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# The “feeling-life” journey of the grade school child: An investigation into inclusive young citizenship in international Waldorf education

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## ABSTRACT

Rudolf Steiner’s international Waldorf education is comparatively under-researched for a hundred-year-old education movement which thrives globally. What is further unknown in academic educational circles is the specific study of the “feeling-life”, the middle period of childhood in Waldorf education, of children aged seven through fourteen. This article assesses the holistic nature of the Waldorf grade school, and its child-centered, creative pedagogy. Using work by Lani Florian and colleagues, the article scrutinizes the extent to which Waldorf education is able and well-suited to accommodate all learner types. Fifteen Waldorf teaching advisors and teacher trainers from the US, the UK and Germany were invited to assess the inclusive outlook of their Waldorf grade school. The findings show internationally and inter-regionally diverse and contrasting practices; a route informed by inclusive pedagogy sustains child development and leads to young citizenship. Recommendations are of productive collaboration between schools’ networks and for Waldorf educational studies to forge connections with the wider educational academic sphere, and to share their application of creativity and restorative and inclusive practices.

## ARTICLE HISTORY



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## Introduction

Jarvie and Burke (2019) emphasize a tangential approach to educational scholarship in its key connection to theology as a possibility for providing alternative routes in education. One such alternative is Rudolf Steiner’s Waldorf pedagogy which is based on the spiritual science of Anthroposophy, meaning “human wisdom” founded by Steiner in 1902 (Dahlin, 2018); it is applicable to various disciplines, including the realm of education. This centers around the natural growth of the child, and the development of the human being. Anthroposophy provides meaning and clarity in the teacher’s implementation of the curriculum, and in the focus of educating

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the child holistically, equally by academic, artistic, and physical means (Ergas, 2017). Steiner identified a child's three-dimensional mode of engaging with the world and learning, in adopting the "hands, heart and head" of Pestalozzi the "founder of modern education" (Heafford, 1967), and three seven-year periods through which children mature and grow, from first developing their body and "will" in early childhood, to journeying through the "feeling-life" in grade school, and onto the "thinking-realm" and toward consciousness at high school. It is the "feeling-life" and awakening of the child upon which this article concentrates, in the arousing, middle period of childhood, and the budding elements of the child's imagination and capacity for affiliation through feelings, all through a creative pedagogy of in-depth teaching and learning, and central authority of the class teacher (Steiner, 1907/1996). Such terms and concepts are scrutinized according to both the broader background context, and their relevance in contemporary application. Other important contemporary minority alternative education systems such as the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches have not been the focus of this article.

In order to assess the extent of characteristic inclusion in sample Waldorf schools, the article draws on the established framework of Lani Florian and colleagues, as well as opposing educationalists, on debates about educational inclusion. Florian's inclusive pedagogy is an evolving debate from 1998 (Florian, 1998), which arguably features more prominently in current international academic discussion than do Waldorf education studies. Drawing the two together affords the opportunity for critical comparisons, but also for bridging adjacent and complementary disciplines, and highlighting their existence. Waldorf educational practice incorporates literature which particularly addresses how to educate and support diverse learner types in Waldorf schools, as well as promoting all-class "curative education" which allows all learners to develop their whole person (McAllen, 2013; Steiner, 1907/1996; Tunkey, 2020). Prominent debates consider inclusive pedagogy, and concern issues of acceptance and treatment of individual learners, and the parameters of the curriculum. Florian et al. (2017, p.11) put forward a starting point for discussion of principles of inclusion:

the focus of inclusive education is on ensuring that all learners have access to a good quality education. Growing awareness that the underachievement of certain groups of students is an inequity of opportunity has led to a renewed focus on interventions aiming at closing the gap between the lowest and highest achievers.

### ***Waldorf education history and philosophy***

Steiner studied, among other scholars, the spiritual science of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), who became a central guiding beacon in influencing Steiner's own writings (Hasler, 2010). Goethe, the famous

Enlightenment thinker and prolific writer, maintained that the universe is an ever-evolving, interconnected living organism. In 1790, Goethe devised a crucial notion of plant evolution in the form of the “metamorphosis of plants” (Attfield, 2021c). Goethe saw metamorphosis as a way to explain transformative states in the development of the human being (Aeppli, 2016). He wrote that art replaced nature as an extended medium of expression, so that humans could then develop their imagination, and a “higher form of seeing”, in externally observing from the standpoint of maturity the interdependences implicit in metamorphosis (Lowe & Sharp, 2005, p.54). Steiner adopted this framework in conceiving the fourfold structure of the human being, of the mineral “physical body” of the developing anchor, the vital or “etheric body” of inner growth, moving to the conscious “astral body” of thoughts and invention, and ultimately, to the maturing identity or “I” and the gaining of reflective insight (Tunkey, 2020, p.18). In particular the etheric energies and growth toward the inner astral life-forces will be considered further in this article, as will be the four “middle senses”, in relation to the stages of the grade school child.

Another influential figure affecting the resulting Waldorf education was Professor Millicent Mackenzie, a global colleague of Steiner (Attfield & Attfield, 2019). In 1922 Mackenzie invited Steiner to present at her education conference at Oxford University, UK (Paull, 2011). It was this that afforded Steiner the platform to disseminate his educational vision, and to talk about his exemplar school established in 1919, the “Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory school” in Stuttgart, a local inclusive school, with 700 children by 1922 (Steiner, 1922/1947; Paull, 2011). Mackenzie acknowledged “Dr Rudolf Steiner, of Dornach, Switzerland” in 1924, as being of fundamental interest to academic educationalists. Mackenzie (1924, p.6) wrote that Steiner’s

views on education are still too little known in English-speaking countries. ...His views on freedom are well worth the closest consideration, and on “freeing the pupil” as carried out in his school.

Correspondingly, Harris and de Bruin (2018, p.216) examine a “new” concept of creativity in education, authenticated as vital in terms of it producing better learner outcomes in math and literacy, and in producing problem solvers and independent thinkers, “that is adaptive and critically reflexive to the tasks of reconciling safe, and empathetic learning environments with the production of an adaptive and innovative 21st century workforce.” Perhaps Steiner’s pedagogy of one hundred years ago was creative in just such a way.

Western state education has fundamentally remained faith based; Anthroposophy can similarly be viewed as “an educational approach based on a spiritual outlook” (Goldshmidt, 2017, p.349). Just as some religions

such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam usually believe in forms of life-after-death, so other spiritual faiths or outlooks share a belief in reincarnation, including Buddhism, Hinduism and Anthroposophy (Tweed, 2020). Steiner interpreted Goethe's metamorphosis as applying to human life transforming into death, and to rebirth. Reincarnation is the notion that the human soul continues into a further life, and touches our moral lives. The anthroposophical view of incarnation is that the child gradually incarnates through their four stages of human development throughout their childhood. Our forethought (or short-sightedness) affects our developing incarnations (Welburn, 2004).

Neither Anthroposophy, nor the particular notions of incarnation and reincarnation are taught to children in Waldorf schools; rather, the individuality and soul of the child is highly regarded and nurtured by the teacher in both conceptual and practical ways. Waldorf education attempts to work with the child at a profound level, and to educate through the "emotional living" and stimulation of their multiple senses. The direction of international Waldorf education is an inward one, which facilitates the deep-rooted nurturing of the child, so educating the soul life. Education is thereby seen as an art; it requires the teacher's philosophical and spiritual study, and fundamental comprehending of humanity (Ergas, 2017; Goldshmidt, 2017; Jarvie & Burke, 2019; Steiner, 1907/1996).

### ***Barriers to learning and participation, and educational inclusion***

Greenstein (2016, p.43) states that in typical educational models, "the student is the 'non-knower' whose role is to passively receive the knowledge to the desired level and at the desired pace". One problem seen to prevent this process is children with special educational needs failing to learn adequately, thus causing their own individual pathology; this notion has "emerged as a means to remove and contain the most recalcitrant students in the interest of maintaining order in the rationalized school" (Greenstein, 2016, p.43). The inclusive pedagogy movement has to deal with the debate of exposing "normalcy", and unworkable demanding academic requirements for education (Attfield, 2021a; Popkewitz, 2012), versus explaining the logistics of inclusion working in pressured schools. The prominent education necessary condition of the "bell-curve" predicts that only half of the population of children can achieve; this conflicts with the alternative of allowing a class of children to progress without interruption, including children with barriers to learning, to thrive within their class (Florian et al., 2017).

Examples of children's learning differences are "neuro-developmental disorders", "sensory disorders", and "attention disorders" (all from an individual deficit perspective) (Booth & Ainscow, 2017; Van Herwegen et al.,

2018). In some cases children who experience barriers to learning and participation can be “pidgeonholed” (or permanently classified) where they cannot be satisfactorily allocated a school place; they may struggle in the mainstream, yet be too able for special school provision. An external pressure on schools is to produce high-achieving (and later academically qualified) learners, from compulsory school age; education policies in the mainstream expect narrowly defined “academic achievement” (Greenstein, 2016). Florian et al. (2017, p.11) state, “the debate continues regarding the nature of the effects on the achievement of other children and young people in conventional schools”. This concern can equally apply to alternative “mainstream” schools catering for typical abilities, such as Waldorf schools. Smaller schools in particular may be concerned with their reputation and may not wish to be seen as a “special school”. In addition, schools may be concerned about failing to meet legal equality duties they are subject to, as when children with additional needs do not progress sufficiently in their learning (Florian, 2012).

Florian et al. (2017) present examples of “sufficient progression” of individual learners, evidenced in exemplar schools that have adopted inclusive pedagogy and simultaneously concentrated on ambitious achievement. Some of these examples are selected here for discussion. First, relationships between teachers and students (and among themselves) affect schools’ abilities to produce innovative, respectful meaningful processes, which can respond flexibly and problem-solve. Secondly, reducing the disparity between high and low achievers supports the achievement outcomes for all students. Thirdly, staff and students have a sense of agency, in being able to impact on the culture and worth of their schools.

Florian (2012, p.277) offers a definition of inclusive pedagogy; it

encourages open-ended views of all children’s potential for learning and encourages teachers to extend the range of options that are available to everyone in the community of the classroom.

Florian et al. (2017) write about schools that strive to be productive, as well as intentionally inclusive of all learners. The attributes of these schools are sustaining their values of protecting vulnerable children, and enabling all children to be educated and to achieve; this requires monitoring the teaching and learning of all children, and adopting the role of problem solvers with dynamic, flexible policies. The overall responsibility is perceived to be that of the teaching provider, rather than the focus being on the limitations of learners. The idea is to enable useful and stimulating education for all children. The movement of inclusive pedagogy acknowledges the class environment and the demands of the class, individual children’s different characteristics, and the basis of shared class learning (Florian et al., 2017; Florian & Beaton, 2018).

Florian and Beaton (2018, p.870) explain the difference between inclusive pedagogy and “over-differentiation” which results in “integration”. Inclusion “avoids the marginalization that can occur with differentiation strategies that are designed only with individual needs in mind”. Florian and Beaton (2018) are also concerned about repeated integration which they claim furthers exclusion, whether the child is either physically outside or inside the class. For them, all-class collaborative engagement and learning is the key. Similarly, Booth and Ainscow (2017) elucidate this argument further. Children who demonstrate learning delays tend to receive the support of an additional educator to work separately with them at a slower pace, or on lower-level core skills. Booth and Ainscow (2017, p.48) instead advocate a wider interpretation of “support” where whole classes can collaborate, and achieve “all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to the diversity of children and young people in ways that value them equally”. Booth and Ainscow (2017, p.41) promote and interconnect values of fostering learner independence, with ranging external life-long values of independent thought, positive well-being, human rights, “environmental sensitivity, spiritual engagement, and a revaluation of risk”. In practice,

individual differences between learners are to be expected, and the importance of participation in classroom activities is privileged over judgements about what students can and cannot do (Florian et al., 2017, p.27).

### ***The inclusive basis of international Waldorf grades education***

Upon reaching seven, the child is considered to be ready, “physically, emotionally and intellectually” to embrace formal learning (Nicol, 2016, p.9). This aspect is rare among English-speaking mainstream systems, where children normally commence formal learning earlier (Bruce, 2015). In being designed around what Steiner regards as the natural development of the child (Steiner, 1907/1996), this effectively allows children of all rates of development to have an increased chance of being “school ready”. Steiner asserted the importance of educational investment into both academic scholarship and arts-based study, taught in a three-dimensional way:

idealism of practical insight. must work in the spirit of its curriculum and methodology; an idealism that has the power to awaken in young, growing human beings the forces and faculties they will need later in life to be equipped for work in modern society (Steiner, 1920/2000, p.7).

Goethe said that “looking to nature is the best educator of our senses” (Lowe & Sharp, 2005, p.53). Steiner adopted this notion in his emphasis on the central importance of the natural world, and the mirroring of human growth and of the four feeling senses. He means here those of



“smell” and “taste” enhancing multiple dimensional discernment, “sight” developing focus, observation and perception, and “warmth” relating to comfort, experiment and balance; all experienced palpably by grade schoolers (Aeppli, 2016). The development of the senses supports an accelerated skill-set for the grade school curriculum. Middle childhood supports the growing capacities of the child’s “etheric forces”, in facilitating the maturing of one’s internal and external rhythmic systems; a creative core guides the inclusionary framework for developing habits, imagination and memory, and for developing a sensitive cultural awareness, and understanding of causal relationships, leading to young citizenship. The “astral body” begins when the child is around ages thirteen to fifteen; it is the capacities of “moral self-education”. The “astral body” leads toward an understanding of proportion, risk-judging, and impulse (Steiner, 1919/2000).

A natural flow of inward and outward breath underlies the curriculum and rhythmically connected learning, enabling the emotional stability and maturing of students; the contraction is symbolized by accelerating academic study, and the expansion by decelerating practical activity or movement. This supports different learner types, and those students who may otherwise experience barriers to learning and participation (Attfield, 2021b; Booth & Ainscow, 2017; Tunkey, 2020). Teaching is conducted in the form of main lesson blocks, allowing chronological sense and historical foundation, and study which is cognitively embedded and culturally informed. It also provides other wide-ranging subjects, taught in ongoing, and connected linear format (Koepke, 1992).

Now either disregarded, or else reinterpreted by some Waldorf educators, or even credited by others, Steiner believed that individuals with developmental delays had been reincarnated into their current life according to a fundamental choice of their own in their previous life, just as those with other faiths who believe in reincarnation do (Tweed, 2020; Welburn, 2004). However simultaneously, Steiner believed in investing in such children as intrinsically important beings, and in supporting their incarnating process and to awaken their “soul-faculties”, in an equivalent commitment to modern day principles of diversity and equality (Attfield & Attfield, 2019). In his own tutoring practice, in 1884 through 1890, along with educating three siblings, Steiner gave attention to working with a grade school aged fourth sibling, with a significant “abnormal” learning delay in “reading, writing and arithmetic... (with) slow and dull thinking” (Steiner, 1907/1996, p.xi). It was this that led Steiner to devise the “soul economy”, where in preparation the teacher familiarizes themselves with the topic in considerable detail; then in teaching the teacher economically imparts essential meaningful aspects of a topic suitable for the child to embrace. Steiner said,



this pedagogical task became a rich source for learning for me... I came to realize that education and teaching must become an art, based upon true knowledge of the human being (Steiner, 1907/1996, p.xi).

McAllen (2013) and Tunkey (2020) advocate one-to-one or small group integratory support with those students with barriers to learning in reinforcing their academic development, as well as individual support for such learners in the classroom. Meanwhile, other Waldorf schools have replaced such a system with the more modern notion of whole-class inclusionary learning (see Florian & Beaton, 2018; see Booth & Ainscow, 2017). Visible signs of the wide-ranging curriculum are clear in the forms of whole-class movement, experiential learning, and an arts-based, academic education. Contrasting types of input in Waldorf grade schools are offered by remedial education on a whole-class basis enabling inclusion, and by the constant and unique teacher-student individual relationship: “In this period, teachers have an important task in showing each child that they feel seen and appreciated as individual persons” (Dahlin, 2018, p.75).

Steiner’s principles of the “feeling-life” and experiential, holistic learning may relate to studies of affect (see Stein, 2018); both can be seen to parallel Aristotle’s “virtue ethics” in which characters develop by the encouragement of people to make wise choices, through corresponding channeling of their emotions (Aristotle 2000). Poles apart from Waldorf pedagogy is the system of “operant conditioning” as advocated by Skinner (1953), where learners are supposed to respond through prior conditioning, without thought. Prominent mainstream education systems at times seem to echo the application of operant conditioning (Charlot, 2012).

## Methods

Huddleston (2018) discusses the changing nature of curriculum studies, in accordance with education institutions’ operations, evolving influential bodies, and new modal frameworks, affecting the school’s day to day activities as well as the object of focus for external study. In parallel, dissimilar pedagogies of Waldorf and Inclusion are theoretically difficult to assess together, due to each one’s distinctive basis and fundamental type. Huddleston asserts that such educational scholarship needs to promote the empirical values of social science, but to be additionally both “critical” and “emancipatory” for modern community benefit, and thereby can be perceived as “postqualitative research”; the article adopts such a methodology. This is explained below.

Steiner wrote about Goethe’s preference for science not being restricted by hypotheses. That is, Goethe wanted to avoid deductive reasoning from conjectures through testing for possible refutation, and instead, to invite

open-minded examination and observation (Steiner, 1911/2000; Aeppli, 2016). Similarly, Steiner (1920/2000, p.119) asserted that “human subjects shape their own experience.” In the same spirit, this research adopts an inductive research strategy; the article does not assume pre-knowledge in its exploration of Waldorf practitioner participants’ varying realities (indeed these were not known prior to investigation), and undertakes to unearth a legitimate portrayal of their experiences and perspectives, where adjacent views are tested against one another. The postqualitative basis encourages scrupulous testing of the kind depicted in Huddleston’s exposition here, while highlighting the subject’s reality. Huddleston (2018, p.176) describes the purpose of postqualitative research as scrutinizing “three dichotomies: theory versus practice, epistemological versus ontological, and nonmaterial versus material”; postqualitative research thereby attempts to challenge existing positions and to more flexibly consider alternative perspectives that are outside of previously accepted binary options.

The research is interpretivist in that the researcher deconstructs and then reconstructs the data in order to represent its meanings authentically (Atkinson, 2015). Participant validation is a key stage in the process of scrutinizing one’s interpretative claims of the data (Connor et al., 2018). All participants verified (or amended) their selected data contributions as being accurate and fairly represented.

The main thesis of Gellner (1970) was that the contradictions in a society’s belief systems are more likely to be understood by outsiders; on this basis, it cannot be true that a society can only be understood by its own participants. The inter-subjective researcher (see Biesta, 2020; see Attfield, 2021b) acknowledges their own insider/outsider position. I have a superficial sense of “insidership” in terms of my marginal parent position at a Waldorf school and thereby growing curiosity, but I am more obviously an outsider, as sociologist lacking commitment to Anthroposophy and open to criticisms of Waldorf practice. The article is written for outsiders as much as insiders. The receipt of research funding from two Steiner-based charitable organizations has been a notable blessing that provided me with time and space to produce research. I was also cautious in its receipt in order to safeguard the nature of rigorously scrutinized, empirical research, producing trustworthy findings that related communities themselves can benefit from, through highlighting the presence of the participants, but testing the data with pedagogical theory, literature and other contrasting data (Biesta, 2020; Bryman, 2012).

Interviews took place during the Covid pandemic, and so occurred online, thus enabling international representation. The process snowballed, in participants themselves suggesting further participants. The sample pool evolved to fifteen teacher advisors and teacher trainers; three in Germany, five in the USA, and seven in the UK. The identifiability of participants

is of real concern to this internationally close-knit community. To merely label participants numerically could enable some readers to connect clues and identify individuals. Accordingly, participants are identified in the findings by group classifications of “US” (United States), “G” (Germany), and “UK” (United Kingdom). Ethical approval was secured from the university ethics committee. Ethical considerations particularly concerned continued consent, authentic representation, and protection.

The interview schedule was conceived from themes in the review of literature. These themes were the underlying values of Waldorf education, its minority position of education, the treatment and transitions of differently able children in grades school, the limits to accommodating such children, the possibilities of inclusive pedagogy coinciding with Waldorf education, and the considered contemporary relevance of Waldorf education. The same questions were asked of all participants, ensuring a starting point of standardized process. The researcher sets out the methods so that a second researcher could replicate the process, regardless of the data they collect. Data produced in mirrored projects would vary, given peoples’ shifting nature, and given that data are co-produced between participant and researcher. Critical and provoking postqualitative research (see above) is transferable, rather than generalizable; valuable findings from a small study can be applied in a parallel, different educational setting (Huddleston, 2018). Inherent bias is mitigated and guarded against, through reflection, accountable testing of data, and through balanced external investigation (Bartels & Wagenaar, 2018).

## Findings

### *Children’s “natural development”*

A participant commented on the three elements of metaphysical cognitive states of ourselves that connect together, in causal order, and applied in Waldorf education. UK: “We use the Platonist elements of ‘goodness, beauty and truth’; it is the ethical value framework for Steiner, and frames the pedagogy and curriculum” (see Steiner, 1914/2009). In some respects Ancient Greek philosophers’ thinking, and in particular that of Plato (428–348 BCE) can indeed be seen to have underlain the thinking of Steiner. Plato introduced these states, comprehending “the form of the good (goodness), the valuable (beauty), and the true (truth)” (Plato, 1974, 517b5). These Platonic origins can be seen as a partial precursor to Steiner’s threefold human organism by way of a sequentially developing person, of “will, feeling and thinking” (Dahlin, 2018). Waldorf educators perceive middle childhood children to learn most effectively through an innovative curriculum that responds to their emotional temperament,

insight and “images” (Plato, 1974, 510), thus connecting beauty with the “feeling-life” (see Nordlund, 2013). This is expressed by a second participant implicitly echoing Steiner’s thoughts about beauty, perception and self-connection. At grade school, US: “children see the beauty of the world through the curriculum; in feeling through the environment, the sciences, and the biographies of human beings”.

Several participants explained the development of children at grade school as corresponding to the inner threefold human phase of their “feeling-life”. Study is brought alive in allowing children to engage and learn through self-connection (Goldshmidt, 2017). G: “You teach historical events to spark emotion and realization, and then they can write an interesting composition.” And UK: “experiential activities enhance thinking and exploration. You are appealing to the ‘feeling-life’, that is sensing, engaging and connecting, in wonder and discovery”. This is achieved through the teacher approach of “soul economy” (Steiner, 1907/1996) where, G: “the teacher studies the material in-depth, assimilates it, chooses what aspect is important, and in teaching all that is needed is the artistic presentation”. This was similarly expressed by another teacher. US: “In grades 1 to 8 you are learning from someone who has digested all the content in order to present it to you”.

One participant connected Steiner’s notion of children’s natural development with that of Aristotle:

US: We teach not only to the experience of the child, but to the soul development of the child. It was Aristotle who first said the soul grows in this way.

As well as being influenced by Goethe and the notion of metamorphosis, Steiner also referred to theories of Plato’s student Aristotle (384–322 BCE). Aristotle saw the human being as having a three-part soul, which incorporated plant, animal and human capacities, and so a non-conscious soul developing to full consciousness; that is, humanity having a nutritive soul of unconscious growth, an animal soul capable of self-motion, and a reflective soul of consciousness. Steiner’s fourfold structure of the human being including etheric, astral and ego or “I” states can be seen to parallel these elements (Durrant, 1993; Steiner, 1914/2009; Tunkey, 2020). Other participants articulated this same fundamental point. UK: “It’s not about children’s level of learning; what they are being given is feeding their soul. It’s meeting them at their developmental need at a soul level”.

One participant highlighted the role of imagination in grade school. UK: “People underestimate how important it is to keep exercising your imagination. We keep their imaginations and creative capabilities open”. Steiner used Aristotle’s concept of the significance of one’s imagination (see Steiner, 1914/2009). This was that “imagination is a movement generated by the activity of sense perception” (Durrant, 1993, 427b27). Another

participant explained the central nature of children's imagination. US: "(In terms of learning,) the stronger we are at day-dreaming, the better we are at flipping into attention when we need to". One participant explained how a teacher facilitates this. UK: "The teacher is working to create an imaginative landscape that the children can develop a strong connection to in their learning" (see Nordlund, 2013).

One participant summarized an echo in Steiner of Aristotle's correlation of perception to thought and knowledge. G: "Steiner says you get a percept through the senses, you get a concept intuitively through thinking, and those two generate reality". Aristotle spoke about sensory awareness being separate from intellectual capacity which can in part be seen to contribute to Steiner's threefold human organism (Steiner, [1914]2009). Aristotle separated feeling and thinking, identifying that students learn through perception; "a sense-organ is that which is able to receive perceptible forms. (It is) acted upon by that which possesses color, flavor or sound" (Durrant, 1993, 424a17). This is supported by Mackensen (1994, p.vii): "Our starting point for all knowledge and thinking is the active participation and perception through human senses of a living human body". This leads to varying levels of complexity in empirical learning.

UK: We do not start with a science experiment and tell children the answer; the Goethean experience is where you set it up without saying anything. You need to design the activity so they will end up with the concept themselves.

In contrasting the mainstream to this alternative, "we have explored conventional ideas to contrast *our* approach of phenomenology or goetheanism" (Mackensen, 1994, p.vii). This illustrates the prioritized investigative learning of students, as well as the central importance of Goethe in Waldorf pedagogy. This strikingly contrasts with the majority of educative systems, and may be seen to simultaneously diagnose their deficiency (Charlot, 2012).

### ***The role of the teacher***

One participant asserted UK: "We value engagement, practical skills and physical learning as much as academic knowledge". Each is learned through continual observation of the child by the teacher; this is seen as a core inclusive aspect of Waldorf pedagogy, in that every effort is made to understand individual children (Tunkey, 2020). Harris and de Bruin (2018, p.218) assert that

developing creativity in schools ...is reflected in the need for thorough preparation and professional development of teachers' understandings and skills and the ways students' creativity can be enhanced in schools and classrooms.

Indeed Ergas (2017) similarly emphasizes the essential quality of a rich and meaningful relationship between teacher and student, where the teacher must invest their “self” into this role. Dahlin (2018, p.5) wrote that Steiner put “teachers in the center of the classroom. But he demanded that they be enthusiastic and inspiring for their children”.

Participants articulated the unique, fundamental idea of Waldorf grade school, and the means by which a class of children is taught. G: “The class teacher’s expertise is in organizing a learning group; their primary skill is not a subject specialism, it is a pedagogical specialism”. Another conveyed this idea in a simile. US: “The relationship with the class and their teacher is like a conductor and their orchestra”. Teachers assessed the in-depth means of learning and teaching at grade school. UK: “Main lessons are one of the great joys of life. You have a three week or so period where you can enter into a subject very deeply”. Study is conducted in a coherent and interdisciplinary way, that will assist long-term memory and knowledge. UK: “History doesn’t just start somewhere, there’s been a long evolution of process”. A further participant considered the second stage of grade school. UK: “This is about self-directed learning. Students are not so led by teachers; teachers now enable with wisdom and guidance”.

A participant commented, UK: “in mainstream schools children are taught to regurgitate information; they’re not taught to be thinking beings with connections to one another” (see Greenstein, 2016). Biesta (2012) discusses a three-layered aim of education, that is the multiple purposes of “qualification, socialization and subjectification”. “Qualification” follows the normative meritocratic system of providing students with evidence of their scholarship; “some would even argue that it is the only thing that should matter in schools” (Biesta, 2012, p.13; see Attfield & Attfield, 2019; see Popkewitz, 2012). “Socialization” is the learning of longer-term societal functioning in a person developing membership of society and an established identity, and thus developing a sense of citizenship. However another participant reflected, US: “increasingly we see that children in mainstream education are quite stressed, and ‘incomplete’ and thereby perhaps unable to have a sense of membership of the wider community. The third dimensional purpose is far less likely to be broadly acknowledged:

Subjectification is about how we can exist “outside” of such orders. With a relatively “old” but still crucially important concept, we can say that subjectification has to do with the question of human freedom (Biesta, 2012, p.13).

The concept of freedom in education was however central to Steiner as well as to global colleagues. Freedom in education means that “facts will be laid before the pupils in such a way as to rouse active response and co-operation in estimating their value and significance” (Mackenzie, 1924, p.77; see Steiner, 1916/2011).

Two participants discussed the role of teachers to embody freedom in education, and to impart this to their students. US: “As a role model, you show your class children that it is important to learn without fear, and to learn in freedom to be yourself”. Another pointed out that in Germany, Waldorf education is widely known of and, G: “there is inherent state support. That goes alongside a greater degree of professional and personal freedom for Waldorf teachers”, which is perhaps a different experience to that of other participants. Biesta (2012, p.16) emphasizes the importance of education being recognized as an art. “Teaching should not and cannot be understood as a science – and actually needs tact, ingenuity and judgment”. A participant concurred with this conviction. G: “Steiner used the phrase ‘education as an art’; what you are actually doing is providing support and learning situations for the self-activity of the child” (see Steiner, 1907/1996).

Participants expressed their observation of the transitions of children as they progress through school. UK: “We say the child ‘incarnates’. The child is in their unconscious ‘will’ movement, metabolic way of living. But they are moving into the realm of ‘feeling.’” Steiner converted Goethe’s idea of metamorphosis to incorporate rebirth and reincarnation (Tunkey, 2020; Welburn, 2004). Beliefs in reincarnation and the “transmigration of souls” have been found among the Ancient Greeks (Durrant, 1993, 407b12). Steiner also spoke of the living stages of incarnation where one develops through full consciousness, and to the mature state of the “I” (Steiner, 1914/2009). Another participant referred to US: “the idea that there are repeated earth lives. I think this is at the very core, an underlying theme in Steiner education”. A participant represented the notion of reincarnation in practical terms. UK: “This is about children having agency over their bodies. It’s about making sure children have the language, physical and social skills to access the rest of the curriculum”. Teachers have an added purpose in being inspirational role models, and imparters of knowledge, to themselves re/incarnate (Tunkey, 2020). There is an aspect of mutual and collaborative growth between teacher and student (which does not encompass the occasional unsuccessful teacher).

Within the scope of grades school Steiner observed two milestones for children, in reaching their ninth and twelfth years, and these are reflected upon by participants. US: “In story telling we look at the archetypal experiences of development. For example at age nine, the child experiences their consciousness as more separate”. Another participant explained the “nine-year-old change” as, UK: “where the child unconsciously realizes they are an individual, and losing their childhood. That is experienced as a loss, without gaining what they are going toward yet”. Upon reaching nine, the child’s imitation is replaced by a new sense of externality, and



“reversal of life-force” (Koepke, 1989, p.88). In terms of the curriculum, examples of how this is approached in practice are explained thus. UK: “The child experiences the fragmentation of their world, and we teach fractions; the material is directly designed to meet their soul picture”. A participant reported an example of where nine-year-olds experience feeling instability through a separation of losing their metaphorical home. UK: “They’ve left behind the garden of Eden of childhood. They literally start building dens at home, and we teach them brick building”. Steiner spoke about a similar climactic change occurring when children reach the age of twelve; this is the start of their need of specialist teachers (see Koepke, 1992). UK: “They start to develop critical faculties, but are still affected by feeling, so it’s not yet analytical thought”. Here again, theoretical value is converted into practical operation on the ground.

### ***One hundred-year-old educational inclusion***

Participants illustrated the underlying inclusive basis of the curriculum. UK: “Subjects have a similar status so it means whatever children are good at is valued”. Similarly, other participants explained how they manage class-based inclusive learning. UK: “You deal with the huge range of abilities in a class of seven-year-olds. So you adapt what you are doing for the children you have in your class”. And, G: “we give students the right to develop their personality, talents and abilities to the fullest”. Tunkey (2020, p.133) discusses the balance of educational subjects, and calculates that “about half the school week is spent on other than the ‘common core’ of math, science and English language skills”. The other half of the school week is widely spent on physical education, music, arts and crafts. This curricula structure indicates an inherent inclusive basis where a diversity of children of varying strengths can progress in the way Steiner intended. His goal was that students should secure emotional maturity and independence, and should learn actively and internalize what they learn, thus gaining “multiple intelligences” (Dahlin, 2018) which can contribute to their growing sense of young citizenship. One participant recognized a benefit of class-based working. G: “Germany doesn’t have such a focus on individual children, which I think is better. Children can learn more from each other than we give them credit”. Another stated their long-established method of class-based inclusion. US: “If a teacher knows to clarify what they are asking children to do, it widens all of their assumptions about the children they have and their capacities”. And, US: “we make sure that all individual children are challenged, and that they can learn together. They tend to mature socially and emotionally together”. Florian (2012, p.277) concurs that

inclusive pedagogy encourages open-ended views of all children's potential for learning and encourages teachers to extend the range of options that are available to everyone in the community of the classroom.

Participants highlighted their interpretations of inclusive practice. G: "Steiner said 'treat everyone as if they are talented and able, but also as if they all have learning difficulties, which is effectively inclusive practice'" (see Rawson, 2015). A participant explained how this can work at grade school. UK: "there is wisdom in allowing a process of deepening through a bit of time, and through sleep; the essence of the two- or three-day rhythm is a deepening of civility". Okello and Quaye (2018) discuss this curative and inclusive practice of rhythmical pace for memory recall, and "rehearsal". An example of whole-class curative education is eurythmy. This discipline was first introduced in the English-speaking world at Mackenzie's conference of 1922 (Paull, 2011). Eurythmy is the inclusive, central discipline of artistic movement incorporating choreography, speech, and musical study. It is curative in that it supports the development of whole-body organization in connecting physical motion and senses together. Academically, eurythmy deepens musical, literary, and geometric comprehension (Avison & Rawson, 2014). UK: "Differentiation is different in eurythmy. Children learn the same exercise over a period of time, so children's progress is in the refinement of the movements".

While broadly inclusive in their underlying approach, sample schools differ considerably in their decisions to accept children with learning differences. Two participants expressed caution in relation to receiving learners with "support needs". UK: "We have to recognize when we don't have the resources to make reasonable adjustments for a child with significant support needs". One considered their varied experience of divergent Waldorf school cultures. UK: "One Steiner (*sic*) school I taught in was very narrow, another was widely accepting". The decision of whether to accept a particular child must depend on resources, expertise, and existing (inclusive) strategy (Florian & Beaton, 2018). One participant described their intake policy which reflects proportionate numbers of people in society with learning differences; they class this as inclusion.

G: We accept five children with different types of learning difficulties in a class of 25 children each year, and they all work together. We do team teaching; you have to work in dialogue, and have knowledgeable, open-minded and open-hearted teachers.

Booth and Ainscow (2017, p.45) relatedly suggest that if the label of "barriers to learning and participation" replaces an individual child's label, this indicates a school aim to remove such barriers, and to embrace collaborative, whole-class learning, and whole-class quality achievement (see Florian et al., 2017). Participants put forward other strategies to eradicate barriers to learning. G: "We don't send someone away because they lack

social skills, or they can't learn enough in a timeframe". And, US: "if a child is slow at processing, maybe they need to hear what's coming tomorrow, before the others do". Another strategy is acknowledging the "lowest common denominator" and considering that in relation to the class. UK: "Having the opportunity to move around when you need to move around is great for *every* child, it doesn't have to be about one child who can't sit still". Adapting one's understanding toward a child may also assist educators. UK: "A difficulty doesn't necessarily mean the child can't learn as much as the other children; it means they always have to work harder". In relation to "gifted" children, two participants commented, UK: "it's important that we learn to think about gifted people as *not* more valuable. Within a whole-class, what you expect from each student is different". And, US: "inclusive practice is crucial. A gifted child will learn a whole lot from their peers, because they are allowed to be a child and a class member". Such statements suggest the presence of an inclusive community, and encouragement of students' emerging positions of young citizenship, where children value difference and equality.

Some participants reported on their working relationship with remedial support. UK: "I rely on (remedial) trained colleagues to give me insights in working well with individual children". A further participant refuted the 1970s onwards standard Waldorf training of McAllen, for children with additional needs:

UK: It's *totally* different to McAllen's model of taking children out of the class. The (remedial teacher) supports the class teacher to support the child; this points towards inclusive teaching.

In educating students with barriers to learning, a participant defended the approach of integration in the form of one-to-one or small group support. This can be for the purpose of, UK: "study skills, learning support, confidence and encouragement. People can get dispirited if it takes them much longer to do their work than other people". However in absolute contrast, other participants referred to this method as a redundant option. UK: "We experimented with different types of integration and inclusion. The children themselves grew quite resentful being taken out for separate classes". Similarly a participant referred to in-class over-differentiation, leading to the static integration of children (Florian & Beaton, 2018). UK: "What we absolutely *don't want* is three differentiated worksheets, for a top group, a middle group and a bottom group". A participant objected to what they felt was a denial of the need of (remedial) services in Waldorf schools. UK: "Colleagues I've worked with believe that as long as you are using the Waldorf curriculum, you don't need to think about (remedial support), which is frightening" (See McAllen, 2013; see Tunkey, 2020). Another similarly observed that a lack of take up of remedial

support results in misconstruing the support required. UK: “We are so inclusive of difference that we can fail to spot where that difference needs a difference in support as well”. This issue may need further attention.

### ***Participants’ reflections on Waldorf education***

Some participants expressed a need to address weaknesses in the current system, in order to move forward. UK: “We need to be more rigorously self-critical in terms of what we’re doing, and how we describe what we are doing”. A couple of participants asserted the need to forge connections with educationalists in the broader sphere, UK: “in a language that they can understand”. Participants from the three countries commented on the lack of inclusion in Waldorf education in terms of socioeconomic and multicultural accessibility. The predominant climate in English-speaking countries, as Waldorf education has to be private education, has moved away from what Steiner himself intended (see Paull, 2011). In 1919, US: “it was working class, local, and mixed gender from the beginning; all incredibly visionary. State funded Waldorf schools have to make compromises, but that invites real communities”. And, G: “excluded groups are those without money, knowledge, or the right languages. Waldorf communities need to facilitate a more whole-scale inclusive society”. Others raised the issues of there being a lack of standardized teacher training, and the need to improve professional standards, as well as to advance high quality continuing professional development, and institutional support for teachers.

Participants remarked on the purpose of Waldorf education for future generations. G: “Change will keep accelerating; we aim to enable children to understand and transform the world, by giving them resilience, confidence and sensitivity”. Another participant envisaged a world where young adults will have to withstand multifaceted, destructive social action, but that Waldorf education imparts G: “the sensitivity (in one) to see what’s needed in the world, and the confidence to make that happen”. One participant indicated their view of the significance of Waldorf grade school. US: “We bring values of less egocentrism, less judgement, and less indifference to the world”. And this recognition, together with social concern means that, US: “Waldorf education enables children to become confident individuals who can cope independently and happily in the world”, with emotional stability and thus young people well on the way to citizenship (see Nordlund, 2013).

School behavioral policies may be “restorative approaches” led, which can be seen as a central aspect of working toward such young citizenship, incorporating both inclusion and the child-centered curriculum. Students are guided to be responsible for their own actions and to develop a social

conscience. Anti-social behavior is challenged and students are required to reflect on this in discussion with affected parties, and to recognize the causal effects of their actions, through values of reverence for one another. This relates to the peace education movement (see Cremin & Bevington, 2017). One participant commented,

UK: having restorative approaches in our school is vital. Children see that we don't live as individuals but as social beings. It is so important how we treat other people in the world.

One hundred years ago, Mackenzie (1924, p.79) similarly wrote, “the internal order and discipline of the school and the class are passing into the hands of the pupils themselves with the most satisfactory results”. On meaningful inclusion, another participant similarly stated G: “Children need to be all together, they learn from one another. We can instill in them how to live together well”. A further participant concluded that overall, US: “the class gains from having a child with any type of difficulty. All children are diverse, and together they will learn consideration, patience, and diplomacy”. In discussing their growing social consciousness at the seventh grade, Mackensen (1994, p.ix) writes “young (Waldorf) people are occupied with the question: how can a person contribute something of value in the outer world?” Participants commented on Waldorf students’ sense of stability. G: “Our education provides an environment for the child to grow up as complete and functioning a human being as possible”. A final participant connected students’ independent, meaningful community membership with their vision for the future. US: “Our diverse range of students develop a shared social concern; they will become future innovators of their society”. Accordingly, many of the participants came up with what are effectively assessments of grade school Waldorf education as highly contributory to personal growth, and the good of society.

## Discussion

Contemporary educationalists have assessed the purpose of mainstream education as predominantly two-dimensional teaching to produce qualifications, and a longer-term conforming identity, which together produce currency for someone entering and contributing to economic society (Biesta, 2012). Popkewitz (2012) similarly talks about school students as consumers of societies’ priorities, in order to secure their own component position of employment. An identified shortcoming in conventional education is a lack of creativity. This situation is said to cause poor levels of average knowledge in math and literacy, and to limit the possibilities of innovation required for future living (Harris & de Bruin, 2018). Charlot (2012, p.218) identifies an example of this, in that conventional schools

are limited to teaching via an “object of thought”, contrasting with the teacher’s “place of experience”, where the two cannot meet; the learning is not experiential, and the teacher and student cannot share educational encounters. In absolute contrast, pedagogical recognition of the student’s “feeling-life” absorbent stage of human development allows a deep level of learning through sensory awareness and emotional engagement. Whereas, a lack of creativity in education can lead to “the overriding problem of the school pedagogy”, and can result in aspects of the employment of “operant conditioning” (Charlot, 2012, p.219; Skinner, 1953; Stein, 2018).

Typical historical methods of approaching children with learning differences were far from optimistic, maintaining, with Burt (a contemporary of Steiner), that not even special schools could remedy some “feeble minded” children (Burt, 1937, p.103). As has been mentioned, this is in direct contrast to contemporary educational values of positive endeavor, but also quite different from Steiner’s already existing principles from the early 1900s. Steiner’s educational philosophy can therefore be viewed as visionary in terms of a hundred years ago, but also importantly in relation to what mainstream educationalists value even today. Popkewitz (2012) talks about the excluding nature of conventional education, particularly affecting those with learning differences. Remedial arrangements to support learners may not attach equal aspirations of output to those of their peers, and thereby fail to advocate inclusion in either the short- or longer-term. In contrast Waldorf education uniquely holds the fundamental aim that educators knowledgeable in “human wisdom” can nurture the development of humanity in all students (Tunkey, 2020).

In the English-speaking world however, this is generally only on offer largely to a privileged population, one with the cultural capital (see Bourdieu, 2021) of financial advantage and networks, which also tends to be uni-cultural. A difference to this inequitable norm is the position of the state funded but somewhat precarious charter schools (US) and (former) Steiner academies (UK) which cater/ed for communities more equitably in financial terms, where schools are/were freely accessible (Attfield, 2021b; Attfield & Attfield, 2019). This aspect ought to be considered further, if rounded, three-dimensional inclusion is to be achieved by this movement.

Jarvie and Burke (2019, p.231) discuss the relevance of theology, and suggest its broadminded critical study for educational scholarship:

theological arguments that might otherwise be useful for understanding social processes have largely fallen from (the) field of education; (this) has turned us away from a collective deep discussion of human reality, purpose, and action for nearly half a century.

Steiner's spiritual basis for education remains central in today's Waldorf education. This underlines the need for a holistic education system that recognizes the three-dimensional child; all aspects of their development are educated, nurtured and valued. The developmental stage of grade school is that of students significantly learning through imagination, perception and feeling, all underlined by creativity, and "freedom in education" (Mackensen, 1994).

Steiner believed grade school teachers were responsible for engaging a child's interest, and enabling them to learn. Waldorf educators see that certain children need help developing the feeling senses, in order to become what Steiner would call more "incarnated", or in other words to become more educated, and thus become themselves (see Tunkey, 2020). Steiner's "soul economy" practice of wide-scale teaching was designed because he tutored a child with difficulties in learning in the late 1890s. The child who subsequently became a medical doctor was crucial to contributing to Steiner's vision (Steiner, 1907/1996). Florian and colleagues similarly advocate class membership and whole-class learning, thus enabling children to develop together in an inclusionary school community. The high regard paid to each student by the teacher in educating their "soul life" is recompensed by the development of the grade school student's social standing. In the teacher imperceptibly nurturing their "etheric" qualities, and in their unconscious leaning toward "astral" qualities, students are guided to develop respectful, inclusive relationships with fellow peers and teachers, thus establishing their own young citizenship. This assessment coheres well with the verdict already noted as that of participant practitioners.

This investigation has critically assessed the significance and relevance of Waldorf grade school education, while stressing the importance of questioning the assumptions of conventional education, and contrasting the responses of different participants with each other and with the literature. In this way the scrupulous testing specified by Huddleston (2018) as an essential component of postqualitative research has been exemplified.

## Conclusion

Waldorf grades school education has an insightful and inherently inclusive core, in its holistic pedagogy, and creative curriculum, which is devised in accordance with the development of the human being and child-focused development, centering on the "feeling-life". Branches of Waldorf practice vary in adopting models of inclusive pedagogy. Some address barriers to learning and participation through the provision of integratory support in combination with class-based activities. Other Waldorf education



practices provide insightful scaffolded support enabling children of wide-ranging abilities to function educationally and holistically, solely in whole-class learning. The formula of the Waldorf child-centered creative curriculum, plus its meaningful inclusionary practice, and the modern use of restorative approaches implemented into school systems, can be seen to prepare the ground for cultivating young citizenship. Recommendations are for Waldorf schools to aspire to embrace multi-cultural, socioeconomic inclusion, while addressing their financially precarious survival. Other recommendations are for regional and national Waldorf schools' associations to collaborate and exchange systems of practice, as well as for further Waldorf educational research to connect to other external academic education fields identifying modern innovation, while simultaneously highlighting this established and insightful, widely under-researched pedagogy of creative, social consciousness.

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