

Renewal of Literacy®'s Proposed Mission Statement and Core Principles of Waldorf Education

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Renewal of Literacy®

Mission Statement of Waldorf Education: Private and Public Schools

Waldorf education strives to educate children in alignment with child development as articulated by Rudolf Steiner in order to allow students of themselves to develop three human virtues that promote social renewal. All Waldorf schools strive for balance in education. Public Waldorf Schools strive to do so while working within state standards to benefit a more diverse student population and spread Waldorf principles and methodologies to the public sector.

The core principles are derived from the mission statement. Their purpose is to help Waldorf schools in every stage of development create a healthy learning environment and a healthy community.

Core Principles of Waldorf Education

1. Educate Children in Four Areas: Waldorf Education is first and foremost an education. It includes four areas of primary emphasis as well as direct and indirect instruction:

- **Academic Education:** Academic education is taught directly. It includes curriculum development, lesson preparation, lesson delivery, assessment, and remediation. Aspects taught include English/language arts (e.g., reading, writing, etc.), math, geography, history, natural science, and science. It also includes specialty classes that include art (e.g., painting, drawing, sculpting, dance, music, etc.), movement, crafts (handwork, woodwork, etc.). Finally, it includes two subjects developed by Rudolf Steiner: form drawing and eurythmy.
- **Moral Education:** Steiner refers to moral education as self-education, which means it is taught indirectly. Waldorf education provides the environment for the development of three virtues.
- **Social Education:** Social education is taught indirectly. One way that students develop social education is through a diverse range of stories that introduce them to different points of view, peoples, and cultures.
- **Environmental Education:** Environmental education is taught directly. The students gain knowledge of their local environment through Home Surroundings (local natural science and geography) in grades 1 through 3 and then expand their study from their locale to the entire world in subsequent grades.

A Waldorf school strives to include aspects of education that are universal to all schools while creating a curriculum firmly rooted in its place and time. In that way, it supports the community and the students it serves.

Waldorf teachers are free to innovate in their lessons, provided they meet the standards adopted by their school.

2. Align Education with Child Development, as Articulated by Rudolf Steiner: Waldorf schools strive to educate students in alignment with child development as informed by Rudolf Steiner and modern researchers.

Rudolf Steiner identified three broad seven-year stages in child development and smaller periods within the first two stages. While there are differences in ethnic groups and differences in individuals within groups, these broad stages and period are largely universal. Teachers create, deliver, and assess lessons in alignment with child development. The stages and periods have been named for ease of discussion:

- **Imitation Stage (birth to loss of first tooth):** In early childhood, the focus is on the maturation of the physical body, including the brain. Formal academic instruction is best delayed until the loss of the first tooth. This stage is divided into three smaller periods: 1) Senses Period from birth to age two and a half 2) Fantasy Period from two and a half to age five; 3) Faith in Teachers Period from age five to loss of the first tooth.
- **Authority Stage (loss of first tooth to puberty):** Students begin formal academic education in grade 1 at age six (seventh year) around the time they lose their first tooth. The loss of first tooth indicates a completion of early development and a maturation in memory and imagination. Children learn best from an academic authority (i.e., a beloved teacher). This stage is divided into three smaller periods: 1) Active Period from loss of first tooth to approximately age nine (grades 1-3); 2) Descriptive Period from approximately age nine to age twelve (grades 4-6); and 3) Explanatory Period from age twelve to puberty (grades 7-8).
- **Judgment Stage (puberty to adulthood/age 21):** Students are ready to form their own judgments rather than rely on an academic authority. These years coincide with high school and secondary education (e.g., vocation training, college, university). These years prepare students to participate fully in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of life.

3. Provide the Environment and Relationships Necessary for the Development of Three Virtues:

Educating in alignment with child development provides an environment where students can, of themselves, develop three human virtues:

- **Gratitude:** Children who are raised in an environment where adults feel and express gratitude develop gratitude themselves. Gratitude cannot be taught. Children teach themselves the capacity to feel gratitude during the Imitation Stage through their relationships with their caregivers.
- **Love:** Students who have a beloved academic authority whom they can look up to and revere develop the capacity to love themselves, others, and the world. The capacity to love cannot be taught directly. Students teach themselves during the Authority Stage through their relationships with their teachers.
- **Duty:** Students who form their own judgments have the capacity to shoulder their duties in relationships, in employment, and as citizens. The capacity to duty cannot be taught directly. Students teach themselves during the Judgment Stage.

A key aspect of an environment conducive to the development of the three virtues is human relationships. Who the teacher is and the lessons the teacher creates, delivers, and assesses are key aspects of the environment for children to develop the three virtues. For this reason, the development

of the teacher as a human being is as important as curriculum development and proficiency at teaching. Waldorf Teachers are to take up their own development in three areas: 1) thinking; 2) feeling; and 3) willing.

4. Promote Social Renewal: Social renewal is possible when sufficient numbers of human beings have developed in themselves the three virtues: the capacities to feel gratitude, love, and do their duty. Society cannot be renewed directly, only indirectly, because the human virtues cannot be taught. They must grow of themselves out of human beings who have the right environment. Who the teacher is and the academic education a teacher provides are of the utmost importance because the teacher provides the environment for students to develop the three virtues.

5. Hold the Image of the Human Being as a Unique Individual: Waldorf education recognizes that while each student goes through the archetypal stages of child development, each student is also an individual. Each student is a unique human being with a unique biography, talents, and weaknesses. Teachers work with individual strengths and weaknesses in order to educate all the students in the class and help all students develop the skills and capacities necessary to participate fully in life—and help students work off their rough edges.

6. Strive for Balance in Teaching: Waldorf schools strive to bring balance in teaching. Some areas include:

- Enlivening Elements and Structuring Elements: Effective education contains both excitement/enthusiasm that comes with new learning and the rote practice necessary for students to develop capacities, skills, and knowledge.
- Thinking, Feeling, and Willing: All three capacities are important in Waldorf education, not just thinking.
- Analysis and Synthesis: Some aspects of education are taught whole to parts (analysis) and others are taught part to whole (synthesis). Both are equally important.

By working consciously with balance, teachers can meet the demands of different places, times, communities, and students but still deliver a Waldorf education.

7. Educate within Government Standards: Public/charter Waldorf schools assume additional responsibilities, one of which is educating in alignment with government standards. They strive to balance the principles of Waldorf education while simultaneously working with government standards. They take the curriculum and standards mandated by the state and strive to teach both in alignment with Waldorf education as much as possible. This includes creating/adopting, teaching, and assessing a curriculum that aligns with state standards and aligning with child development to the greatest extent possible.

8. Make Waldorf Education Accessible to a Diverse Student Population: Public/charter Waldorf schools strive to educate a diverse student population, one that matches the ethnic and socio-economic makeup of society. They do so by promoting Waldorf education to the people in their communities and creating a curriculum that matches the student population.

9. Spread Waldorf Principles and Methodologies to the Public-School Sector: Public/charter Waldorf schools serve as ambassadors to the greater public education movement. They bring the principles, methodologies, and best practices of Waldorf education to the greater world so that more students can benefit. As such teachers engage in study and faculty study to familiarize themselves with the principles and methodologies of Waldorf education as articulated by Rudolf Steiner and best practices in education.

10. Question the Principles of Waldorf Education If They Are Not Working: If any principle is not working, Waldorf schools seek to acknowledge it and address it. Rudolf Steiner acknowledged that Waldorf education has no right to assume that its teaching methods are always correct, and the same holds true for Waldorf principles. In *Renewal of Education*, Steiner says, “Even the best pedagogical principles—although they may be satisfying to use and we believe they are fulfilling all that is required—will never be genuinely useful because we do not actually try to look at the results of education in life.” (174) The core principles have to work.

Steiner develops the thought in *The Child’s Changing Consciousness*:

Sectarianism to any degree or fanatical zeal must never be allowed to creep into our educational endeavors, only to find at the end of the road that our students do not fit into life as it is; for life in the world does not notice one’s educational ideals. Life is governed by what arises from the prevailing conditions themselves, which are expressed as regulations concerning education, as school curriculum, and as other related matters, which correspond to current ways of thinking. And so there is always a danger that we will educate children in a way that, through correct in itself, could alienate them from life in the world—whether one considers this right or wrong. It must always be remembered that one must not steer fanatically toward one’s chosen educational aims without considering whether or not one might be alienating one’s students from surrounding life. (146)

If a principle does not work, schools and teachers are to acknowledge the problem and address it. Steiner encouraged Waldorf teachers to use imagination, have courage for the truth, and be responsible. This advice helps schools and teachers assume responsibility for their work and teach and innovate responsibly in alignment with the core principles of Waldorf education.

An example of questioning principles is found in the article [“A few thoughts on leadership and management issues in Steiner Waldorf schools.”](#) It questions the principle of collaborative leadership and the college of teachers because it does not work well and researches the indication upon which this idea is based to allow responsible innovation in Waldorf school governance structures.

Conclusion

The mission statement and the ten core principles are designed to help Waldorf schools function optimally. Waldorf administrators, teachers, and parents are encouraged to use the core principles to inform the Waldorf education they create, from the founding of a school through the years of growth to maturation. They are the foundation of the Renewal of Literacy® course “Fundamentals of Waldorf Education.” They are offered to heal the rift between public and private Waldorf education and allow the Waldorf movement to achieve its full potential.

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