. Other comments mentioned that students have to do a lot more creative, scientific, and descriptive writing beginning in third grade that continues up through the upper grades. Both of these observations demonstrate the parents' views that the way that children learn Language Arts in Waldorf school is more comprehensive, thorough, and balanced. Examining all of the parents' comments resulted in their key perception that the special techniques that Waldorf schoolteachers use to instruct academics are fundamental.

#### Nature Connections and Science Lessons

The importance of 'nature connections and science lessons' for student education was one more theme that was developed from the broad ideas of the interview questions. Out of the 15 interview responses, 13 mentioned the importance of nature and science education when teaching students. Ten parents mentioned the plethora of field trips related to nature and science education that the students take including: camping and backpacking; going on the trip to Wolf Creek Education Center; raising and then going to the river to release salmon; taking a three-five day farm trip to a sustainable farm; attending beach clean ups; going to environmental camps; and taking nature walks. Nine interviewees mentioned the significance of the northern California Waldorf charter school's 4H program where the students as a whole class examine, experience, and visit

different farm animals for each of the grades. Science and nature experiences were noted significantly by 13 of the Waldorf parents.

Parents' descriptions of their views about science and nature in Waldorf school included: "the school is environmentally aware"; "ecological consciousness is interwoven into all areas of learning"; "backpacking taught my son how strong he was"; "science is taught through experiential learning"; "students are taught to be stewards of the land"; and the school encourages a "holistic connection to nature and the seasons." Some other noteworthy impressions the parents shared regarding the importance of nature and science curriculum for students were: the value of offering natural materials as toys and classroom supplies; the natural wood desks and chairs provided to each student; the environmental projects; the organic food program, school garden, and composting project; and extensive science lessons interwoven into all the grades. Waldorf parents clearly think that nature and science are very consequential elements of Waldorf education.

### The Arts Curriculum

The arts are a vitally important part of the Waldorf curriculum and featured significantly in all 15 interviews. Fine art, drama, and music through song, verse, rhymes and instrumentation are all interwoven into the regular curriculum. A key comment from a first through third grade Waldorf teacher and parent was, "Art was the most meaningful aspect of my daughter's Waldorf education". A Waldorf charter school administrator said a few essential observations about art including: "the artistic piece of Waldorf

education is absolutely crucial”; “art is transformation that is alive, it is living and growing and makes you a whole human being by teaching you to be at peace with yourself”; and “developing through an artistic medium as a human being is a journey of consciousness.” A parent of three Waldorf educated children said that the strong emphasis on art in Waldorf education “helps kids who are not good at art to get better at it.” A parent who homeschooled her kids using Waldorf education, and experienced a private Waldorf school in central California quoted a book stating that the arts help, “...the child’s soul to shine brightly in his inner world and he is quick to find the colors which portray his inner landscape” (Fenner & Rapisardo, 1995). Finally a parent who is a board member of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and a school psychologist at a northern California charter Waldorf school said that, “art provides an alternative assessment and window into students’ abilities.” The parents presented a lot of significant impressions about art and its effects on their children’s learning.

Other thoughts that the parents mentioned about the arts were the importance of: the main lesson books; the development of lifelong artistic skills in drawing, music, and creativity; the important experience and abilities developed by learning flute in kindergarten-eighth grades and violin in fourth-fifth grades; exposure to handworking skills like knitting, felting, sewing, crocheting or leatherworking; hand and brain development and coordination; and a lifelong progression of the ability to make things, develop hobbies, and fix objects.

In contrast to all the positive reactions to the arts, three of the 15 parents felt that the fine arts in the main lesson books and painting lessons were too rigid at times and that



the students should have more freedom with their artistic expressions. In other words one out of five parents commented that the art is too structured at times in Waldorf lessons. Overall however the arts were viewed as an extremely positive aspect of children's Waldorf education by most parents that were interviewed.

#### Extracurricular Classes: Handworking, Music, PE, Developmental Movement, and Spanish

Extracurricular classes at private and public Waldorf schools are offered weekly for all students in TK through eighth grade. These classes include Handworking, Music, PE, Developmental Movement, and Spanish (or another foreign language). Thirteen of the 15 parents mentioned positive comments about supplementary class experiences for their children. In regards to the additional classes one parent said that, "Waldorf students get the same schooling as traditional education students, but way more", while another said the extra classes make students, "well-rounded people." An additional parent said the extra classes make Waldorf students' "brains more divergent" while a fourth parent said that the extracurricular classes help "to develop the hands, heart, and head".

Four of the parents mentioned that the Handworking class is important in helping the development of the hands, hand-eye coordination, brain development, and physiological correlation between the brain and the hands. Three parents said that music instruction was a valuable experience for their children because they learned a lifelong love of playing an instrument, the violin lessons open up their brain's capacity, and music lessons offer their children another modality of learning.

Three parents said that the PE classes helped their children to be more athletic, more ready for competition, more confident, and more comfortable with PE. Three other parents said that the Developmental Movement classes were a valuable part of their children's school experiences. They noted that the movement classes help children to develop their brains more. This crossover of the midline in their brains helps children's academic learning by opening up the brain nerve cell networks (Darian, 2012). Several parents appreciate that Waldorf education seems to place a higher value on developing the whole child by educating all parts of their bodies and both sides of their brains.

A few parents mentioned the benefit of learning Spanish. One said learning Spanish is important because it is a relevant language and another parent said her two children were able to skip first year Spanish and progress up to level two when they moved to high school. One parent said that her three children "were able to learn a second language" that they could use later in life. Some parents do feel that learning a foreign language is an important aspect of a Waldorf education.

In summarizing the importance of Extracurricular classes a Handworking teacher from the northern California charter Waldorf school said the extra classes help to "keep children out of the media-crazed world", and "push kids to do other activities besides screens." The Extracurricular classes offer students various avenues for engagement and interaction with life. Overall many of the interviewed parents had meaningful comments to say about the extracurricular classes- Handworking, Music, PE, Developmental Movement, and Spanish.

### Social-Emotional Development

Social-emotional development in Waldorf schools was another significant theme among the interviewees' responses and was mentioned in all fifteen interviews. Some points of discussion that were brought up in the parents' interviews consisted of: caring about the whole child and social interactions of students; teaching students to be compassionate, kind, and socially responsible; and helping students to be ready for the social demands of elementary, middle, and high school as well as adult life. According to the interviews Waldorf education also emphasizes citizenship, a sense of diplomacy towards others, and a good sense-of-self and self-confidence.

Parents mentioned some important activities that the students do at Waldorf schools to help social-emotional development. These endeavors include: weekly friendship circles with the school counselor; regular mindfulness lessons with the Creative Movement teacher; peer mediation programs where middle school students become leaders to help younger students with social problems; and the ongoing investment of teachers showing respect to students and in turn students learning how to interact with adults. One parent who experienced two Waldorf charter schools with her two kids said that, "the peer mediation program teaches the children to speak up for diplomacy". One parent of two who is also a Waldorf Kindergarten teacher stated that, "Waldorf education offers a fertile ground for helping students with social-emotional development". A Waldorf charter school administrator stated that, "her children developed a sense of social responsibility."

Two parents described the empowerment of the coming of age ceremonies that occur over the course of a student's Waldorf career. Some of the events mentioned were: the Rose Ceremony for kindergarten, the Spiral Walk for primary grades, the May Day Festival and the Lantern Walk for kindergarten through eighth grades, the Squire's Challenge and the Knighting Ceremony for sixth grade, the Sword and Maypole Dances for fifth and eighth grades respectively, and the Greek Olympics for the upper grades. Social-emotional development is an important objective of Waldorf schools and many parents notice its value.

#### Students Well Prepared for High School, College, and Life in General

One final theme that was consistently brought up by the Waldorf parents was how well students are prepared for high school, college, and life in general. All 15 of the interviewed parents have one or more children who are now attending or did attend high school after going to a Waldorf school.

Twelve of the 15 parents felt that their children were well prepared for high school. Many of those parents stated that the academic expectations of the junior high curriculum at the Waldorf school were extremely high which prepared them well for high school. Seven parents said that the high school work expectations were easier than the junior high responsibilities their children had at the Waldorf school. This was a disappointing aspect of the transition to high school for two of the parents and their children.

Furthermore seven of those 12 parents who thought that their children were well prepared, also thought their children were well prepared for the social demands of high school. Some other positive comments about how well prepared their Waldorf educated students were for high school included: very organized and neat with school work; more prepared for AP classes in high school; understand math and science really well; and know how to study, write papers, and complete thorough work products.

It should be noted that one parent did not think that her child was well prepared for high school because he lacked enough exposure to technology to succeed there. Three of the parents said that a Waldorf high school would have been a better fit for their children. Another parent, who sent her daughter to a private Waldorf high school for seventh-tenth grade after she attended a private kindergarten-sixth grade Waldorf school, thought that her daughter was ill-prepared due to both the schools being fledgling schools and not having strong academic programs. Overall, there were minimal negative comments from parents about their children being well prepared for high school and most of the parents thought their children were well prepared for high school.

In looking more closely at whether parents thought their students were prepared to go to college, eight of the 15 parents have children who are college age and five of those parents reported that their children were well prepared for college. One parent said that, “the children are held to a higher standard in Waldorf school” and in turn “are more successful in their high school and college careers”. Another parent said that her daughter was well prepared to study Environmental Engineering in college because of her Waldorf background.

Three of those eight parents who have children who are college age said their children did not go to college, and two of those same three parents said their children were not well prepared to go to college. Those two parents did not state that their children were *not* prepared for college because of their Waldorf education. Overall the majority of those eight parents who have college age children thought that their children were well prepared for college, in part, because of their Waldorf education.

Many parents had a positive response to how well prepared their children were for life due to Waldorf education. Thirteen of the parents felt that learning through the Waldorf curriculum better prepared their children for life. Parents commented on how well prepared for life their Waldorf educated children are by stating that they: have good life and social skills; are able to be kind, loving, and accepting towards others; have a lifelong sense of the importance of art; are able to be friendly, open-minded, and sensitive towards others; and have high respect for adults and teachers.

One parent of three children said that her children's Waldorf education helped them to, "develop their spirit and a deeper connection to life", and a handworking teacher and parent of two stated that her grown children "have a deeper sense of understanding humanity". A Waldorf kindergarten teacher stated that she notices, "kids who attend Waldorf schools are unaffected by society". The theme of being well prepared for life came up in many of the parents' responses regarding their children's Waldorf education and experiences.

The parents overwhelmingly reported positive feedback about their children's Waldorf educational experiences. They discussed a wide range of topics and openly

shared numerous details about how Waldorf education has been an important influence on their children's schooling. The qualitative data from the interviews helped to shape and guide the topics of the quantitative research and the survey development.

### Surveys

The quantitative survey was created to further examine the importance of Waldorf education and how it affects students. In the interviews the guiding question was, "What aspects of a child's Waldorf education influences their present and future schooling and beyond?" The responses to the interviews helped to shape the survey questions. The survey questions looked more closely at the following topics: how Waldorf curriculum affects learning in all subject areas; parent's personal reflections of their child's experiences in Waldorf school; the importance of extracurricular classes, art, and social-emotional development in Waldorf education; and the overall benefits of Waldorf education for life in general. These four broad topics were examined further to highlight the value parents place on many specific areas of their children's Waldorf school experience. Some of the specific areas emphasized by the parents' survey responses included the following: Waldorf curriculum; holistic education - educating the whole child - hands, heart, and head; how students learn reading and writing; how students learn math; nature based science and environmental education; social-emotional development; arts curriculum; extra-curricular classes; global peace and multicultural awareness; 4H program; integrated learning; and hands-on interactive learning. These specific areas

appeared to be very important for most of the Waldorf parents as indicated by their responses.

### Significance of the Waldorf Curriculum to Children's Schooling

The significance of the Waldorf curriculum to children's schooling was very important to the surveyed parents. A high number of parents think that the Waldorf curriculum is valuable. A total of 50 out of 54 parents or 92.6 percent think that the Waldorf curriculum is extremely valuable, very valuable or moderately valuable for their children's schooling experience (Figure 1).

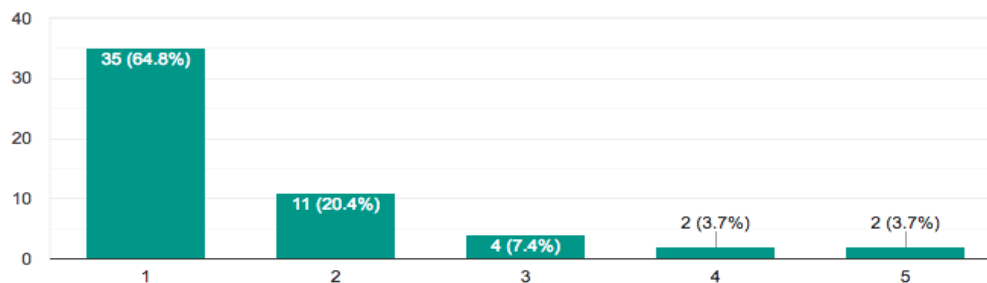


Figure 1 How valuable to your children's schooling is the Waldorf curriculum?  
(1=extremely valuable and 5=not valuable at all)

### How Academics are Taught Using a Waldorf Curriculum

Parents also were asked what value they place on the way academics are taught using a Waldorf curriculum. Out of 54 responses 94.5 percent think it is extremely valuable, very valuable, or moderately valuable (Figure 2). Parents overwhelmingly replied that the way academics are taught using Waldorf education is valuable to them.



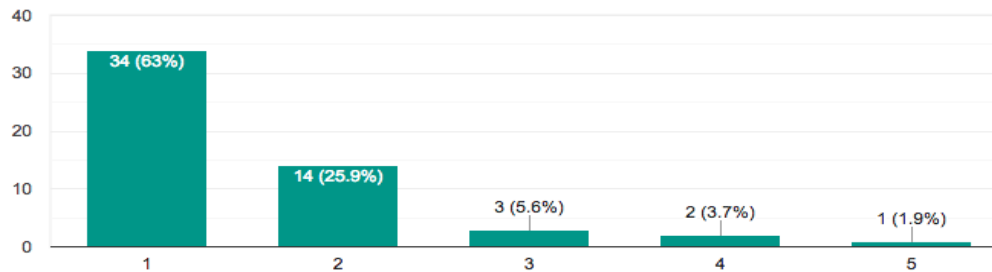


Figure 2 How valuable is the way academics are taught using a Waldorf curriculum?

(1=extremely valuable and 5=not valuable at all)

### Holistic Education and Educating the Whole Child – Hands, Heart, and Head in Relationship to Waldorf Education

Several Pearson Correlations were done in regards to looking more closely at the value parent place on holistic education and educating the whole child – hands, heart, and head in correlation to the value parents place on various aspects of Waldorf education. Overall 13 significant correlations were found. Nine of the correlations were very significant. The other four correlations were significant (Table 1).

Table 1

Pearson Correlations for Value parents place on holistic education in correlation to thirteen variables.

Variables	Value of holistic education or educating the whole child – hands, heart, and head
1. Value of the Waldorf curriculum & how students learn	0.841 <0.0001
2. Value of academics being taught using a Waldorf curriculum	0.734 <0.0001
3. Value of reading & writing taught through storytelling, symbolism, songs, poems, verses, and main lesson book	0.670 <0.0001
4. Value of math being taught through hands-on activities, interactive lessons & kinesthetic movement	0.802 <0.0001
5. Value of nature-based science, environmental awareness, and outdoor education	0.649 <0.0001
6. Value of social-emotional development, child's sense-of-self	0.627 <0.0001
7. Value of arts curriculum	0.579 <0.0001
8. Value of extra-curricular classes (Spanish, PE, Handworking, Creative Movement, Music)	0.785 <0.0001
9. Value of global peace and multicultural awareness	0.487 <0.0001

Table 1

Continued

Variables	Value of holistic education or educating the whole child – hands, heart, and head
11. Importance of whole child being taught through physical, social-emotional, and mental activities	0.418 0.0019
12. Importance of integrated learning	0.410 0.0021
13. Importance of hands-on interactive learning	0.375 0.0052
	Pearson Correlation P-Value

### Learning Language Arts through Waldorf Education

An important alternate topic that was highlighted by the parents through the survey was how students learn Language Arts through the Waldorf education. Parents had a very favorable response to this topic. A total of 51 parents feel that it is extremely important, very important, or moderately important. This equals a sum of 94.5 percent of parents that feel that learning reading and writing through Waldorf education is important (Figure 3).

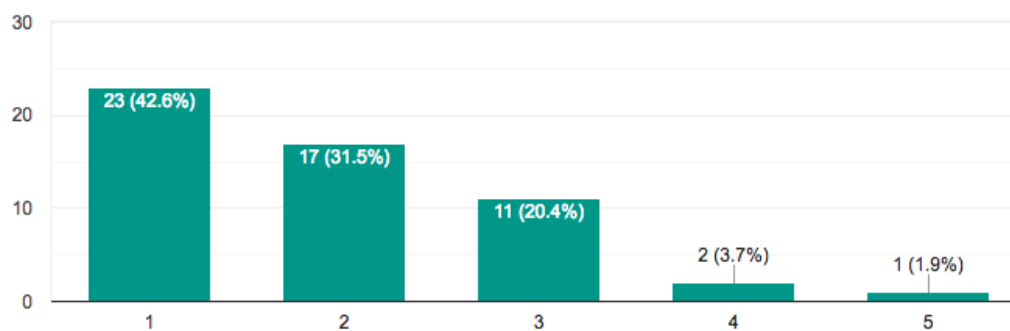


Figure 3 How important is it to you that your children learn reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum?

(1=extremely important and 5=not important at all)

Several Pearson Correlations were done also using the idea of how students learn Language Arts through the Waldorf curriculum. The correlations compared the value of importance the parents place on how children learn reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum to several beneficial aspects of the Waldorf curriculum. Six of the Pearson Correlations turned out to be significant (Table 2).

Table 2

Pearson Correlations for Importance of children learning reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum in correlation to six variables.

Variables	Importance of children learning reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum
1. Children are better at reading and writing because they are learning these subjects through a Waldorf curriculum	0.708 <0.0001
2. Benefit of the pace of children's reading development in the lower grades	0.727 <0.0001
3. Value of the arts curriculum to children's schooling experience	0.505 <0.0001
4. Children develop a lifelong love of learning	0.442 0.0006
5. Value of way academics are taught using a Waldorf curriculum	0.338 0.0108
6. Children more creative because of the Arts programs at the Waldorf school	0.333 0.0121
	Pearson Correlation P-Value

### Children Better at Reading and Writing when they learn them through the Waldorf Curriculum

Parents were asked whether their children are better at reading and writing because they are learning those subjects through a Waldorf curriculum. Many parents were favorable to this question. A sizeable number of parents said they strongly agree and agree with that idea. In contrast some parents said they had a neutral position about that question. Four parents said that they disagree and two parents said they strongly disagree that their children are better at reading and writing because they are learning these subjects through a Waldorf curriculum. Overall a favorable percentage of parents, 61.1 percent, did agree with the position that their children are better at reading and writing because they are learning those subjects through a Waldorf curriculum (Figure 4).

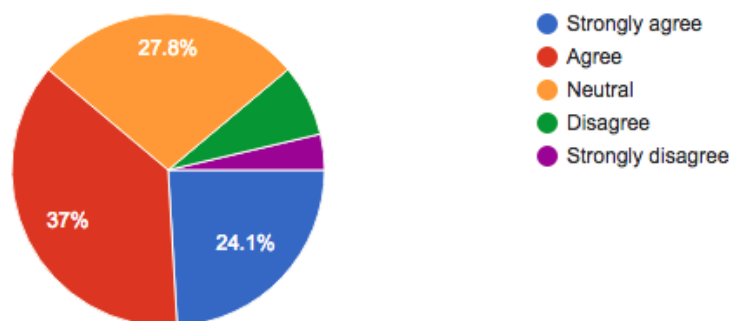


Figure 4 Are children better at reading and writing because they are learning those subjects through a Waldorf curriculum?

Figure four is a pie chart that uses percentages to show parents' responses. These include strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The results are as

follows: 24.1 percent strongly agree = 13 parents; 37 percent agree = 20 parents; 27.8 percent neutral = 15 parents; 7.4 percent disagree = 4 parents; 3.7 percent strongly disagree = 2 parents.

### The Importance of Math Being Taught through the Waldorf Curriculum

One more significant finding from parents in regards to their children's Waldorf education was the importance of math being taught through the Waldorf curriculum. A large pool of parents feel that it is extremely important, very important, and moderately important that their children are being taught math through the Waldorf curriculum. That is a total of 94.4 percent of parents. Only a few parents feel that math being taught through the Waldorf curriculum is minimally important or not important at all (Figure 5).

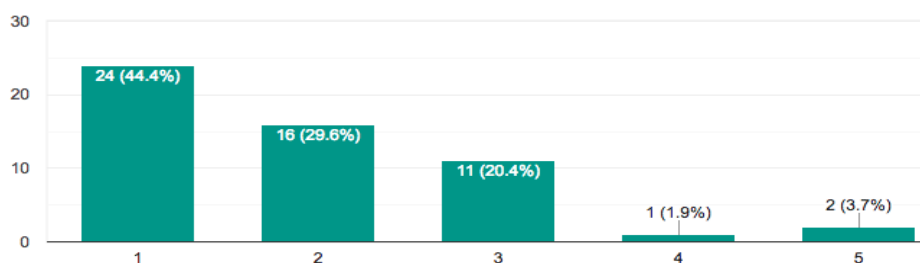


Figure 5 How important is it that your children learn math through the Waldorf curriculum?

(1=extremely important and 5=not important at all)

In further consideration of the importance of learning math through the Waldorf curriculum, numerous Pearson Correlations were completed. How math is taught

through the Waldorf curriculum was compared to several aspects of Waldorf education. Two strong correlations were found between how math is taught through the Waldorf curriculum and other various aspects of Waldorf education. Six other correlations were conducted in relation to the value of learning math through the Waldorf curriculum. All of these calculations showed notable P-values (Table 3).



Table 3

Pearson Correlations for Value parents place on How important it is to learn math through the Waldorf curriculum in correlation to eight variables.

Variables	Important to learn math through the Waldorf curriculum
1. Children are better at math because they are learning it through a Waldorf curriculum	0.709 <0.0001
2. Value the way academics are taught using the Waldorf curriculum	0.529 <0.0001
3. Child prepared for life due to attending Waldorf	0.473 0.0002
4. Children more musical because of music programs at Waldorf school	0.384 0.0035
5. Children more creative because of arts programs at Waldorf school	0.367 0.0054
6. Children develop a lifelong love of learning	0.343 0.0097
7. Children prepared for upper grades, high school, and college	0.327 0.0159
8. Value of weekly music program	0.304 0.0226
	Pearson Correlation P-Value

In further discussion of the Waldorf math curriculum, Pearson Correlations were carried out using the main idea of the importance of learning math through hands-on activities, interactive lessons, and kinesthetic movement in comparison to various aspects of Waldorf education. There were three values that scored a very strong correlation with the importance of learning math that way. Six other correlations were found related to the topic and each had significant P-values as well (Table 4).

Table 4

Pearson Correlations for Importance of learning math through hands-on activities, interactive lessons, and kinesthetic movement in correlation to nine variables.

Variables	Importance of learning math through hands-on activities, interactive lessons, and kinesthetic movement
1. Importance of main lesson books	0.529 <0.0001
2. Value of extracurricular classes	0.618 <0.0001
3. Importance of arts curriculum enhancing academics	0.519 <0.0001
4. Value of nature-based science, environmental awareness, 4H, and outdoor education	0.413 0.0019
5. Important to learn lessons that are fun and interesting	0.385 0.0040
6. Importance of hands-on interactive learning	0.373 0.0055
7. Value of social-emotional development, child's sense-of-self	0.354 0.0085
8. Importance of learning academics at the right pace	0.311 0.0220
9. Importance of learning academics developmentally appropriate to the age of the child	0.297 0.0309
	Pearson Correlation P-Value

This mixed methods study revealed some important findings about how parents view their children's Waldorf school educational experiences. Both the interview and survey studies uncovered key conclusions that show that many aspects of Waldorf education benefit and advance children's learning.

## DISCUSSION

Conducting the mixed methods research for understanding students' Waldorf school experiences was enlightening and informative. The research did prove to be constructive and valuable in terms of understanding which Waldorf student experiences are deemed important by parents. The research also indicates that Waldorf education does offer a more well-rounded and integrated experience than traditional schools.

The results of the qualitative data show that parents had a tremendous amount of positive feedback about their children's Waldorf education. The interviews allowed parents to share what they value most. The three topics that had all 15 parents discuss their affirmative attributes were: child development and developmentally appropriate practices; the arts; and social emotional development.

The prominent status for the 'child development and developmentally appropriate practices' result shows that Waldorf education works with the correct age and stage of the child. This gives educators the liberty of allowing children to progress at the right pace. The prominent ranking of the 'arts curriculum' illustrates that Waldorf education offers children a well-rounded experience by teaching lessons through multiple modalities of learning. Creativity and a sense of reverence are highly regarded. The high rating of 'social emotional development' demonstrates that Waldorf education nurtures children's self-esteems, sense of self, and awareness of others. A sense of community is very important in the Waldorf classroom and school. These three topics, that 100 percent of the Waldorf parents discussed, exemplify how Waldorf education teaches to the whole

child, hands, heart, and head, and not just to spirit of the mind. Unlike traditional schools that teach mainly to the spirit of the mind, Waldorf schools teach to the child's specific age and stage of development, incorporate arts into all aspects of the curriculum, and nurture the whole child including their social emotional health.

One discrepancy in the results for the interviews was that many parents thought their older children were prepared for high school (12/15) and many thought their children were prepared for life (13/15). In contrast about half, or 53 percent of parents, thought their older children were prepared for college (8/15). Was this factor different because not all young adults go to college? Or were there some elements in their Waldorf education that were missing for those students? Could Waldorf education have offered something different to some of these students that could have helped them prepare better for college? Does traditional education help prepare more children for college? These questions could be probed further.

Looking closely at the results of the quantitative data demonstrates some very important findings. Many parents gave favorable scores to three specific topics that were examined more closely for the survey data. The three topics with high scores include: how academics are taught using the Waldorf curriculum; how students learn Language Arts through the Waldorf curriculum; and the importance of math being taught through the Waldorf curriculum. These three topics' results ranked high scores of 94.4 to 94.5 percent showing that most parents responded favorably to them.

The rationale for the high-ranking score for 'how academics are taught' is because Waldorf education teaches through main lesson blocks where each subject is taught to the

multiple intelligences. Academics are taught by means of integrated education and the ascending spiral of knowledge which both help to strengthen conceptual understanding for Waldorf students. The reason for the high score for ‘how students learn Language Arts’ is because Waldorf education uses rich storytelling, poetic songs, and imaginative lessons to bring the linguistic world to life. Teachers use multi-faceted techniques of holistic instruction to aid in developing students’ language capacity. The reason for the elevated score for ‘the importance of math being taught through the Waldorf curriculum’ is because math is presented through imagination and imitation, rhythm and beat, and visual and artistic lessons. The arithmetic lessons animate the math world and bring it off the paper and into the deeper realizations of children’s minds. Parents seem keen to the idea that the way students learn academics, language arts and math through the Waldorf curriculum is unique, valuable, and perhaps different than the way those subjects would be learned in a traditional school setting.

There were numerous strong correlations for the survey data. Some of these correlations highlighted: how all academics are taught, social emotional development, the importance of the arts, and extracurricular classes. However there was one very strong correlation that seems noteworthy. That is the value of global peace and multicultural awareness. In relation to holistic education it received a P-value =  $<0.000$ . This score shows that there is a very strong correlation between Waldorf’s holistic instructional style and the importance of cultural awareness, world knowledge, and an allegiance to the greater community.

Another very strong correlation that is notable is the importance of children learning reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum and the pace of children's reading development in the lower grades. This too had a P-value =  $<0.000$ . This value demonstrates a strong correlation between the importance of learning reading and writing through the Waldorf curriculum and using a slower pace in primary grades. The value also highlights the benefits of that correlation to children's long-term linguistic skill development and success. It similarly reflects a very different approach than the one used for teaching reading and writing in traditional schools where children are continuously being pushed to do harder and harder work in the younger grades.

Two more remarkable correlations relate to the importance of learning math through the Waldorf curriculum. One relates to the value of music in the Waldorf curriculum. 'Children being more musical because of music programs' and 'the weekly music program' both scored strong correlations and significant P-values ( $p < 0.05$ ) in correlation to the importance of learning math through the Waldorf curriculum. Those scores show that Waldorf math programs help to accentuate the music programs. The other correlation relates to the value of Waldorf education in one's life and included the following two topics, 'Child prepared for life' and 'Children develop a lifelong love of learning.' These significant scores demonstrate that the importance of learning math through Waldorf education influences students' present and future lives. It also instills a lasting reverence for learning. Both of these striking correlations show that learning math through the Waldorf curriculum can be a more integrated experience that instills a

lifelong love of learning as opposed to the more stagnant style of how traditional schools teach.

Further studies for this research could be to look into state test scores of Waldorf charter school students in comparison to the state test scores for traditional schools. In the minimal research I have done regarding schools' state test scores, the evidence shows that Waldorf students do score higher than traditional school students over time in Language Arts and Math (Larrison et al., 2012).

In comparing the results of this study with the Waldorf studies in the Literature Review many similarities surface. First, over the long term Waldorf students achieve more skills in learning (Larrison et al., 2012). Second, holistic education and integrated education are equally important teaching pedagogies to use when instructing children through all three stages of development (Barnes, 1991; Chauncey, 2006; Foster, 1984; Larrison et al., 2012; Nicholson, 2000; Oberman, 2008; Oberski & McNally, 2006; Ogletree et al, 1970; Petrash, 2010; Reinsmith, 1989). Next, using the Waldorf curriculum to educate the very young child has important implications for their long-term success (Clouder, 2003; Hutchins, 2009; O'Connor & Angus 2014). Finally, the arts help children learn through an integrated approach and help them to develop a sense of creativity for life (Dahlin, 2009; Souto-Manning & James, 2008). In contrast to traditional education, Waldorf education uses a balanced approach that offers a more well-rounded and integrated experience.



## SUMMARY

In summary the key elements and many benefits of Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education are presented in this thesis research. The articles, books, and publications that were read for the Literature Review described integral aspects of Waldorf education. The mixed methods research provides support for the value of learning academics, arts, and social skills through this curriculum. The data shows convincing input from parents regarding their opinions about how Waldorf curriculum accentuates learning. It also imparts overall validation of the advantages of Waldorf education to children's lives during their school years and their futures.

The principle ideas presented by the literature and by the mixed methods research complement one another and offer evidence that Waldorf education is a well-rounded and integrated school pedagogy. It serves children holistically and the benefits of learning through the Waldorf curriculum can last a lifetime. Parents largely appreciate and recognize the value of Waldorf education and its many rich and varied qualities.

The results were clear – Waldorf education is a curriculum that brings great benefits to young students. Parents feel that it is a fundamental curricular program that helps their children in many ways including: benefitting them through its important strategies, helping them to achieve their optimal development, and assisting them to be more prepared for upper grades and life in general.

Could this 100-year-old teaching philosophy, described by some as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's best-kept secrets, be a gift to the world in helping to preserve our future and assist humanity to evolve? This research seems to suggest that it can.

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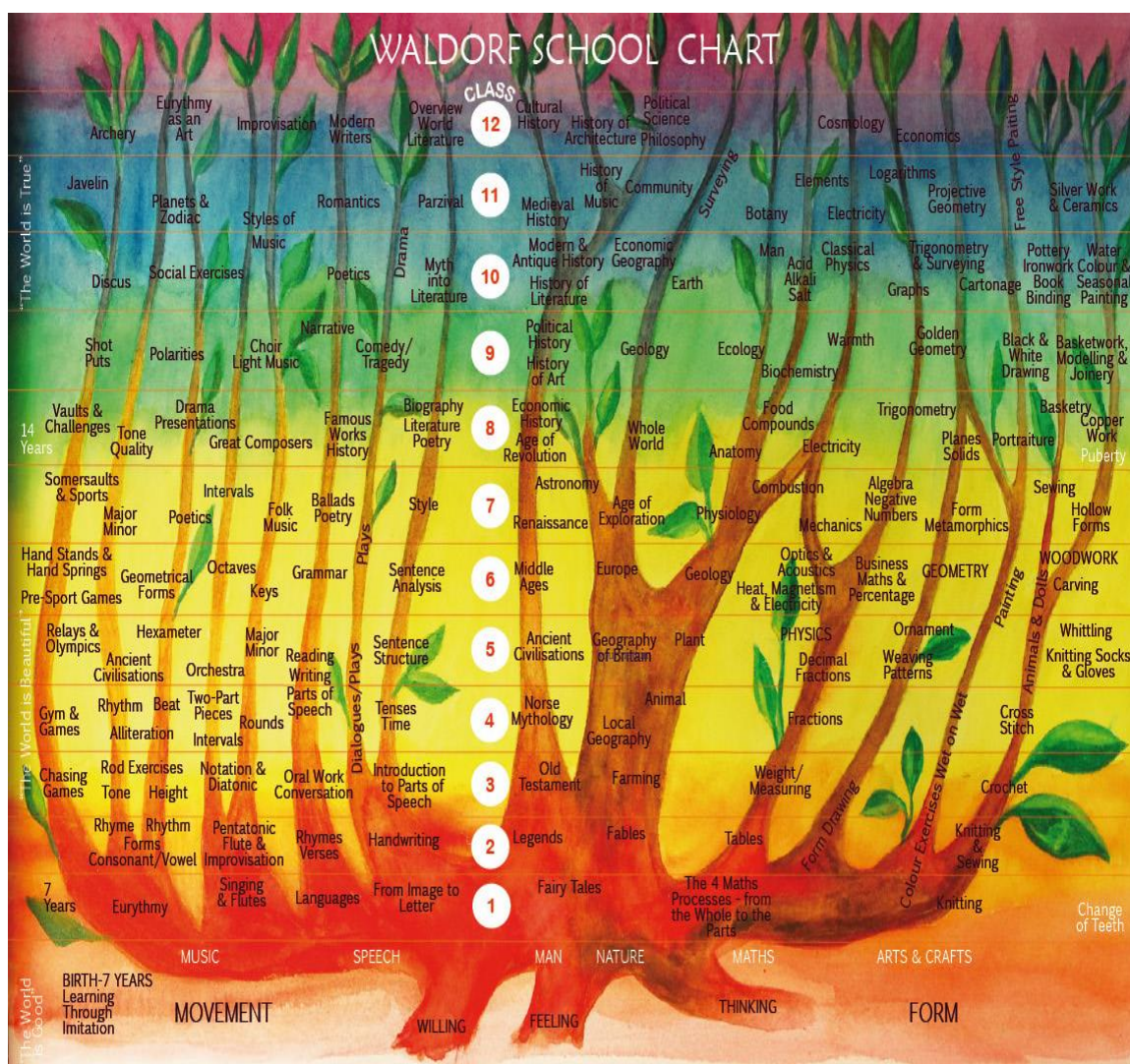
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APPENDICES

Appendix A Waldorf Curriculum Chart that follows the development of children at each age and stage of their formative years

(Note this chart was created for schools in England and can be modified for any country)

Online Waldorf Library. (2015) <http://www.waldorflibrary.org/150-articles/1307-waldorf-curriculum-chart>





Appendix B Interview Questions for thesis project by Jacqueline Stratton

*Interview Topic: What aspects of your child's Waldorf education influence their present and future schooling and beyond?*

1. What is your experience with Waldorf schools and how do you feel about it?
  
2. How do you feel about the way children learn in a Waldorf school? Was there anything particularly good or bad?
  
3. How do you feel about the way art was used in Waldorf education and its effect on your child?
  
4. In what ways do you think Waldorf school influenced your child's sense of self or social interactions?
  
5. What did your child learn about global peace, the environment, or multiculturalism in Waldorf school? Do you feel these areas were emphasized the right amount?
  
6. Do you feel like the Waldorf experience helped your child to be more prepared for high school, college, and life in general? If so, in what way?

Appendix C Consent Form INFORMED CONSENT for Interview Research  
on “*Why Waldorf Works for Education*”

You are invited to participate in a **study that involves research in Waldorf Education**. My name is Jacqueline Stratton and 2 of my children have or are currently attending a Waldorf school. I am currently completing my thesis research as a graduate student at Humboldt State University in the Department of Education. *The purpose of this thesis study is to examine what aspects of Waldorf education, that Waldorf student’s experience, are deemed important by their parents.*

As a parent of children who attended a Waldorf school you are in a special position to share your experiences and to help answer the question of whether a Waldorf education prepares students well for the upper grades and life more generally.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an interview. Your participation in this study will last about 40 minutes.

There are no risks in participating. **There are some benefits to this research, including contributing personal knowledge of Waldorf educational experiences that will strengthen future educational opportunities for children.** Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time without penalty.

The interview is anonymous and no identifying information of the interviewees will be included in the thesis. The interview session will be recorded and later transcribed. Quotations from the interview will be used only with permission from the interviewee. All recordings and transcriptions obtained from the interview will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after the thesis is completed. The interview consent form will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after a period of three years.

If you have any questions about this research at any time, please call or email me at Jacqueline Stratton at ph. # 707-677-3506 or email at jad4@humboldt.edu *or* Eric Van Duzer at ph. # 707-826-3726 or email at evv1@humboldt.edu.

If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5165.

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**Please check statement and sign below to authorize your consent to participate:**

**\_\_\_\_I authorize my consent to be interviewed and for the information I give to be used in the Master’s thesis study on Waldorf education by Jacqueline Stratton.**

**Print name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D Email Invitation and Consent Form for Survey Research on *Why Waldorf*

### *Works for Education?*

Dear Wonderful Waldorf Families,

You are invited to participate in a **study that involves research about Waldorf Education**. My name is Jacqueline Stratton and 2 of my children have attended or are currently attending a Waldorf-Inspired school. I am presently completing my thesis research as a graduate student at **Humboldt State University** in the **Department of Education**. *The purpose of this thesis study is to examine what aspects of Waldorf education, that Waldorf students' experience, are deemed important by their parents.*

As a parent of children who now attend or have attended a Waldorf school you are in a special position to share your experiences and to help answer the questions of whether a Waldorf education offers a well-rounded experience and if **Waldorf education prepares students well for the upper grades and life more generally**.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey/questionnaire. Your participation in this study will last about 12 minutes.

There are no risks in participating. **There are some benefits to this research, including contributing personal knowledge of Waldorf educational experiences that will strengthen future educational opportunities for children**. Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time without penalty.

This survey is anonymous. Please do not add any personal identifying information on the survey. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after the thesis is completed. This consent form will be maintained in a safe location and will be destroyed after a period of three years.

If you have any questions about this research at any time, please call or email me -Jacqueline Stratton at ph. # 707-677-3506 or email at [jad4@humboldt.edu](mailto:jad4@humboldt.edu) *or* Eric Van Duzer at ph. # 707-826-3726 or email at [evv1@humboldt.edu](mailto:evv1@humboldt.edu).

If you have any concerns with this study or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at [irb@humboldt.edu](mailto:irb@humboldt.edu) or (707) 826-5165.

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**Yes I authorize my consent to participate in the survey and for the information I give to be used in the Master's thesis study on Waldorf Education by Jacqueline Stratton. Click here: "Yes I give consent to participate in the research study that examines Waldorf education."**

**No I do not authorize my consent to take the survey to research Waldorf Education. Click here: to end the consent form and survey now.**

**Thank you for your time and have a nice day!!**

Appendix E Phone Invite for the interviews: Why Waldorf Education Works?

“Hi. I am conducting interviews of parents of current and prior Waldorf students.

*I would like your input regarding what aspects of your child’s Waldorf school experiences have helped them in their present and future schooling and beyond? As a parent of children who do attend or have attended a Waldorf school you are in a special position to share your experiences and to help answer the question of whether a Waldorf education prepares students well for high school, college, and life in general.*

This study is being conducted to collect data and information on Waldorf education and Waldorf students, and to encourage Waldorf curriculum to be used more in education.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview?

I would greatly appreciate your input and knowledge regarding this topic.”