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Michaela Wolf Hashitani  
*Portland State University*

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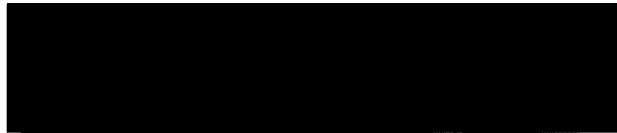
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## THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Michaela Wolf Hashitani for the Master of Arts in German were presented February 11, 1998, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

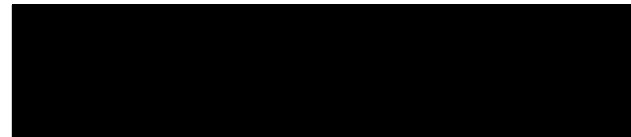
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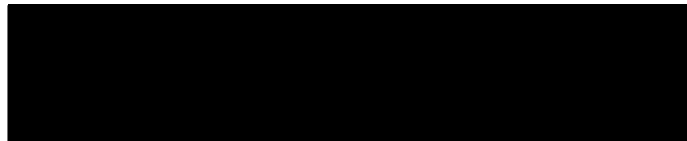
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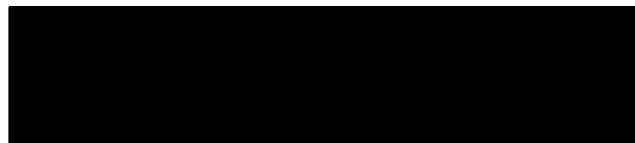


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## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Michaela Wolf Hashitani for the Master of Arts in German presented February 11, 1998.

Title: Rudolf Steiner's Theory of Foreign Language Learning

Rudolf Steiner is best known as the founder of the philosophical movement *Anthroposophie* and as the ideological father of Waldorf schools. The Waldorf school program follows Steiner's education principles in that it teaches children to explore their world with all senses. The goal of Waldorf education is to help children develop their soul and spirit in order to become a conscious, mature adult. Waldorf schools introduce two foreign languages at grade one in order to raise world-awareness in children and young adults.

This study reviews Steiner's biographic background until the opening of the first Waldorf school. It highlights Steiner's spiritual development, projects it against the background of philosophical movements at the turn of the twentieth century, and portrays *Anthroposophie* as a new cultural direction. It then details Steiner's theory of education and its consequences for foreign language teaching at Waldorf schools and will give meaning to Steiner's ambiguous spiritual language. Respect for humankind in general and teaching students to become balanced, spiritual individuals by nurturing them

according to their strengths and weaknesses accent Steiner's educational principles. Finally, this work critically examines Steiner's specific theory about foreign language learning with respect to his theory of speech and language development. It presents Steiner's original ideas, compares them to subsequent developments in teaching at Waldorf schools in regard to goals, content, methods, and contrasts it with the language program at the German American School.

# **RUDOLF STEINER'S THEORY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

by  
**MICHAELA WOLF HASHITANI**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**  
in  
**GERMAN**

Portland State University  
1998

## **Dedication**

To Glenn and all my dear friends,  
here and in Germany,  
who contributed in countless ways  
to the completion of this project.

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## Introduction

I have been teaching German as a second language for several years at the college and elementary level. This teaching experience, paired with professional activity—attending workshops and conferences on second language acquisition—led me to Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf schools. Steiner gave twenty-eight lectures on his theory of education shortly before the opening of the first Waldorf school in 1919. He believed in introducing two foreign languages at the elementary level. Steiner provided his audience of teachers and interested parents with a detailed, but complicated philosophy of teaching young students. In subsequent lectures given in 1924, he answered specific questions from teachers regarding foreign language teaching methods. Steiner died in 1925, six years after the opening of the first Waldorf school.

Today, there are more than 125 Waldorf schools in the United States and more than six hundred schools worldwide serving approximately 120,000 students. All of them offer two foreign languages in grade one.

Educational movements such as Clinton's *Education 2000 Act* and the new admission standards for acceptance at Oregon's public universities have alerted many educators and parents to the benefits of second language learning. In Europe, Germany in particular, learning a second language at a



young age is nothing new. Most Germans can speak English quite well. Students in European countries start learning a foreign language directly after elementary school, in grade five, at age ten or eleven. A student who attended the *Gymnasium* in Germany will have studied one foreign language for nine years and another for seven years.

During the past 20 years, the United States has also proposed teaching languages at an earlier age. Many private and public schools across the country now offer successful foreign language programs at the elementary level. My own program, at the German American School of Portland, is one example to support this fact. The German American School began to offer an immersion program to preschoolers and kindergartners in 1993. As their first teacher, I taught a regular play-based curriculum entirely in German. Through music, play, and art, the American children were able to follow my directions and started to speak quickly. As the year progressed, I was able to offer more complex activities as the children's speaking ability progressed. I taught pre school, kindergarten, and first grade during the following years, and am now the Administrative Director at the school. Today, the German American School offers a Pre-school and Kindergarten program as well as an Elementary School through fourth grade.

The history of foreign language teaching in the United States is extensive and has undergone many unsuccessful attempts throughout the

years in order to reach it's current state. There are now a significant number of model immersion and partial immersion elementary schools in the United States. We have well documented research on early childhood language acquisition for educators and parents. Much of the research originated in Canada. Canada can look back on almost fifty years of immersion programs in French and English. Reliable documentation of programs in the United States started in 1980. All of the research makes a strong case for early language teaching.

Much to my surprise, I discovered that Rudolf Steiner had developed a detailed outline for foreign language teaching at Waldorf schools as early as the beginning of this century. Many of Rudolf Steiner's guidelines for foreign language teaching are indeed common practice in today's classrooms. Without reference to Rudolf Steiner, relevant literature in the field suggests using techniques, materials, and methods very similar to what he had proposed as early as 1919. A method very similar to the modern teaching method called *Total Physical Response (TPR)* was used by Steiner.<sup>1</sup> By having the children actively follow certain commands, Steiner taught verbs. He believed that verbs are the first grammatical form children can understand

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed description of the method can be found in Ramiro Garcia, Instructor's Notebook: How to apply TPR for Best Results ( Los Gatos: Sky Oaks Productions, 1994)

because children are constantly active.<sup>2</sup> Steiner was an adamant believer in developmental appropriate practices, which is also a key concept in present teacher education.

With my thesis, I explore Rudolf Steiner's life and his motivation to become involved with education. I discuss his approach to education in general and to foreign language learning in particular.

The foundation for Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy is *Anthroposophie*, the philosophical movement he founded. To discuss this philosophy in detail would go beyond the scope of this thesis. My primary goal is to illustrate Rudolf Steiner's theory of education as well as foreign language learning and contrast it with my own educational work. There are many aspects of Steiner's teaching philosophy with which I agree. Like Rudolf Steiner, I believe in engaging children to participate in the learning process using all their senses. It is my conviction that experiences made using all senses will be retained the longest. Like Steiner, I want to meet children where they are and take them further, and, like Steiner, I want to be a role model—convinced of the things that I am striving to convey to children.

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<sup>2</sup> Willi Aeppli, Rudolf Steiner Education and the Developing Child Trans. Angelika V. Ritscher-Hill. (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1986) 142-48.

All these are key issues to successful language learning, and I will discuss how Steiner supports them.

On the other hand, my thesis will also attempt to point out the shortcomings of Steiner's philosophy—the goal of foreign language teaching at Waldorf schools is not proficiency. Steiner wanted students to experience the beauty and rhythm of foreign languages. The goal for students at Waldorf schools is to develop an understanding of the inner structure of the foreign language by being exposed to the finest literature and poetry.

In this way, my thesis will put forth an effort to give a balanced critique of Steiner's philosophy of education and his theory of foreign language teaching.

# Chapter 1

## Rudolf Steiner

When one thinks of Rudolf Steiner, two key concepts come to mind: *Anthroposophie* and Waldorf education. The term "*Anthroposophie*" stems from the Greek "*anthropos-sophia*" or "human wisdom".<sup>1</sup> Steiner sought to create an exact scientific method by which one could do research for themselves into the spiritual world. The anthroposophic idea of humankind combines various elements from the theory of development based on German Idealism—reality as a gradual revelation of the spirit—as well as Goethe's view of the world—reality as growing of the ever-conscious, objective mind—. Steiner was convinced he would be able to educate and develop human intellectual power. Education of the intellectual power would lead to true human freedom. Through study and practiced observation, a person would discover their own inner nature and the spiritual realities of physical nature and the cosmos. The awareness of those relationships would create a

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<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger, David. Frequently Asked Questions about Waldorf Education. Online. Waldorf Education Mailing List. Internet. 18 August 1997.

greater reverence for life as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Steiner founded the *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft* in 1913, which to this day has its headquarters at the *Goetheanum* in Dornach, Switzerland.

On September 7, 1919, Rudolf Steiner, together with Emil Molt (1876–1936), opened the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. Molt was the owner of the *Waldorf Astoria Zigarettenfabrik*. Molt was looking for an alternative form of education for his worker's children. Steiner had developed such an education model based on his philosophy of *Anthroposophie*.

## Biographical Background

From the time Rudolf Steiner was a child, he was fascinated by the sciences and how science was able to explain the world. However, while this fascination kept him motivated to continue to learn, he also experienced the prevailing certainty a spiritual world existed within the soul as an objective reality. This search for this spiritual reality behind objective reality led Steiner to extensive studies of all areas of life, and set him out on a quest for more

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<sup>2</sup> Steiner presented a detailed image of practiced observation in 1914 while at the *Philosophie Kongress* in Bologna, Italy. Kugler calls this inward observation "*Seelenübung*". Walter Kugler, *Rudolf Steiner und die Anthroposophie* (Köln: DuMont, 1978) 42-53.

knowledge in order to substantiate his ideas. In An Autobiography, Steiner records:

That the spiritual world is a reality was as certain to me as the reality of the physical. But I needed some kind of justification for this assumption. I wanted to prove to myself that it is no more an illusion to experience the spiritual world than it is to experience the physical. (29)

Steiner was convinced that the human being was not only a mere composition of organic matter and nerves. He felt there was more to the reality of living than what the natural sciences had thus far researched. In addition, he wanted to research the distinct differences between animals and human being. After many years of careful study, Steiner believed to have created a solid foundation for his beliefs. From 1902 until his death in 1925, he traveled extensively through Europe giving lectures as the founder of a new philosophical movement, *Anthroposophie*.

Born, February 27, 1861, in the small village of Kraljevic, then part of Hungary, Rudolf Steiner spent most of his youth in lower Austria, where he enrolled as a student at the *Realschule* in Vienna in 1872. It was his father's idea that Rudolf become a railway engineer just as he had. Therefore,

Rudolf's father deemed it unnecessary for his son to receive a higher education at the *Gymnasium*.

At first, Steiner was bored at the school, he longed for people whom he could admire, leaders he could follow. Through his interest in mathematics, physics, and geometry, Steiner began to comprehend how scientific problems are connected with nature. Three years into his schooling at the *Realschule*, Steiner felt the need to grapple "with the phenomena of the sense world in order to gain a standpoint in relation to the spiritual world standing directly visible before me."<sup>3</sup> Steiner was convinced he would fully understand the spiritual world that he inwardly experienced if he could cognitively grasp the true nature of physical phenomena. He purchased Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, which he secretly studied during class time. Steiner soon realized that Kant's theories would not help him approach an understanding of the transitional process that occurs when general surveyable concepts of natural phenomena become transformed into concrete *Vorstellungen* of them.<sup>4</sup> Although he experienced a conflict with Kant's ideas, they presented Steiner with a clearer picture of his own intentions. Reflecting upon Kant's words, Steiner states in his autobiography: "A 'subject matter' that remains

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *An Autobiography* Trans. Rita Stebbing. Ed. Paul M. Allen. (New York: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1977) 44.

<sup>4</sup> Kugler 17-19. Kugler illustrates how *Vorstellungen* evoke a certain "*Seelenverfassung*".



outside thinking as something one can only 'reflect upon' was to me an unbearable idea. I was convinced that the *actual reality of things* (emphasis added by Steiner) must enter into one's thoughts" (42). Steiner believed that the same natural phenomena would be experienced differently by each individual. He developed an inherent need to understand the individual "spiritual" processes of human beings.

Between 1877 and 1878, the Russo-Turkish War was raging and was often discussed at Steiner's home. He regularly witnessed his father's heated debates. Steiner was not particularly interested in the actual arguments exchanged. Instead, he sat and watched the men talking. He observed how one would respond to the other's argument. It was extremely interesting to him, how the men would change posture, tone of voice, and energy. Steiner felt that there was more to these discussions than just words and convictions. Each of the men seemed to be driven by forces Steiner wanted to understand. It was important to him to find out how to prove that the force behind human thinking is actually spirit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Steiner, Autobiography 52.

At age eighteen, in 1879, Steiner entered the *Technische Hochschule* in Vienna. During one of his first visits to Vienna, he bought a number of philosophical books, among them Wissenschaftslehre by Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Steiner was trying to find other scientists who would help him express his own observations in clear, surveyable concepts.<sup>6</sup> With Fichte's work, he hoped to find a means to clearly express his thoughts in the idea of the living spirit. Based on Fichte's lecture, Steiner developed a lengthy manuscript of his own ideas, which he never published.

Upon entering the *Technische Hochschule*, he decided to become a teacher for the *Realschule* and enrolled in mathematics, natural history, and chemistry. In 1882, he was introduced to Karl Julius Schröer (1825–1900), a professor of History of German at the *Technische Hochschule*, who first introduced him to the works of Goethe, and to cultural life in Germany. Steiner was privileged to have Schröer as a fatherly friend and mentor.<sup>7</sup> Schröer was an outstanding educator, philologist, and Goethe scholar. In Schröer's presence, Steiner always felt the spirit of Goethe.<sup>8</sup> Steiner was very

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<sup>6</sup> Christoph Lindenberg, Rudolf Steiner (Reinbek, Ger: Rowolth Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1992) 19.

<sup>7</sup> Lindenberg 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Steiner, Autobiography 87.

much intrigued by the ideas of Goethe. Although he had not published much up to this point, Steiner was asked by Joseph Kürschner, a Goethe publisher himself, upon Schröer's recommendation, to edit Goethe's writings on Natural Science. In order to accomplish this task, Steiner wanted to probe the epistemological basis of Goethe's thoughts. By way of commenting on Goethe's organic sciences, he developed a strong desire to at least outline such an epistemology, and subsequently completed his book Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goethe'schen Weltanschauung in 1886. Later, Steiner edited the second volume of Goethe's scientific writings and discovered for himself that he should present his own view of the spirit in clear thoughts. By way of Goethe, he discovered the interrelation of true knowledge, the spirituality manifest in art, and man's moral will.

Steiner now distanced himself from Fichte and Hegel for whom the true reality of art lies in "ideas". Steiner was convinced that the beautiful is not just an idea given the form of something tangible to the senses. To him, the beautiful was the sense-perceptible given the form of something spiritual. He believed that the path of a true artist is the path to the living spirit. According to Steiner, art is the realm where the spirit world is transformed into the natural world. He saw in the human personality a center in which humankind would

be at one with the “*All-Eine-Wesen*” of the world.<sup>9</sup> To Steiner, this center was the source of man’s will and if the clear light of the spirit was effective in this center, man’s will would be free. A “*Philosophie der Freiheit*” was taking shape within him.

Steiner was deeply impressed by Schröer’s knowledge of Goethe’s work. Schröer was able to introduce Steiner to the lesser known scientific writings of Goethe. Especially Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* had a profound impact on Steiner.<sup>10</sup> Steiner believed to have found someone in Goethe who described similar spiritual experiences. Goethe provided Steiner with the ideological foundation he had longed for. Steiner was able to elaborate on Goethe’s theories and used them to expand his own philosophical ideas.

While at the *Technische Hochschule*, Steiner actively pursued the unification of natural science and the knowledge of spirit. He studied the sciences thoroughly, took part in numerous scientific experiments, and discovered that every aspect of organic science was permeated by Darwinian ideas. Besides Darwin’s theory of natural selection, Darwin also believed that socially beneficial characteristics could contribute to the improvement of the

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<sup>9</sup> Kugler 38.

<sup>10</sup> Kugler 25. Lindenberg 35.

human race. An advocate of Darwin's ideas was the German zoologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919). Not only was Steiner fortunate to meet Haeckel personally, he also defended Haeckel's theory of descent in 1899 with his essay *Haeckel und seine Gegner*.<sup>11</sup> Until 1900, Steiner was convinced of these ideas, but subsequently distanced himself from the Darwinian idea of natural selection as well as Haeckel.

Steiner had gradually built up a *Vorstellung* of the innate being of man. He concluded that human thinking is a reflection of soul experiences in a spiritual world. He also had progressively developed his sense of the *Ich*. He wanted to establish the fact that the reality of the *Ich* was an inner spiritual perception, a concrete reality that can be inwardly surveyed. This concept was aimed against the general perception that thinking was merely a result of processes in one's brain and nervous system, as held by the *Naturalisten* and other positivist thinkers. To Steiner, the experience of thought was the experience of reality. This life of thinking represented the inner being to Steiner, and it was very difficult to combine the idea of higher organisms evolving from lower with these ideas about spirit.

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<sup>11</sup> Lindenberg 62.

While the *Naturalisten* believed that human psychological behavior was based on physical mechanisms, Steiner was convinced that all expressions of life had a spiritual origin. He disagreed with the Naturalist's notion that all experience was a logical consequence of nerves and brain working together. Instead, he was convinced that outside forces cause the inner sensual life of man to come to life.<sup>12</sup> Steiner was twenty-two years old when he came to realize that spiritual reality comes to man in thought. To him, thought was the internal reality of nature and in turn would become a deeper insight into the external world. Steiner believed this spiritual activity to be comparable to mathematical thinking.<sup>13</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, numerous people disbelieved Steiner's view of the spiritual nature of man. Many literary circles subscribed to the ideas of *Naturalismus*. Most of the *Naturalisten* saw Industrialism spread, and social differences became more apparent. Social issues became the overt subject of naturalistic literature and drama. This modern industrial reality called for precise and scientific observations of social

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<sup>12</sup> Kugler 19-25.

<sup>13</sup> Steiner, Autobiography 70.

and human life. Illustration of reality, education and development of the future were the goals of many Naturalist authors and poets at the time.

Steiner was introduced to many literary circles in Vienna and was able to meet interesting people. His ideas of the inner being of man were often countered by the *Naturalisten*. Repeatedly, he tried to gain understanding and support for his spiritual search. However, he felt alone in his thinking because he did not meet anyone who was pursuing his search for spiritualism. Steiner was convinced that all philosophies he had encountered and studied did not go far enough to explain and understand the true nature of humankind. His conviction of the spiritual foundation of the world seemed to oppose all the explanations science was supposed to provide.

While a student at the *Technische Hochschule*, Steiner took on pupils for tutoring. This type of tutoring was essential to any student at the time, as they had to earn money for buying their own textbooks and materials. In 1884, he was introduced to a family with four boys. One of them showed abnormalities in his physical and academic development and was entrusted to Steiner for his entire education. The boy represented Steiner's first real pedagogical challenge. Up to this point, it had seemed doubtful that the boy could ever be educated. First, Steiner wanted the boy to master his bodily functions. Steiner very often spent two hours of preparation for every half

hour of instruction, because he wanted the boy to achieve a maximum of learning through a minimum amount of strain. Steiner was also convinced that the boy's soul was not connected to his body. On the other hand, Steiner thought he was also able to perceive the boy's intellectual capacities and his cognitive abilities. As thinking represented the soul, Steiner wanted this soul to fit the body. After a short time, Steiner noticed that the boy liked him very much. He felt the boy's soul awaken. After only half a year of teaching, the hydrocephalic head of the boy grew smaller and by the time of high school, his health had been completely restored.<sup>14</sup> Steiner was very successful in teaching this child; the boy finished the *Gymnasium* and later entered the School of Medicine to become a physician.

This practical teaching experience was central to Steiner's development. For the first time, he was able to translate his ideas about the importance of nourishing human's spirit into practical work. While teaching this boy, Steiner gained deep insights into the way the human spirit and soul are connected with physical stature. It was then, when he began to understand that teaching must become an art, based on the true knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Judith Angress, Einblicke in die Waldorfschule: Einblicke einer israelischen Pädagogin (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1994) 62. Lindenberg 137.



of humankind.<sup>15</sup> Steiner felt that no real learning could take place if all students were treated alike and were taught numerous facts to memorize. He realized how different subject matter had different effects on students, and, subsequently determined that successful teaching was an artform. His ideas of awakening and nourishing students' spirit would become fundamental to his theory of education.

Upon leaving the *Technische Hochschule*, Steiner moved to Weimar in 1890 to work in the Goethe-Schiller archives. In Weimar, he immersed himself further in Goethe's ideas. He wanted to use Goethe's work as a foundation for his own experience of the spirit. Steiner recognized in Goethe a thinker, able to perceive the spiritual in nature, even though he had not carried this as far as a direct perception of the spirit. Steiner became convinced that his observations of the spiritual had developed into an exact science.<sup>16</sup> During the course of trying to define spiritual activity, Steiner examined various orientations of the human soul. One of these orientations was mysticism. Steiner was drawn to the idea of mysticism uniting with the

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<sup>15</sup> Steiner, Autobiography 97.

<sup>16</sup> Lindenberg 48-54.

source of human existence. But contrary to the mystics, Steiner believed that one can only penetrate into the deeper regions of the human soul equipped with a content of ideas that is clear and defined. The mystics believed this content first had to be stripped in order to get a better understanding of the soul.<sup>17</sup> Steiner was convinced mysticism maintained that ideas cannot reach true human knowledge. Since human knowledge was spiritual, gained through ideas, mysticism would leave man outside the sphere of the spiritual. Steiner had to describe his philosophy as the result of introspective observation following the methods of natural science. He first presented an outline of his ideas in 1891 with his doctoral dissertation Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre. In 1894, his main work, The Philosophy of Freedom was published, in which he states:

Our ideals are no longer so shallow that they can be satisfied by the all too often superficial and empty external reality. . . . Yet I cannot believe that no possibility exists to rise above the deep pessimism this insight can bring. And I find the means to rise above it when I look onto man's inner world; that is when I

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<sup>17</sup> Steiner, Autobiography 152.

approach the actual reality of our world of ideas. It is there enclosed and complete in itself; it can gain nothing and lose nothing from the transient nature of the external world. Are not our ideals, when they are truly alive and truly our own, realities in their own right, independent of the favors or disfavor of external nature? (118)

During the years following the publication of Die Philosophie der Freiheit, Steiner continued to build on his philosophical foundation. He gave numerous lectures, continued to publish articles, and spent a substantial amount of time discussing his ideas with people he met in diverse literary circles. In one of those circles, he was introduced to Marie von Sivers (1867–1948) who had recently become a member of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft*. Many people believed Steiner to be a man of spiritual competence. Although he had not been a *Theosoph* in the usual sense, he was asked by Marie von Sivers in 1901 to join the *Theosophische Gesellschaft*.<sup>18</sup> Among the *Theosophen*, Steiner was impressed to find people

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<sup>18</sup> Lindenberg 84-92. Here, Lindenberg illustrates the ideological foundation of the *Theosophen* and their development as society leadership changed.

who wished to learn and hear about the spiritual world. In 1902, the German section of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft* was founded in Berlin. Rudolf Steiner was elected General Secretary. At the *Theosophische Gesellschaft*, Steiner had the opportunity to speak about his ideas of the spiritual evolution of humankind. The audiences at the *Gesellschaft* were truly interested in knowledge of spirit and accepted his theories. Among the members of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft* Steiner encountered people who were especially receptive to his ideas. However, followers of *Theosophie* utilized Eastern occult practices and spiritual methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of the soul. Steiner, in contrast, soon realized his ideas were leading him to an experience of a universal God. Steiner wanted to educate people to gain a deeper self-awareness as a means to universal, all encompassing enlightenment. Steiner called this path to enlightenment *Anthroposophie*. Especially when the *Theosophen* considered it their mission to prepare the world for a new savior, Steiner began to distance himself. He also realized that new members wanted to learn about religious themes in a different way than *Theosophie* had taught. Subsequently, in 1913, Steiner founded the *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft* as a special section of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft*.

The *Theosophische Gesellschaft* gave Steiner the forum he had longed for. Finally, he was able to convey his ideas to people who were able to follow his thoughts. While the *Theosophen* were preparing for the arrival of a new

spiritual world leader, Steiner wanted his audience to understand that this godly spirit originated within each human. Steiner wanted to create a new image of humans. He wanted to reunite humankind with the spiritual, supersensible powers of the world in order to achieve true enlightenment.

One of Steiner's avid followers at the *Theosophische Gesellschaft* was the German author Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914). Morgenstern's fiancée Margareta had listened to one of Steiner's lectures earlier and had asked Morgenstern to accompany her. In 1909 Steiner was introduced to Christian Morgenstern. In Steiner, Morgenstern found a spiritual leader he had long been searching for. Steiner's ideas about medicine, agriculture, and education inspired Morgenstern. Despite his illness, Morgenstern followed Steiner to many of his lectures and courses all across Europe and declared Steiner his mentor. Until Morgenstern's death on March 31, 1914, he admired and respected Rudolf Steiner.<sup>19</sup> Morgenstern dedicated the poem collection

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Beheim-Schwarzbach, Christian Morgenstern. (Reinbek, Ger.: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1964) 114–32. Beheim illustrates Morgenstern's admiration for Steiner and the impact Steiner's lectures had on Morgenstern's life.

Wir fanden einen Pfad to Steiner. Morgenstern even considered recommending Steiner to the Nobel Prize committee as a true leader of human wisdom and peaceful spirituality.<sup>20</sup> Although Steiner and Morgenstern never became close friends, Morgenstern longed to be near Steiner, his spiritual leader, whenever he could.

The *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft* kept Steiner very busy. He traveled all across Europe giving lectures on *Anthroposophie*. During these journeys, Steiner intended to clearly convey the concepts of *Anthroposophie*, but also tried to find an artistic expression for his philosophy. He wanted his audience to understand *Anthroposophie* as spiritual life, not as theory or doctrine. Steiner utilized drama to demonstrate his concepts of anthroposophical life. He wrote four mystery dramas which portrayed human soul experiences, struggles, and failures.<sup>21</sup> In connection with these dramas, some leading *Anthroposophen* wanted to create their own auditorium. When Steiner realized a war was on the horizon, he accepted an offer to build in

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<sup>20</sup> Beheim-Schwarzbach 135.

<sup>21</sup> Kugler 96. Lindenberg 97.

Dornach, near Basel in Switzerland. The first *Goetheanum* was begun in 1913. During World War I, Steiner spent most of his time in Dornach, working on and perfecting the building.<sup>22</sup> Dornach later became the headquarters of *Anthroposophie*.

The *Goetheanum* represents Steiner's philosophy in that he was able to elaborate an organic building style. Steiner developed an artistic, symmetrical style which had its roots in the organic world. The *Goetheanum* had two free-standing wooden cupolas, supported by a concrete foundation. Pillars inside had different capitals, one the metamorphic continuation of the other. In this way, the audience's eyes would follow an organic development up to the stage.

During World War I, Steiner was not able to do much traveling. He stayed primarily in Dornach, developing his ideas, only lecturing in nearby towns. In 1917, Steiner published his book *Von Seelenrätseln*. With this book he first introduced his original statements of the fundamental principles of *Die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*, which became the basis of his

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<sup>22</sup> Kugler 97-155. A detailed description of architectural plans and artwork for the building can be found in Kugler's chapter. Kugler also includes a series of photographs of the Goetheanum as well as other buildings at the anthroposophic headquarters in Dornach.

theory of education. For quite some time, readers and students had become anxious for Steiner to put his educational theory into practice. When in 1919 Emil Molt, the director of the *Waldorf Astoria Zigarettenfabrik* in Stuttgart, wished to offer schooling for the children of his employees, he asked Rudolf Steiner to organize and direct it. Steiner accepted and asked a group of men and women to teach at the new Waldorf school. These teachers were not chosen on the basis of their educational training or experience, but rather for their own eagerness to learn. Before the school opened in September of 1919, Steiner gave a total of twenty-eight lectures to the prospective teachers in order to prepare them for their task.

The Waldorf school and the *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft* helped Steiner to become more visible in society. His lectures were in high demand and Steiner traveled extensively throughout Europe. By 1922, Steiner's health had begun to suffer because of exhaustion. In addition, the *Goetheanum* had burned down on New Year's Eve 1922/23. Steiner was very concerned with the reconstruction of the building.<sup>23</sup> After the second *Goetheanum* was finished, Steiner continued to lecture, but his health forced

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<sup>23</sup> Lindenberg 132-34.



him to slow down. Steiner had to cancel his travels early 1925 trying to restore his failing health. But to no avail, Steiner succumbed to his exhaustion in his Studio at Dornach on March 30, 1925.

While many of Steiner's comments and ideas seem to be steeped in ambiguity and mysticism, he was able nurture the need for change in many people at the beginning of the twentieth century. Steiner's development into the leader of *Anthroposophie* was marked by gaining a sound knowledge of the natural sciences as well as the prevailing philosophies of his time. Especially his scientific approach to understanding human spirituality was highly recognized. His Philosophie der Freiheit tried to connect the spiritual element to the common science while Von Seelenrätseln explained the development of man into a spiritual being. These theoretical foundations were supplemented by Steiner's lectures.

## **Basic Concepts of *Anthroposophie***

The basis for Steiner's philosophy is represented by the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*, which he first described in 1917 in his book Von Seelenrätseln. Steiner determined that throughout the human organism there would be a harmonious order of a predetermined organization to which man

learns to adapt in his development. Social life would be dependent on man's creation. All humans could have the power to develop a destructive or constructive social environment. According to Steiner, this power would always be destructive if it was used against human organization.

Steiner saw the bodily and psychic organization of the human being as threefold: *Wollen*, *Fühlen*, and *Denken (Vorstellen)*. Contemporary science generally associated the entire *Seelenleben* with man's nervous system. Instead, Rudolf Steiner tried to prove that only the process of *Vorstellen* was connected to the nervous system. In his theory, the nerve/senses system was located in the head, serving man's thinking process. Steiner was convinced that the process of *Fühlen* depended on the rhythmic system that manifests itself mainly through breathing. According to Steiner, the rhythmic system was located in the heart and lungs. The process of *Wollen* depended mainly on the digestive system.<sup>24</sup> Steiner described these three activities as *Die drei Arten seelischer Aktivität*. They are recognized in three different ways by the

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<sup>24</sup> Joan Almon, "Education for Creative Thinking: The Waldorf Approach" School as a Journey: The Eight Year Odyssey of a Waldorf Teacher and His Class. Torin M. Finser. (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press., 1994). 233.

human conscience. Steiner was convinced that *Denken* could only be experienced in the waking hours of the day. *Fühlen* appeared to be dreamlike, *Wollen* had the quality of sleep.<sup>25</sup> The challenge for the social organization of human life would be to follow the same threefold principle as the human organization. Only then, could social organization develop into a healthy social environment. These three systems would contain everything that was necessary to sustain the reality of a human and healthy social organization.

Rudolf Steiner's *Anthroposophie* was intended to be the foundation of a new culture. He not only wanted a better and alternative form of government, a better and alternative form of living, but also more justice and better education. He wanted a new culture which included all this. A new culture not only for the immediate future, but for the next millennium. The challenge he faced in developing his philosophy was to define from which direction to expect such a new cultural movement. He did not find an answer in the sciences, which determined the period of *Naturalismus*. Nor did he find an answer in the movements that countered *Naturalismus* around the turn of the

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<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Childs, Steiner Education in Theory and Practice (Edinburgh, Eng: Floris, 1991) 35.

century. Trying to search for a “godly wisdom” to legitimize his philosophy proved to be futile. To found a *Gottesstaat* or a *Sonnengottkultur* like the ancient Egyptians appeared impossible after the demise of the empires, the decline of religions, the French Revolution, materialism, socialism, and the declaration of human rights. For this reason, Steiner renamed *Theosophie*, *Anthroposophie*. He was determined the idea for this new cultural movement evolved from the idea of humans themselves. He had to develop this new concept of humankind from scratch. Steiner described *Anthroposophie* in his book Von Seelenrätseln as a philosophy about humankind:

Die aus der Anthroposophie hervorgegangene Philosophie über den Menschen wird zwar ein Bild desselben liefern, das mit ganz anderen Mitteln gemalt ist als dasjenige, welches die vom Menschen handelnde, aus der Anthropologie hervorgegangene Philosophie gibt; aber die Betrachter der beiden Bilder werden sich mit ihren Vorstellungen in ähnlicher Übereinstimmung befinden können wie das negative Plattenbild des Photographen bei entsprechender Behandlung mit der positiven Photographie.

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The development of Steiner's theories reflect the course of his life. As a student, he tried to find answers to his spiritual search in the explorations of science, and later in the philosophical excursions of Kant and Fichte. When

introduced to the works by Goethe, Steiner found a scientist who, through his scientific writings, was able to help Steiner formulate his own ideas. While editing Goethe's works, Steiner build up confidence to publish his own thoughts. Gradually, Steiner's ideas began taking shape. He developed a theory of education based on his own practical work and expanded his thoughts about human spirituality. He began to find a forum for his theories when he became a member of the *Theosophische Gesellschaft*. Many of Steiner's comments and lectures appealed to a great number of people, specially those who were convinced that a change in society needed. Steiner's collected works seem to be a strange mix of pseudo-science and strong spirituality. However, all philosophies are constantly changing. What proved to be true yesterday, might not be true today because perspectives might have changed. Steiner very much subscribed to this principle. He considered his philosophy a science. He deliberately did not pronounce it a natural science. Steiner proclaimed to do research into the inner spiritual world using scientific methods. He demanded that his followers conceive his theories as a work in progress. *Anthroposophie* needed to be carefully thought about as a dynamic and challenging process. Steiner's lectures and publications can be viewed as a coherent, yet highly demanding path toward conception of the spiritual world within us all.

## Chapter 2

### Steiner's Theory of Education

Rudolf Steiner's *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* represents the basis for his theory of education, much of which had its origin in the anthropologic studies of Goethe. Steiner never presented his educational theory in a concise and systematic form, instead he gave a course of twenty-eight lectures to the prospective staff of the first Waldorf school just a few days before its opening in Stuttgart on September 7, 1919. The course lasted fifteen days and was split into two daily sessions. The first session of fourteen lectures would later be published as Allgemeine Menschenkunde als Grundlage der Pädagogik. The teachers met in the morning to hear a lecture about *Menschenkunde*. This first course would be followed by a second session of yet another fourteen lectures on methods and didactic issues. These lectures were published as Erziehungskunst. Methodisch - Didaktisches. The afternoons of the teacher preparation course were devoted to discussions about pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> The original twenty-eight lectures make up the foundation of Steiner's theory of education. His first seminary course

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<sup>1</sup> Lindenberg 120-22.

covered fundamental teaching as it related to the being and nature of humankind. With these lectures, he hoped to generate enthusiasm and love for the true nature of man.<sup>2</sup> He was convinced that a true understanding of human nature would cause teachers to educate differently. Steiner aimed to educate people about how *Wollen*, *Fühlen*, and *Denken* develop in a child. He wanted teachers to understand the true development of a child as a physical and a spiritual being. Steiner showed the highest respect for individuality and encouraged educators to be aware of the internal and external qualities of each child. Steiner appears to have been training his teachers to be sensitive to the different personality types of children.

Steiner's philosophical ideas about education are an assemblage of lectures and talks. Many of them appear to be mystical and seem to have only symbolic value. These lectures are open to various interpretations, and to the present day, there is no common understanding of his philosophy.

Today, the lectures need to be studied in conjunction with one another in order to gain a basic understanding of Steiner's philosophy of education. With his philosophy, Steiner wanted to reform the educational system prevailing in Germany after World War I. Steiner was convinced the

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<sup>2</sup> Steiner, A Modern Art of Education (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1992) 95.

catastrophe of war was due in part to a lack of proper education.<sup>3</sup> His challenge was to change the educational system. He based his ideas for the Waldorf school on the principle that people did not yet know what good education ought to be and one should therefore first acquire a fundamental knowledge of the human being.

Steiner's educational theory seems to be complicated and hard to follow. In order to gain better insight into his theories, it is very helpful to study Steiner's theory of human development. These principles help to understand the teaching methods at Waldorf schools.

## Child Development

Steiner expanded his educational philosophy upon *Die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*, which recognizes three human principles: *Wollen*, *Fühlen*, and *Denken (Vorstellen)*, each of which develops at different stages throughout life.<sup>4</sup> These three areas are distinct, yet tightly interdependent; one cannot function without the other two. Each brings its unique qualities to

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<sup>3</sup> Kugler 191.

<sup>4</sup> The *Dreigliederung* was first introduced in 1917 by Steiner in a seventeen-page appendix to his book Von Seelenrätseeln.



the individual. When Steiner spoke of a well-balanced person, he meant that all three aspects actively work together in harmony. Rudolf Steiner not only described these three aspects, but also spoke of how to educate children in order to develop all three capacities.<sup>5</sup>

According to Steiner's anthroposophical ideas, the development of a young person into a mature adult occurs in three periods of seven years each. Steiner also recognized three additional principles, responsible for the development of the human spirit.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate developmental stage of the spirit is called *Ich-Leib*, a spiritual force which emerges when a human being realizes the significant difference between her/himself, the *Ich*, and the rest of the world. A human being enters the last stage of development around the age of twenty-one as the "Ego" becomes apparent.

During the first seven years of life, a child lives primarily in *Wollen*, learning nearly everything through physical activity. This physical activity can be described as a sequence of actions, not yet consciously understood by the

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<sup>5</sup> Almon, 223-25.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed discussion of the spiritual body can be found in Rudolf Steiner, The Kingdom of Childhood: Seven Lectures and Answers to Questions Trans. Helen Fox (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1995) 90-97.

child. Using a rather wondrous explanation, Steiner determined that through language a child's activity can be modified. Through language, even the youngest children in the earliest stage of development will modify their activities. In lecture nine of Study of Man, Steiner explained: "Up to the change of teeth the child bears a very distinct character, shown in his wanting to be an imitative being; he wants to imitate everything he sees in his environment" (125). Learning takes place mostly through imitation of older children or adults in the child's life.<sup>7</sup> An infant imitates the model, and language develops like a habit. During the first three years of life, a child first learns to walk, to talk, and finally to think. A child is best taught by initiating imitation; reasoning and calls to the imagination will have an effect only later. Steiner theorized that this type of learning and growing predominantly affects the *Physicher Leib*. Steiner compared the human *Physischer Leib* to that of an animal; composed of a physical structure and organic powers. Between the ages of three and five, children must be provided with worthy things to imitate. Fairy tales, songs, circle games, baking, crafts, imaginative play, repeated and familiar activities should be the content of kindergarten life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Steiner, Art of Education 175.

<sup>8</sup> Almon 228-29.

The academic teaching of letters, numbers, and sound is not present at all. The teacher for this age group must develop the child's physical strength and help the child to coordinate arms and legs by strengthening the hands and fingers. Coordinated and strong physical movements are reflected in the child's speech.

Steiner determined that even before children have learned to speak, their physical activities are determined by *Wollen*. *Wollen* at first is an act of unconscious imitation of older people in a child's life.<sup>9</sup> By imitating other people in their environment, children direct their limbs and bodies. Initially, this act of will is rather uncoordinated. When children learn to speak, they also learn how to direct their limbs. According to Steiner, physical activity is interrelated to speech. As children learn to form sentences, they also learn to consciously coordinate their bodies.

The transition into the second seven year period is marked by the appearance of the second set of teeth.<sup>10</sup> The body of the child starts to free itself from mere physical needs and imitation and develops a sensual inner life from which fantasy and memory emerge. Until this time, the *Ätherleib* is

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<sup>9</sup> Steiner, Childhood 91.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Study of Man: A General Education Course (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1966) 44.

entirely bound up with the *Physischer Leib*; driving out the teeth, it emancipates itself from the physical body. The *Ätherleib* may also be called *Lebensleib* and still bears most of the characteristics of an animal. The *Ätherleib* grows into the possibility for reproduction. Steiner maintained that with the process of the change of teeth, thinking emancipates itself from bondage to the body. Now the teeth aid in speaking, thus becoming the real helpers of thought. Although free thought emerges between the approximate ages of seven and fourteen, all feelings still have a strong connection to the physical body and the organs. At this stage, children's inner life of *Fühlen* is strongest, they predominantly learn through imagination and the arts. Waldorf schools teach children pictorially. Paintings made with crayons and watercolors purposely promote fantasy and imagination. Letters evolve from pictures—children are taught to write before they are taught to read. The literature curriculum follows a historical design which allows the child's imagination to flourish. Fables and legends are taught in grade two, Old Testament stories in grade three, Norse myths in grade four, Greek myths in grade five, followed by Roman myths in grade six.<sup>11</sup> Children are also introduced to *Eurythmie*, a teaching method developed by Steiner. *Eurythmie*

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<sup>11</sup> Almon 230-31.

is a dance-like art form in which music and speech are expressed through body movement. Specific movements correspond to particular notes or sound. Children respond to simple rhythms and exercises which help them strengthen and harmonize their body and their life forces. *Eurythmie* is designed to enhance coordination and strengthen the ability to listen.

Human relationships are of greatest importance during this stage of life. Since Steiner considered consistent relationships vital to this developmental stage, Waldorf schools teach the class as a whole and appoint the same classroom teacher for an eight-year period.

Children between the ages of seven and fourteen become aware of language and use it as a tool to try to distance themselves from their environment, they now use language in a playful and experimental manner. Now interested in secret codes, they may also develop a slang, spoken and understood only by their peers. Children experience a need to emancipate themselves from the adult world around them. At this stage of life, a child needs the security and guidance of the teacher and of parents to try out newly acquired skills. Children slowly emerge into the world of abstract concepts about the twelfth year as reasoning awakes. Steiner calls this period the

*Mittlere Kindheit* and the phase of development *Rubikon*.<sup>12</sup> In terms of language learning, Steiner was convinced of delaying grammar instruction until the time of the *Rubikon*. Before entering the *Rubikon*, children take in the content of a lesson with their whole body. The lesson affects the children in a formative way, *gestaltend* to use Steiner's word. Up to the age of twelve, children should develop a feeling for correct grammar by listening to the correct use of language. After entering the *Rubikon*, children add the component of the spiritual or emotional, which Steiner called *das Beschreiben*. The *Mittlere Kindheit*, according to Steiner, is marked by a sense for the rhetorical quality of language. This sense develops into the dialectic element of language at the beginning of puberty. Children are now able to realize cause and effect. They have arrived at the point where they begin to reason and explain. According to Steiner's scale of development, this stage is called *das Erklären*. Children move from exposure to correct grammar to the rhetorical elements of language and finally begin to feel the power of language. Once they develop a feeling for the power language has in life, children are approximately fourteen years of age and have arrived at the transition point to the third seven year period.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rubikon* is the ancient name of a small river in northern Italy. The *Rubikon* river marked the border between Italy and Gallia Cisalpina. When Caesar crossed the *Rubikon* on January 11, 49 BC, the civil war broke out. Crossing the *Rubikon* has the symbolic meaning of not being able to return. In Steiner's view, entering the stage of the *Rubikon* means the child has left childhood behind and is now entering the stage of adulthood.

During the high school years, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, cognitive and intellectual *Denken* awakens. Students now work with teachers who specialize in their subjects.<sup>13</sup> The adolescents conduct experiments and are encouraged to make their own observations in order to enable them to better formulate their own conclusions, learning at the same time to explain and defend them. The teacher is asked to develop independent judgment in the students rather than to feed them finished conclusions. At the Waldorf high school, students are taught to reflect and observe so that they may arrive at their own conclusions about life. Students learn to discover who they are and where they want to go. Students at Waldorf high schools also create elaborate presentations of poetry, drama, and music, using the method of *Eurythmie*. Steiner was convinced that students gain a deeper perception of composition and writing through *Eurythmie*.<sup>14</sup>

During this seven year period, feelings are gradually released from the body. This is the time the *Astralleib* works through the physical body and becomes independent. The *Astralleib* is a vehicle of pain, pleasure, craving,

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<sup>13</sup> Angress 96-98.

<sup>14</sup> Kugler 119-26.

and passion. According to Steiner, every creature who possesses a nervous system also possesses an *Astralleib*, which would then include animals. The *Astralleib*, until this time loosely attached to the physical body, becomes drawn inward until it permeates the human being. The human body has arrived at the stage of puberty and sexual maturity. Steiner contended that the inward movement of the *Astralleib* can be supported by singing, as the astral forces stream through the nerves by breathing. After the successful completion of puberty, the process of separation between the *Ich* and the world is accomplished. Students have now developed personal ideas of fantasy and their own judgments. The adolescent experiences a more profound individuality, ready to take responsibility for their own life's direction. Their sense of *Ich* is now able to work through their *Wollen*, *Fühlen*, and *Denken*. These aspects of the self have been allowed to develop in a healthy and harmonious way. The child has now entered the stage of adulthood.

Waldorf pedagogy is based on the assumption that teachers together with parents must encourage children to behave and to learn in ways appropriate to their particular stage of development. These stages are roughly correlated with age. During the first seven years of life, children learn mostly through imitating older people in their environment. They control their behavior through physical actions. Learning and growing happens to their *Physischer Leib*. Steiner calls this stage of development *Wollen*. During the



ages of seven and fourteen, children learn through imagination and the arts. They are highly dependent on role models in their life. Their sensual inner life, *Fühlen*, is very active. The spiritual force of the *Ätherleib* becomes apparent and children are able to carry out free thought. The third seven year period is marked by *Denken*. Now in their high school years, students have learned to reason and to explain. Now, the spiritual force of the *Astralleib*, a vehicle of passion and pain, becomes independent. Waldorf teachers are asked to accommodate students at each of these developmental stages. It is the goal of this model of education to allow a child's potential to fully develop and blossom.

## The Four Temperaments

Beyond the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*, Steiner also recognized four temperaments in human beings: choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic. Any of the four temperaments may be more dominant at different stages in life. The challenge of the Waldorf teacher is to identify the predominant temperament of a child and then teach the child accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Angress 43-50.

Steiner found the choleric child easy to identify. Choleric children tend to be more heavy-bodied, short, and often red headed, and may appear forceful when angry. They walk with their feet planted on the ground. These children like to assume the role of the leader, they are often stubborn and dominant. It is very hard to disrupt their self-confidence. Choleric children prefer to play solo-instruments.

Sanguine children are the most normally proportioned. These children are easily distracted and their attention is geared toward the outside world. The sanguine child is interested in life, as is the choleric, but does not have the same endurance. Sanguine children are very good observers and are rarely self-centered. They have difficulties keeping their hands and feet still. These children are also easily moved by tears and laughter. This type of child likes to play a variety of musical instruments in order to satisfy their need for diversity.

Melancholic children seem to be tall for their age and always seem to be brooding. They concentrate very much on their own thoughts. Melancholic children are deeply moved by outside occurrences and are also very inquisitive. They are extremely sensitive and cannot give quick answers. These children like to play by themselves and may appear antisocial. Melancholics are born scholars and philosophers, according to Steiner. They very much like solo singing.

The rarest of the four temperaments is the phlegmatic child. These children may often appear to be overweight, with a good-natured character. They display very little psychical and physical movement and seem to be disinterested. Steiner thought of them to be the most balanced of the four types, if it were not for their lethargy. Phlegmatic children like to sing.

All four temperaments are alive within each person, One of which prevails. It was very important to Steiner that his teachers be aware of the dominant temperament in each child. All children undergo stages throughout their life in which one of the four temperaments dominates. Steiner recommended specific teaching methods to accommodate these temperaments.<sup>16</sup> When telling a story, the teacher might know which particular child to ask a specific question. A melancholic child might identify with the story's tragic character and will therefore be able to contemplate the character's actions and thoughts. A choleric child might provide solutions to a problem, whereas the sanguine child will be able to foresee the unfolding of events.

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<sup>16</sup> Marjorie Spock, Teaching as a Lively Art (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1985)

Steiner also had specific suggestions for the classroom arrangement to suit specific temperaments. In the classroom, choleric children should be seated in the back where their disturbing influence is least felt. The phlegmatic group needs to be seated in front so that the teacher's activity captures them, melancholic children should be seated by windows, where outside events can distract them from their brooding. Sanguine children should be seated by the inside wall, where the least distractions occur. Steiner advised seating the temperament groups together so that they would tone each other down.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, the groups learn about their dominant characteristics and would start to develop the other facets of their nature.

The theory of the four temperaments still plays an important role at Waldorf schools. Rudolf Steiner studied children and adults very carefully to determine the different groups. He discovered that the sanguine temperament prevails among children. Sanguine children are the most versatile and well-balanced. This group is followed by the choleric temperament. Choleric children like to be dominant. The less represented temperaments in a class are the melancholic and the phlegmatic children. In

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<sup>17</sup> Steiner, Art of Education 185.

Steiner's view, each of temperament group needs to be taught according to its specific strengths and weaknesses. He maintained that observant teachers would be able to help children eventually balance out their dominant temperament in order to become a well adjusted adult.

Today, Steiner's ideas of education permeate the Waldorf school movement. With respect to Steiner's idea of child development, the emerging of the spirit, and the four temperaments, Waldorf schools place less emphasize on academics in the early years of schooling. Reading is not taught until second or third grade. Letters are introduced as evolving from pictures, in first and second grade. During the elementary school years, students have "*Hauptunterricht*" for about two hours daily, in which they study different subjects over a period of time.<sup>18</sup> The class teacher stays with the same group for the entire eight years, until the children enter the third seven year period at age fifteen. The arts, music, gardening, and two foreign languages are considered main subjects. In the lower grade levels, all subjects are introduced through artistic mediums, because Steiner believed

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<sup>18</sup> Angress 28-34. Johannes Hemleben, Rudolf Steiner (Reinbek, Ger.: Rowolth Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1963) 126.

that children respond better to this technique than to dry lecturing and rote learning. Textbooks are not used until fifth grade. Children at all grade levels keep their own “main lesson books”, which they fill in during the course of the school year. They essentially produce their own textbooks with their experiences and what they have learned. Upper grades may use textbooks to supplement their work. There are no grades given at the elementary level. The teachers write a detailed evaluation of each child at the end of each school year. Waldorf schools believe in teaching in a non-competitive way. The use of electronic media is strongly discouraged in Waldorf schools as is computer use by young children. The reasons for this have much to do with the physical effects of the medium on the developing child. Electronic media are believed by Waldorf teachers to seriously hamper the development of a child’s imagination. The healthy development of imagination is believed to be central to the healthy development of the individual.

Waldorf schools hesitate to categorize children with terms such as “slow” or “gifted”. A child’s weakness in one area, whether cognitive, or physical, are usually compensated by strengths in other areas. It is the teacher’s challenge to try to bring the child’s whole being into balance.

After years of careful study, observation, and experience, Rudolf Steiner believed to have created a theory of education that would reform teaching. His ideas are based on the theory of the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*. This theoretical foundation may appear to be pseudo scientific and mystical, difficult to understand and to follow, even by well versed Waldorf teachers. Steiner wanted to prove and explain that the driving force within each human being is a living spirit. The nourishment of this living spirit should be the main challenge for education. Steiner's ideas of education are based on the assumption that the development of a child into a mature adult occurs over three seven-year periods. Each period bears very distinct characteristics: During the first seven years of life, children learn mainly through imitation and are best taught by a role model, mainly learning to control their limbs and beginning to take responsibilities for their actions. During the second seven-year period, the human spirit begins to develop. As the second teeth begin to grow, children develop their emotional life and are very dependent on stable relationships. As older teenagers, children begin to develop independence. Growing independence characterizes the third-seven year period. Children now develop a sense of individuality. With the completion of this process, children have reached the stage of adulthood. Steiner theorized that different inner qualities dominate each of these three periods. He called these three qualities *Wollen*, *Fühlen*, and *Denken*.

In addition to inner qualities, Steiner also identified spiritual forces, which contribute to the development of the human being. While the inner qualities and forces determine each individual at approximately the same time in life, each person develops a particular temperament. Steiner recognized four different temperaments in human beings. He instructed his teachers to pay close attention to the developmental stage of their pupils as well as their temperament. To him it was important to teach each individual accordingly in order to allow the uninhibited development of the spirit.



## Chapter 3

### Foreign Languages at Waldorf Schools

Rudolf Steiner's ideas of foreign language learning are incomplete as are most of his remarks about education. It is difficult, even for the studied *Anthroposoph*, to fully understand Steiner's educational philosophy. Many thoughts are fragments, while some of his lectures are complicated and hard to follow. To complicate matters, Steiner altered some of his initial remarks during the years following the opening of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart in 1919. To this day, even after so many years of foreign language learning in Waldorf schools, there is no clear concept of goals and methods. According to the author of Fremdsprachen in der Waldorfschule, Johannes Kiersch, a teacher needs to teach in the spirit of Rudolf Steiner, but much needs to be reevaluated and reorganized in order to bridge the gap between the original ideas for foreign language teaching the actual attainable results.<sup>1</sup> Waldorf schools face the challenge of meeting modern demands for proficiency in foreign languages without violating their basic principles of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Kiersch, Fremdsprachen in der Waldorfschule: Rudolf Steiners Konzept eines ganzheitlichen Fremdsprachenunterrichts (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1992) 81.

## Foreign Languages at the Turn of the Century

The development of foreign language teaching has experienced much change and controversy. Even to the present day, foreign languages are taught using a variety of methods and aiming for a variety of results. At Waldorf schools today, one can witness an ongoing discussion about the different methods and didactic. When Rudolf Steiner outlined his method of foreign language teaching in 1919, he projected it against the background of foreign language teaching in Germany at the time of the turn of the century.

Until the end of the nineteenth century not many schools taught foreign languages. Students of higher education were taught in mathematics and one foreign language using the *Grammatik-Übersetzungs-Methode*. This method followed guidelines for the ancient languages of Greek and Latin. One promoter of the method in Germany was Gustav Tanger (1848–1901). Tanger was convinced that it was necessary to develop the overall intellectual abilities of students by learning abstract grammar rules and practicing the rules by doing various exercises. Once students mastered the grammar of a language, they were considered having mastered the entire language. The same rules applied to modern languages, which were introduced towards the very end of the nineteenth century. The main criticism of this method revolved around the fact that students learned a living language following the

regulations for a dead one. Some of the critics also argued that modern languages constantly change and therefore could not be forced into stringent grammar rules.

One of the main opponents of *Grammatik-Übersetzungs-Methode* was Wilhelm Viëtor (1850–1918). He wanted to move away from the stiff grammar teaching towards a more active foreign language learning, which had the goal of actually speaking the language. Viëtor called his method *Direkte Methode*. He developed his method in Germany during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, and it was fully implemented after World War I. The thrust of this method was the use of the foreign language during the lesson. The teacher acted as model, the students imitated what they heard. In addition to using the language in class, teachers were also asked to bring actual objects to class or to demonstrate vocabulary with pictures. Viëtor was convinced that with this method, students would develop a feeling for the language and subsequently understand the grammatical rules. In this sense, the *Direkte Methode* was considered a reformed approach to foreign language teaching.

Based on the feeling for the language and the communicative aspect which the *Direkte Methode* tried to achieve, the *Audio Linguale Methode* began to evolve initially in the United States shortly after World War I and then later was transferred to Germany. The method was perfected after the outbreak of World War II, when the military experienced a shortage of people who were able to understand and speak a variety of languages. One of the

main characteristics of the *Audio Linguale Methode* was a language laboratory where students listened to authentic segments of speech presented to them by means of recorded tapes. The students then imitated the language or gave answers in the foreign language which the system accepted or rejected. This method was influenced considerably by Skinner's theories of behaviorism.<sup>2</sup> The *Audio-Linguale Methode* was very popular until approximately 1975.

Foreign language learning until the time of World War I was solely the privilege of students of higher education in Germany. The majority of students attended the so-called *Volksschule*, in which they merely learned how to read and write. Rudolf Steiner was convinced that the catastrophe of the war was in part due to a lack of education. He also argued that children benefit from early exposure to different cultures. As a young adult at the *Realschule*, Steiner taught himself Greek and Latin.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, he never learned how to speak a modern language. The lectures he held in England in 1924 were

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<sup>2</sup> Skinner believed language learning was an acquired behavior based on stimulation and response. In this sense, he considered language learning a habit which could be enforced through positive feedback.

<sup>3</sup> Hemleben 20.

translated by his wife, Marie Steiner, who was fluent in Russian, French, English, and Italian. In this way, she was an ideal companion for Steiner, who never enjoyed a formal education in modern foreign languages.

## **Steiner's Theory of Language Learning**

At Waldorf schools today, foreign language instruction begins in grade one. Instruction in two different languages begin at that time. Every Waldorf school accepts this as a given of the Waldorf curriculum. It was important for Rudolf Steiner to introduce two foreign languages simultaneously in order to allow the children to balance the experiences of the one language with the other. Rudolf Steiner believed that different languages have distinct qualities. In the Waldorf perspective, each language relates to the human being in different fashions. Some languages are considered more musical or emotional (e.g. French, Spanish), others more intellectual or logical (e.g. German, English).<sup>4</sup> Also, by introducing two languages, it would be possible “ . . . to provide a deeper, three-way balance of languages and cultural outlooks, rather than the simple polarity of the native tongue and one foreign language,” as Michael Navascués determines in his article about language

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<sup>4</sup> Steiner, Art of Education 172-77.

learning at Waldorf schools (35). If children learned just one language, they would only be able to experience two distinct qualities. Steiner wanted children to explore language from three angles—their native tongue and the two other languages—and deliberately exposed them to different meanings on order to motivate thinking. Waldorf students are taught to be open for surprises, open for the strangeness of the foreign language, and open for the feelings of others. Students shall “put themselves into other people’s shoes”, writes Michael Stott in his book Foreign Language Teaching in Rudolf Steiner Schools. (9) Following these principles, teachers would be able to convey a world-understanding.

A specific Waldorf school might decide which language to offer by language distribution among the community. Sometimes, the decision may depend on the best teacher available. In Steiner’s view, a teacher’s native or near native fluency in the foreign language provides for the best language experience. Some Waldorf schools offer instruction of one language over a period of time and then switch to the other. Others split up the week between the two languages. Steiner’s theory about foreign language learning relates directly to his theory of education in general in that the same principles of child development, lesson content, and methods apply. Just as the classroom teacher, the same foreign language teacher ideally stays with the same group of students for the entire eight-year period of grade school. For these reasons, foreign language teachers at Waldorf schools refer to Steiner’s

lectures about language and speech development when designing the foreign language curriculum.

## **The Foreign Language Learner**

In his lectures given to teachers in 1924, Steiner indicated the ninth and tenth year as the ideal time to start learning a foreign language.<sup>5</sup> According to Steiner, children at that age are beginning to understand that their actions might have an influence on the outside world. They also understand how the outside world may determine their own lives. This is the time, in Steiner's view, when children are slowly moving away from being self-centered. Steiner was convinced children should not be taught academically before the age of nine. However, Waldorf school children enter grade one at age six, like children at publicly funded schools. Since grade one marks the official beginning of the school career, foreign language instruction at Waldorf schools starts at that time.

Steiner characterized the successful language learner as problem solver, a person who has a need for communication and is ready to admit

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<sup>5</sup> Steiner, Childhood 99.

mistakes.<sup>6</sup> As problem solvers, students want to explore difficulties and questions, and they are willing to take risks. These students have strong self-esteem, confidence in their abilities and are also able to endure multiple meanings. These characteristics help students to become skilled language learners. Waldorf schools seek to support such personalities by frequent positive encouragement rather than criticism. In addition, the foreign language curriculum needs to offer methods that allow for a variety of activities such as reciting, singing, solving riddles, engaging in dialogues as well as role playing.<sup>7</sup> These methods assist the growing independence of students and encourage the development of a healthy self-esteem.

## Goals

Unlike the common goal of proficiency of most foreign language programs, the individual experience of the reality of the language represents the predominant aim at Waldorf schools. Steiner wanted children to immerse themselves in the language realm of a different people for the duration of

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<sup>6</sup> Kiersch 68.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Uhrmacher, "Coming to Know the World through Waldorf Education" Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 9.1 (1993): 97-8.



the foreign language lesson. He wanted his students to experience the language with all their senses by exposing them to songs, dances, and poetry. According to Kiersch, it does not seem important to enable students to apply to real life what they have learned, but teachers shall encourage students to comprehend and live a specific area of sensual reality, while studying another language.<sup>8</sup> In that sense, learning a foreign language serves a social purpose of developing empathy for the language, the culture of the foreign country, and the people who live there.

The ability to communicate in the foreign language is considered a valuable but not necessary side effect.<sup>9</sup> Speaking and conversation should be taught using the *Direkte Methode*. In order to achieve these goals, foreign language teachers have to be as much at ease with the anthroposophical concepts, including familiarity with drama, art, and *Eurythmie*. Teachers, who have an excellent command of the foreign language, will be able to enhance the overall language learning in that they may enrich the language experience artistically.

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<sup>8</sup> Kiersch, 30

<sup>9</sup> Michael Stott, Foreign Language Teaching in Rudolf Steiner Schools (Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 1995) 9.

Christoph Jaffke, in Kiersch, describes the skills of a normal gifted child after three years of foreign language instruction at a Waldorf school:

Es beherrscht die wichtigsten Laute der anderen Sprache und hat ein sicheres Gefühl für die andersartigen Satzmelodien. Es versteht altersgemäß erzählte Geschichten und kann sich in eine Rolle in einem kleinen Spiel einleben. Es kann sich an einfachen Gesprächen über das Wetter, die Familie und die Schule beteiligen. Es hat einen Fundus von Kinderreimen, Gedichten, Liedern und Spielen verschiedener Art. Es verfügt über einen elementaren aktiven Wortschatz, der in der Regel folgende Gebiete umfasst: Körperteile, Gegenstände im Klassenzimmer, Raumorientierung, Präpositionen, Farben, Zahlen, Uhrzeit, Pflanzen und Tiere, Wetter, Wochentage, Monate, Jahreszeiten und Feste, Handwerke und Berufe. Allem Sprechen liegen grammatikalische Strukturen zugrunde. . . .(66)

These skills enable children to participate in choir, early dramatic play, and dances. The extensive vocabulary represents a basis for later grammatical exercises.

Language teachers at Waldorf schools began to struggle with Steiner's concepts and the goals of foreign language teaching as early as 1922, when Steiner came back to Stuttgart for more lectures. Three years into the first

Waldorf school, teachers expressed concern with the study of fine literature and poetry when students had not yet mastered the basics of the foreign language. They discovered their students were overwhelmed by the complexity of high literature. They questioned Steiner for more precise guidance on how to ease their student's studies, which he could not give. Instead, Steiner referred teachers back to the principles of language development in general.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, fine literature and poetry was replaced over the course of the following years by more child appropriate poems and texts, which included children's rhymes, fairy tales and fables.

At the same time, many of the teachers felt frustrated that their students brought too many different abilities to their classrooms. Especially students, who were slower learners, were not able to follow the foreign language curriculum and had difficulties producing even the smallest sentences in the foreign language. An added disadvantage was the fact that students from the community were able to enter the school at their grade level who, until that time, had never been exposed to a foreign language. Thus, a teacher had to differentiate instruction not only in regard to learning ability and willingness, but also level of foreign language skills. Consequently,

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<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Konferenzen mit den Lehrern der Freien Waldorfschule 1919 bis 1924 (Dornach, Switz: Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1975) 32.

achievements in the language classroom lagged behind their goals. When Steiner became aware of this problem, he briefly entertained the idea of separating children into different ability groups. Due to the fact that foreign languages were not yet subject to achievement tests, Steiner recommended exploring alternative methods to accommodate various abilities. He subsequently abandoned the idea of separating the groups and advocated differentiation. In light of higher standards for foreign languages today, this problem presents a prevailing challenge for foreign language teachers at Waldorf schools.<sup>11</sup> In order to accommodate different abilities, some schools have resorted to group students accordingly. Other schools advocate smaller classrooms in order to help every student. Some students might need to be taken out of one of the foreign language programs altogether, as Kiersch suggests in his book Fremdsprachen in der Waldorfschule, but “für eine generelle Gruppeneinteilung nach Begabung oder Leistung besteht in der Regel kein zwingender Grund” (100).

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<sup>11</sup> Steiner never suggested certain tools and methods for assessing students of a foreign language. In fact, there are no clear assessment guidelines for the entire Waldorf curriculum. However, most Waldorf schools around the world are preparing their students to achieve similar goals as their peers in publicly funded schools. This is especially crucial today, as the United States adopted certain proficiency standards for foreign languages. During the last year of their schooling, students at Waldorf schools are studying some of the same material as their peers in public schools. At the end of this last year, they undergo the same standardized testing as all other students. In general, because of their previous in-depth study and development of their personalities, they fare very well in comparison. See also: Steiner, Konferenzen 162-63. Angress 124-26.

Ever since the first teachers experienced these difficulties, there has been a lively discussion of these issues among teachers and experts alike. No common solution has been found yet, therefore every Waldorf school might have a slightly different foreign language program.

## **Content**

During the first three years of foreign language learning in Waldorf schools, all teaching is based on the developmental stage of the children. Children between the ages six and ten still learn mostly through imitation. Steiner's guidelines ask the teacher to present the language as true as possible. This is why Waldorf schools prefer teachers with native or near-native language skills. Children experience the language first as bearer of different sounds, rhythms, and sound combinations. Children acquire a substantial vocabulary about everyday things such as the classroom, colors, themselves and their families. They also learn a number of songs and poems. Teachers mostly expose children to the language orally. The teacher may read a story which the children recite as the entire class. Children do not write in the foreign language until the end of grade three. Exercises in poetry slowly take over in grade four. Children memorize grammatical examples,

beginning with the verb. The curriculum introduces basic elements of syntax in grade five. Children practice reading and writing for general meaning. Sixth graders experience folk tales and popular phrases. Now, easy reading in the foreign language starts. This type of reading continues into grade seven. The reading expands in grade eight to include metrics. In grade nine, teachers encourage students to engage in more conversation, which includes the re-telling of stories. The curriculum places more emphasis on poetic literature in grade ten. At this time, students explore poetic meter more in depth. Students also practice individual and choral recital of verses. Grade eleven moves towards the dramatization of classical plays. Teachers now emphasize the beauty of the language by reading prose and poetry. In grade twelve, students undertake a survey of the historical and cultural development of the foreign language in order to demonstrate national character. Now, the curriculum includes more contemporary literature.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the Waldorf foreign language program uses a spiral approach to teaching. The curriculum progresses from simple verbs and phrases to complex literature and dramatic plays.

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<sup>12</sup> Eileen Stapelton, Waldorf Teacher, Santa Fe, NM, interview with the author, 24 October 1997.

## Methods

Foreign language instruction varies at different Waldorf schools. Although two foreign languages are introduced at grade one, a school might choose to offer a period of several weeks of one language followed by another period of several weeks of the other language throughout the school year. Other schools offer both languages parallel to one another. For the most part, a language lesson is thirty minutes long for grades one through three, and lasts forty-five minutes for the upper grades.

Rudolf Steiner recommended to teach the language immersion style. Over the course of the years, many teachers, even native speakers, have experienced difficulties teaching the children by exclusively speaking the foreign language in the classroom. Michael Stott argues in his book that especially the younger grades should be introduced to the foreign language classroom routine in English.<sup>13</sup> He is convinced that children need to understand what is going on in the classroom. When this basis is established, the teacher might move away from using English to a more exclusive use of the foreign language.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Stott, Foreign Language Teaching 37

<sup>14</sup> Stott, Foreign Language Teaching 16. See also: Kiersch 67.

Steiner instructed teachers to offer the foreign language class after the main lesson, which is two hours long, and before physical education or any other instruction involving physical movement. Based on anthroposophical knowledge and insights, the foreign language teacher has much to consider when preparing a lesson. The different components of the foreign language lesson—speaking, listening, hearing, singing, reciting, writing, and playing—are vital parts of every single foreign language lesson. In following the anthroposophic principles, Steiner wanted the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* addressed in the foreign language lessons. He suggested to start out the lesson with a “head activity” which evokes thinking, followed by a “heart activity” which pays attention to feeling, and end with a “limb activity” which addresses willing. In other words, the lesson has an intellectual, rhythmic, and active part. Stott calls a well organized lesson “planned sanguinity” (16). Already learned facts can be dressed up as something new, which includes incorporating them into a new game or exercise. During the lesson, one item flows quickly into another. The foreign language teacher orchestrates the lesson and directs the children to quickly proceed from one activity to the next.

Since the younger grades do not read and write in the foreign language until the end of grade three, teachers plan their lessons relying exclusively on oral methods. After greeting children individually and welcoming them into the



classroom, the teacher may start by singing, reciting, counting in various ways—a very rhythmic beginning. After this, a new concept is introduced or the children may revisit what has not yet been fully understood. This part of the lesson is focused, the children act more as the recipients, whereas the teacher is more active. During the third part, the children become active by either completing a written exercise, playing a game, completing sentences, discussing a text, or role playing. Each lesson concludes with another song or rhythmic activity. Content may be drawn from a list similar to the following: song, poem, speech exercise, counting, alphabet, dialogue, commands, days of the week, months of the year, parts of the body, clothing, mental arithmetic, proverbs, spelling, story, reading, writing, dictation, a play, shop, grammar. The inclusion of such common vocabulary in the foreign language enables children to relate contents to their own life.

Today, there is a prevailing discussion among Waldorf teachers in regard to textbooks. Steiner himself never supplied teachers with a list of books that may be used in the foreign language classroom. Instead, he advised to turn to classical authors for suitable texts in the foreign language.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Steiner, Konferenzen 161.

In modern Waldorf schools, there are virtually no textbooks for the younger grades. Teachers have a very limited choice of books for the older children. All of these books bear similar characteristics. Pictures are held mostly in black and white, there are no photographs, cartoons, or realistic images of life. They are drawn in a flowing and subtle manner. It does not seem like there is any progression in difficulty; these books contain songs, stories, and poems.<sup>16</sup> Lately, the Waldorf school conference has approved the use of certain modern young adult stories to be read by the upper grade students.<sup>17</sup> Older grades start working with whole texts. Steiner recommended to first work with preliminarily interpreting a text or story, giving the students the possibility of continuing the story. Drama plays a role in the upper grades, and teachers encourage their students to stage various parts of a text. Steiner allowed the use of the student's native language to understand and interpret texts. He encouraged his pupils to retell the story using their mother tongue and write short essays about the story in their native language.

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<sup>16</sup> Grades 4 and 5: Uta Taylor, Sonne, Wind und Regenbogen (Rastatt, Greiser Druck, n.d.)  
 Grades 4 and up: Uta Taylor, Deutsche Balladen zum Lesen und Lernen (Rastatt, Greiser Druck, n.d.)

Grades 6-8: Uta Taylor, Durch das Jahr (Rastatt, Greiser Druck, n.d.)

Grade 7: Michael Stott, Utopie: Eine Geschichte aus dem 15. Jahrhundert (London, Hawthorn Press, 1994)

<sup>17</sup> Ute Luppertz, Waldorf Teacher, Portland, OR, interview with the author, 14 September 1997.

However, he emphasized that actual translation should be avoided, especially during the first three years of language learning, because translation would not allow the children to experience the deeper sensual and true reality of the language.<sup>18</sup> Even for the older grades, Steiner did not recommend translation because it required too much time. When students experienced difficulties with certain sections of a text, Steiner recommended that students work on their assignment at home. In general, homework in the foreign languages was an ambiguous issue for Steiner. He believed students would not retain anything that they merely repeated at home because it would have nothing to do with real life. However, he suggested that homework might be beneficial to students, if started in grade five at the earliest, when they prepared at home for next day's lesson.

While Waldorf schools offer a very limited choice of foreign language textbooks, they also restrict the use of audio-visual media designed to enhance the language experience. When the first Waldorf school opened in 1919, Rudolf Steiner spoke adamantly against permitting any artificial teaching material into the classroom. Such material included photographs

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<sup>18</sup> Steiner, Childhood 117-23. Steiner also discussed this thought in the essays Der Goetheanumsgedanke 296-300.

and films at that time. Steiner believed photographs or a movie sequence only represent a small segment of a greater experience. Instead, he wanted his students to experience life as a whole. Therefore, his teaching materials originated in the direct environment of his students. He not only brought living things into the classroom, he also took his students outside to study their environment. It was important to him to teach every aspect of the material. This included the experience of how something feels, smells, and relates to the community. He was convinced that anything that cannot be experienced by the student with all senses has no place at a Waldorf school. Steiner was convinced that media use would be damaging the healthy development of body and senses.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Waldorf teachers do not use tapes, videos, or computers in their classrooms.

Although the principle of not using audio-visual media follows the concepts of *Anthroposophie*, this issue is widely discussed today. Some teachers still believe that this is the right and only way to teach children. Other Waldorf teachers are convinced that modern technology needs to enter the Waldorf schools in order for students to compete successfully on today's job market. Very often, the individual school and their teachers make

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<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Die gesunde Entwicklung des Menschenwesens (Dornach, Switz: Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1987) 133.

decisions as to what artificial material is permitted. Many schools allow artistic reproductions of reality. None of them permit tape and video recorders. Leading authors on the subject, such as Kiersch, note that the occasional use of a tape recorder or video camera might be acceptable for the older grades. He would also admit films or television classes in the original foreign language. In his book, Kiersch comments about the use of such media: "Wenn das mit Eifer und Begeisterung geschieht, mag der Nutzen den Schaden aufwiegen" (108). However, it is important to him that young students need to be kept away from such influence. For them, an artistically decorated blackboard will have to do.<sup>20</sup>

## Teacher Education

Recent developments in teacher education take into account research on the psychology of learning as well as neurophysiology. Developments in the realm of foreign language learning also point to the direction of communication skills, student directed learning, enhanced flexibility and

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<sup>20</sup> Stott devotes an entire section of his book Foreign Language Teaching on how to use the blackboard as effective teaching medium. 63-64.

creativity, and learning with all senses. Following this more practical and student oriented approach in general, teacher education underscores learning outside the predefined terms and moves towards broadening one's horizon through inclusion of art and life experiences.

Waldorf teachers are generally schooled in the principles of *Anthroposophie*. There are a number of Waldorf colleges around the world. Studies encompass Steiner's theory of education and his ideas on life and living. Implications for foreign language teachers at Waldorf schools include the need for teachers who speak the language fluently, beautifully, and artistically. Teachers need to possess a repertoire of artistic texts, memorized poems, dances, and songs. In order to implement a successful foreign language program, it can be helpful if teachers have a sense of humor and are able to be emphatic and in control of their moods and feelings. Prospective foreign language teachers at Waldorf colleges learn about methods for relaxation, dramatic improvisations, choir teaching, techniques of movement, drama, and puppetry.<sup>21</sup> At the conclusion of his book, Kiersch states:

Der Kursplan einer waldorfpädagogischen Ausbildungsstätte für  
Fremdsprachenlehrer hätte demgemäß dem kommunikativen

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<sup>21</sup> Ute Luppertz, interview with the author, 14 September 1997. In reference to a Waldorf Seminar Ute had attended in Sacramento during the Summer of 1997.

Spracherwerb—vornehmlich im Rahmen eines mindestens einjährigen Auslandsaufenthalts—breiten Raum zu geben und durch verbindliche Lektüre, orientierende Übungen und Kolloquia für eine ausgedehnte Kenntnis der fremden Literatur zu sorgen. . . .(114)

Ideal foreign language teachers at Waldorf schools have freed themselves from the traditional image of discipline and obedience and have become independently thinking, creative, and spontaneous artists.

For the past seventy-nine years, all areas of foreign language programs at Waldorf schools were subjected to continuous evaluation and criticism. When the program was first implemented in 1919, introduction of modern languages to the classrooms was a new concept. Until then, only institutes of higher education offered instruction in foreign languages, mostly Latin and Greek. The prevailing teaching method at the time was the *Grammatik-Übersetzungs-Methode*, which was based on the principle that students had mastered a language once they mastered its grammar. To meet the new challenge of teaching two modern languages simultaneously, Steiner directed teachers to seek guidance for their lessons in his comments about child development and its consequences for teaching. He determined that teachers need to expose their students to fine literature and arts in the foreign

language in order to demonstrate the beauty and specific characteristics of the language. While following Steiner's theories about language teaching, teachers experienced difficulties based on their students' different abilities as well as their motivation to speak the language. Many teachers at Waldorf schools felt, and still feel, a need for more age-appropriate language learning tools. Foreign language students at Waldorf schools, especially in grades one to three, do not use textbooks for their lessons. Today, some schools only permit textbooks for older grades. Students develop their own lesson books, in which they copy poems, phrases, and later, entire texts. With the help of these books, students are supposed to gain an understanding of grammar rules and spelling of the foreign language. Almost all Waldorf schools discourage the use of modern audio-visual media. Reasons for this originated in Steiner's conviction that artificial teaching material would be harmful to the healthy development of young people. Many foreign language teachers at Waldorf schools lament the unavailability of such teaching tools, especially those who are open for innovation. Teaching methods include songs, rhymes, phrases, dances, and literature work. Foreign language contents derive mostly from classical stories, fables, and myths.

Foreign language instruction at Waldorf schools generates an impression of simplicity and logical sequence. Because communicative competence in foreign languages is inferior to the sensual language experience, foreign language instruction at Waldorf schools significantly lags



behind the demands for foreign language proficiency of modern society. Today, the critical issues of proficiency standards and appropriate teaching tools remain unsolved among Waldorf educators. A combined effort of all teachers and parents involved with Waldorf education will be necessary to overcome these obstacles.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

The impetus for the movement which would later be called *Anthroposophie* can be found early in Rudolf Steiner's life. Especially one experience in his life signifies the beginning of his search for answers. Steiner was seven years old when his older sister committed suicide. Without the parents knowing yet about the incident, Steiner had a vision in which he witnessed the sad occurrence. His parents would not believe him when he recounted his vision, but were saddened by the news a few days later. The parents left Steiner alone to cope with this experience. It was never discussed but prompted numerous questions in the boy. How was he different from other people? Did he experience this vision in his subconscious or conscious mind? Recalling his sister's suicide years later, Steiner was convinced of a *Leben in der Seele*. He began to immerse himself into the Sciences, to formulate his particular world view. Even as a child, he distinguished experiences in the external world from those in the *Seelenraum*, where spiritual experiences occurred.

Steiner's development of *Anthroposophie* lasted about two thirds of his life. He studied Kant, Fichte, Goethe, and refused to accept Darwin's and

Haeckel's theories about Natural Selection. When Marie von Sivers, his later wife, asked him in late 1901, whether he considered it necessary to found a new spiritual movement in Germany, he joined the *Theosophische Gesellschaft* as their General Secretary. While with the *Gesellschaft*, Steiner traveled extensively; giving lectures about all areas of life and spirituality to an ever growing audience of spiritualists, astrologers, dogmatists, and sectarians. Early on, Steiner experienced difficulties coming to terms with the goals of the *Theosophen*, which caused him to work further on his own ideas about how practiced self-awareness would ultimately lead to freedom, and to contrast this notion with the occult practices and spiritual procedures the *Theosophen* preferred. Growing conflicts between Steiner's philosophy and the expectations of the *Gesellschaft*, led to Steiner's separation from the *Theosophen*. Steiner now continued to lecture for members of the newly constituted *Anthroposophische Gesellschaft*. His audience wanted to learn all about anthroposophic life, and Steiner demonstrated spiritual life, human struggles and achievements on stage. With his dramas he stressed individuality:

Es gibt keine Entwicklung an sich, keine Entwicklung im Allgemeinen; es gibt nur die Entwicklung des einen oder des anderen oder des dritten, des vierten oder des tausendsten

Menschen. Und so viele Menschen es auf der Welt gibt, so viele Entwicklungsprozesse muß es geben.<sup>1</sup>

This individuality can also be found in his excursions about *Die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* on which Steiner based his theory of education. These ideas were rather revolutionary in 1917, as Steiner first presented them. One *Anthroposoph*, *Waldorf Astoria Zigarettenfabrik* owner Emil Molt, was particularly interested in Steiner's theories. Molt wanted Steiner to demonstrate what life would be like when all three areas of social life were allowed to develop in a healthy way. Steiner encouraged the workers of Molt's company to take active responsibility for their own working conditions and subsequently experience freedom. Both Molt and Steiner soon realized that in order to change social life, they had to educate future generations of workers differently. The men were convinced the catastrophe of war was in part due to a lack in proper education. Molt was aware of his worker's concern about education for their children, and when the worker's council suggested asking Steiner to head a new school, Steiner accepted. On September 7, 1919 the first *Freie Waldorfschule* opened in Stuttgart, based on the principles of *Anthroposophie* and the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*.

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<sup>1</sup> Lindenberg 97.

For the preceding thirty years before the opening of the Waldorf school, Steiner had worked on his theories. He developed his philosophy in a time of change and social unrest. Many people were searching for a new outlook on life after experiencing the impact of industrialization, scientific discoveries, and the threat of war. Steiner wanted to re-unite humankind with the cosmos. He had an astonishingly large amount of followers throughout Europe. This testifies to the fact, that there was indeed a need for a deeper understanding of the world beyond the findings of Natural Science. Steiner claimed to have found a scientific method to explore the super-sensible world. This science seems to be very occult-like and mystical. Unfortunately, words like “spirit”, “soul”, and “super-sensible powers” are, among others, often frowned upon, especially in the United States. These words seem to lack substance, mainly due to our failure to explore their significance, along with the difficulty of reaching a consensus on their meanings. Part of what makes Steiner’s life and *Anthroposophie* so hard to convey is the inherent translation problem—not just from German into English—but also finding a language which suits the audience, yet still brings the fundamentals and principles of this subject matter across clearly.

The problem of clearly understanding Steiner's theories can be found in Waldorf schools. To explore these structural inherent difficulties in general would go beyond my goals. Instead, I want to point out conceptual problems as they pertain to foreign language teaching at Waldorf schools. In Germany's first Waldorf school, Steiner had the fantastic idea of introducing English and French at grade one. When he introduced this concept to his teaching staff in 1919, they were taken by surprise. Most of the teachers were not prepared for such a task, much less did they speak English or French. They subsequently struggled to implement successful foreign language teaching. Steiner himself was not of much help either. During many lectures, teachers questioned Steiner for more precise guidance. He only referred them back to his theory of child development or gave vague answers. Now, almost eighty years later, foreign language teaching at Waldorf schools still lacks a clear concept. Some of the problems have to do with language proficiency, others with a lack of teacher training in both *Anthroposophie* and in foreign language teaching methods.

Steiner recognized young children as ideal language learners. Much of modern day neurological research supports this fact. Language programs continue to develop all across the United States. Young children are able to learn a second and even third language playfully. When exposed to a foreign language over a period of two to three years, most children are developing an

almost native fluency, as do the children at my program, the German American School.

The aim of Waldorf schooling is to educate the whole child, “head, heart, and hands” through music, poetry, art, and dance. What might have seemed revolutionary in 1919 is common practice today. However, Steiner’s first teachers considered using foreign language fine poetry and music too difficult and remote for the children to understand, much less to reproduce. This is a valid concern, but one must also keep in mind that Steiner wanted the students to experience the beauty of the foreign language. He was convinced that speaking would evolve later. Waldorf teachers today still experience the same struggle: their students do not speak the language and if they do, then only in eurythmic exercises. Part of the problem lies in the fact that Waldorf students study the language only for a very limited time throughout the week, which is much different at my school. Research has also proven that the more exposure a student has to the language, the faster significant speaking-competency develops. All the teaching methods introduced by Steiner, however, are highly successful in second language teaching. Teachers at the German American School utilize these methods to great success. Music stimulates the brain in such a way that entire songs can easily be memorized within a short amount of time. The visualization through art stimulates yet another area of the brain. In addition, a variety of methods recognize different abilities in students. Steiner’s methods might bear

different names in modern foreign language instruction, but are nonetheless common practice in today's classrooms.

Modern classrooms benefit from the use of many different media, a notion Steiner rejected entirely. At the German American School, we use authentic materials from Germany, which include videos, films, tapes, computer games, and photographs. Today, it is common knowledge that the more lessons are enriched with cultural artifacts and contemporary images, the more students are motivated to become proficient in the language. Steiner, in contrast, was convinced artificial images would not enable students to experience life as a whole. This means, in effect, that all modern developments bypass Waldorf schools. It also contributes to a conflict between school and home, if Steiner's principles are not upheld outside of school. Many Waldorf teachers would like to make more use of different media, and they struggle with the compromises they must concede to.

Since textbooks are also very uncommon at Waldorf schools, especially in the lower grades, teachers are stuck with songs, poetry and art. While these subjects lend themselves beautifully to enrich the language, they do not contribute enough to achieve proficiency. However, if Waldorf schools would subscribe to the idea of content-based teaching, students would gain much more proficiency in foreign languages without violating the principles of anthroposophic child development. As it is, Waldorf schools teach two foreign languages daily through fine art for a very short period. At my program, we



teach all subject areas in German, which contributes to a vast expansion of student vocabulary. Other schools teach at least one subject in the foreign language and can witness a tremendous improvement in the language skills of their students. I consider content-based teaching as an effective and simple method to achieve higher language proficiency in students.

Lastly, the foreign language teachers themselves very often present somewhat of a problem to Waldorf instruction. Steiner was convinced the language had to be presented in the most authentic way possible. That is why modern Waldorf schools prefer native speakers for their language instruction. Many of the native speakers have either no training in foreign language teaching or are unfamiliar with the principles of *Anthroposophie*. In light of the fact that *Anthroposophie* is a dynamic philosophy, ever changing and evolving, all teachers at Waldorf schools, including foreign language teachers, might not seem to be consistent in their methods. While I believe this to be a positive notion, it also attributes to a great amount of uncertainty among Waldorf foreign language teachers. This is the reason why no two Waldorf language programs resemble each another. Especially new teachers often find themselves creating language programs without guidelines. Only in recent years, have a very limited number of foreign language handbooks been written in both English and German.

In conclusion, I admit that I am deeply impressed with Steiner's theories about education and human development. I also acclaim his courage of introducing foreign languages to young children. As controversial and hard to understand Steiner's ideas may seem, he was successful in contributing many insights to all areas of life including Medicine, Agriculture, Art, Sociology, Religion, and Pedagogy. Many people were looking for a new cultural direction on the eve of World War I. Steiner was able to provide them with answers to their questions and indicated alternative practices for many areas of life. Because he possessed a deep and truly admirable respect for humankind, Steiner was able to attract people from all walks of life. I do acknowledge that his theories need much more contemplation and study than I have been able to afford them. In addition, much of what Steiner has developed seems to be very mystical and fantastic. I still struggle to accept his ideas as science. However, Steiner seems to have been a wise man whose influence is indisputable to the present day.

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