

## Steiner's Style

Steiner's style of lecturing also makes it hard to understand what he is saying. There are eight points.

Steiner goes out of his way not to state fixed educational principles. Steiner uses this practice because he intends teachers to be free to teach the curriculum in the way they see fit. He does not want to be too prescriptive or to imply that there is only one right way to teach something. He also states that he does not want to create a series of abstract educational principles (Steiner 2003, 125). However, it is useful for beginning teachers to have access to concrete educational principles and for Waldorf teachers to be able to state aspects of their methodology. In addition, it is necessary for experienced teachers (and the author of this book) to keep the principles front and center because it is necessary to go beyond Steiner's indications to create a language arts curriculum for grades 4–8 in English-speaking Waldorf schools. The principles help keep innovations in line with the spirit of what Steiner said. For these reasons, some of Steiner's main educational principles are discussed in section two (see chapter 2.3).

Steiner describes things (i.e., characterizes them) rather than defining them. In *Practical Advice to Teachers*, Steiner says he tries to characterize by depicting subjects from various viewpoints (42). This practice is in line with his advice to teachers to characterize rather than define (Steiner 1996c, 154) (see chapter 2.3 #11). However, this practice makes it very difficult to communicate ideas when definitions and sometimes even terms are lacking. In order to make it easier to communicate Steiner's ideas, some terms and definitions have been created for this book. They name important aspects of Waldorf education that Steiner only characterizes.

Note: This use of definitions is entirely in line with Steiner's indications. In *The Renewal of Education* Steiner states, "Definitions exist only so that we can, in a sense, begin with them and so that the child [student] can communicate understandably with the teacher" (2001, 224). In *Continuing the Journey to Literacy*, terms and definitions are created so the author can communicate with the readers. (See chapter 1.2 #2 for some examples.)

Steiner's organization can be challenging. Steiner often states the point at the very end of the lecture rather than at the beginning. In this way, he builds up to his thesis. The structure of his entire two-week training for the first Waldorf faculty is organized using the same principle: he builds up to his thesis (i.e., the curriculum) and presents it last. This organizational strategy works fine if Steiner's material is read from start to finish in the order he presented it. However, when it is split up into three or four different books, the thesis becomes opaque. For this reason, Steiner's curriculum is compiled and presented in organized tables in *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* (see tables 1.3.2–1.3.4).

Steiner often digresses. Steiner begins by presenting broad topics and then shifts to expounding on one or more very specific, related details (often for pages at a time) before resuming the discussion of the broad topics. These shifts make it harder to understand the broad topics. It is necessary to consult multiple sources to get a fuller picture of his broad topics.

Steiner bounces from one topic to another in a stream-of-conscious fashion. When he lectures, Steiner does not categorize what he is talking about or put it into a clear order. *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* has compiled many of Steiner's indications and put them into categories in section two to highlight some of the principles, methods, and words of advice Steiner offers in his lectures so teachers can apply these ideas to the teaching

Source: *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* (Miltzer-Kopperl 2020, 7-9). Used in the online, on-demand course "Unlocking *Continuing the Journey to Literacy*." Renewal of Literacy®. <https://renewalofliteracy.com>

of language arts in grades 4–8. It does the same for Steiner’s indication in teaching language arts, which are presented in section three.

Steiner does not give equal treatment to equal topics. Steiner talks at great length about some topics and hardly at all about others. It gives the impression that some topics are more important than others. See “Sacred Nothing: Two Natural Science Blocks (Zoology) in Fourth Grade” in chapter 2.4 #3.

Steiner uses hyperbole: Steiner frequently uses hyperbole in his lectures. It shows up in two areas: 1) hooks to get the listeners’ attention; and 2) counterarguments to support his position when engaging in polemics in a speech. If you take the hyperbole out of context and/or do not compare a statement with the rest of Steiner’s indications, it can give a false impression. For an example of hyperbole in polemics, see “Sacred Nothing: When Students Should Learn to Read” in chapter 3.2 #11. For an example of hyperbole used as a hook, consider that Steiner has numerous “golden rules” for educators. See chapter 2.3 #8, 2.3 #14, and 2.3 #20.

Steiner sometimes contradicts himself. Steiner sometimes makes contradictory claims or gives contradictory advice. It is useful to consider Steiner’s words in their fullest context in order to understand what he means. Steiner spoke to different audiences at different times, and no single lecture contains his full view on a subject. Comparing lectures sometimes resolves contradictions (for example, see chapter 2.3 #20: Do Not Tire the Students). For an example of a contradiction, see “Background Information” in chapter 2.3 #7.

As a result of these eight points, it is imperative to read Steiner in context. Pulling a quotation out of context creates misunderstandings and perpetuates Waldorf myths (sacred nothings).