

## Key Steiner quotes on school governance with a contemporary re-phrasing: the short read – key quotes

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The context of these quotes is explained in a long paper, Waldorf Working Papers No.4, titled *School leadership and governance in Waldorf /Steiner schools: A commentary on Steiner's original ideas and practice*.

### **1919 (before the school opened)**

The administration of education, from which all culture develops, must be turned over to the educators. Economic and political considerations should be entirely excluded from this administration. Every teacher should be allowed enough time not only to teach but to be involved in administration in his field. He (sic) should be just as much at home attending to administrative matters as he is in the classroom. No one should make decisions who is not directly engaged in the educational process...The actual experience of teaching should flow into the administration. Of course, it goes without saying that such a system relies upon the highest degree of professionalism and competence. The capabilities which each child develops can best be transmitted to the community if his education is the exclusive responsibility of those whose judgement rests on a spiritual foundation. To what extent a child should be taught one thing or another can only be correctly determined within a free cultural community. How such determinations are to be made binding is also a matter for this community. (Steiner 1977: 12-13, originally published in April, 1919.)

### **1919 inaugural address to the teachers before the First Teacher Course**

We must use the Waldorf School and the possibilities it offers as a means of reforming, of revolutionizing education...it (the Waldorf School) will be an *Einheitsschule* in the sense that the education and the teaching will only focus on what the human being in her whole being requires”(Steiner, 20.8.1919, my translation).

We have to reconcile two opposing forces. We need to know our ideals and we need to be flexible enough to adapt to requirements that are at odds with these ideals. Reconciling these two forces will be a challenge for each of you and you will need to commit to it from the start, with your whole being. (trans. M. Saar, 2020, 16)

For this reason, our school will not be governed from above but administered in a republican manner. In a true teachers' republic, no teacher can hide behind the principal's instructions but each one will take full responsibility for everything that needs doing. Each must take full responsibility. (trans. Margot Saar, 2020).

We will replace the duties of a headmaster by having this preparatory seminar in which we will work to acquire the spirit that will unite the school. If we work hard, this seminar will engender in us our spirit of unity. (translation Daphne Harwood and Helen Fox, 1966)

### **1921 Parents' evening**

...all instruction [i.e. teaching] must be pervaded by a specific educational principle that can be attained only if the teachers themselves are fully involved in spiritual activity. It is not possible for them to do this if they are not aware of their responsibility to the spiritual life....If we proceed simply, according to what is prescribed for a single school year, we feel relieved of the need to research week by week both what we are to take up in school with regard to the individual subject, and how we are to present it. It should be characteristic of our teachers that they draw again and again from the living spiritual source. In doing so they must feel responsible to the spiritual life and know that the spiritual life is free and independent. The school must be self-administering; teachers cannot be civil servants. They must be fully their own masters, because they know a higher master than any outer circumstance, the spiritual life itself, to whom they stand in direct connection that is not mediated by school officials, principals, inspectors, school boards and so on. The activity of teaching, if it is really independent, requires this direct connection to the sources of spiritual life...(Steiner, 1996b, 77-78).

In the time since we began our work, we have carefully reviewed from month to month how our principles are working with the children. In the years to come, some things will be carried out in line with different or more complete points of view than in previous years. This is how we would like to govern this school-out of an activity that is direct and unmediated, as indeed it must be if it flows from spiritual depths... we are trying to develop an art of education on the basis of what anthroposophy means to us. The 'how' of educating is what we are trying to gain from our spiritual understanding. We are not trying to drum our opinions into the children, but we believe that spiritual science differs from other science in engaging the whole person, in enabling people to be skillful in all areas but especially in their dealings with people. This 'how' is what we are trying to look at, not the 'what'. The 'what' is the result of social necessities; we must apply our full interest to deriving it from of what people should know and be able to do if they are to take their places in our times as good capable citizen. The 'how' on the other hand, how to teach children, can only come through a thorough, profound and loving understanding of the human being. This is what is meant to work and prevail in our Waldorf School (Steiner,1996b, 78-9).

### **1923 in Ilkley**

The meetings are really a living 'higher education' [the origin word is Hochschule, German for a university or higher education institution] for the college of teachers- a permanent training academy, as it were. They are so-called indeed, and for the reason that every practical experience gained by the teacher in school becomes, in turn, part of her own education. And

she who derives such self-education for herself from her teaching work, gaining on the one hand a profound psychological insight into the practical side of education and on the other side

into the different qualities, characters and temperaments of the children, will always be finding something new, for herself and for the whole college of teachers. All the experience acquired from the teaching should be ‘put into the pool’ at these meetings (Steiner, 2004, 198, gender modified by MR).

### **My summary of the essentials in contemporary terms.**

Whatever organization structure a school has must be determined locally but there are a few general principles that can be outlined as follows.

Waldorf education is based on a pedagogical anthropology that describes the nature of the developing human being from the spiritual perspective (as outlined by Steiner’s Foundational ideas supplemented by subsequent research). We assume this anthropology to be generally valid for all children and young people, though each individual will experience this in unique ways. Based on this pedagogical anthropology Waldorf education has developed a set of generative principles (some of which I have described in my book, Rawson, 2021). Using these principles Waldorf education has developed a series of familiar practices (class teacher system, block teaching, main lessons, phases of learning, education of head, heart and hand etc.). These practices have been proven over time but are not set in stone and practices need to be continuously evaluated and evolve. Each Waldorf school has to agree and explain its pedagogical profile and curriculum and make this concept available and comprehensible to teachers, parents, older students and the wider public.

The responsibility for the ongoing development of the pedagogy and curriculum lies with the teachers, though this may be constrained by state regulation. Nevertheless, engaging constructively with external requirements is part of their responsibility. The development of the education involves groups of teachers in each school, and groups of teachers at different schools interacting with those in teacher education and the academic world so that there is a lively, distributed and rhizomic network of exchange of experiences, ideas, debate and research (not limited to Waldorf education but embedded in the wider educational discourse). Each school benefits from this discourse and contributes to it.

Teachers need to understand and work with Waldorf pedagogical anthropology and regularly affirm through evaluation and research that the practices are still adequate and whether they need to be modified to meet the actual needs of their students. In order to do this, the school needs to be organized so that teachers have the time, resources, training and leadership to do this ongoing evaluation and research. Therefore, they all need to be embedded in an ongoing process of (contractually required) professional development. Only then can Waldorf education claim any degree of autonomy for its education (and be in any position to defend it). National associations of Waldorf schools have a role here in coordinating and supporting ongoing educational quality development and the quality of teacher education.

The college of teachers (or whatever the group of teachers is called) is responsible for the quality of education in a school, with reference to the Waldorf discourse and wider educational science. The teachers' group can be organized as that groups sees fit, given the tasks and context. Individual teachers are responsible for the quality of their pedagogy but are accountable to the college of teachers and the school leadership. The school's legal body is accountable for the quality of the education in the whole school in relation to external authorities and therefore needs to have the organizational powers to manage this educational quality process.

School leadership has to do with articulating a common vision and justifying this in terms of the principles of Waldorf education. Vision sets the direction of the school and determines its values and intended qualities (e.g. inclusive, non-discriminatory), including the quality of decision-making processes and ensuring adequate planning and accountability. Leadership means taking medium and long-term perspectives on the school, trying to get the whole picture and is a kind of stewardship- it is not *my* or *our* school- *we* serve it and the education that lives within it. Teachers are naturally close to their classes and individual children and not only have an ethic of care but are also advocates for them, which is vital, but school leadership is another function and requires wider perspectives. Leadership involves listening to students, teachers, parents and to the wider world to identify needs and recognize the future as it emerges, and then determining what actions need to be taken.

School leadership makes policy and ensures that areas such as human resources are justly, efficiently managed with respect for local employment law. School management is about realizing this vision in practical terms (timetable, staffing, funding, organizing) and school administration is maintaining an appropriate flow of information and communication, documenting, maintaining levels of safety and safeguarding of students and staff, organizing and maintaining resources including care of buildings and grounds.

Ideally people who take on leadership roles have a depth of pedagogical experience in Waldorf education and still have the opportunities to do some teaching or be culturally productive. All teachers and leaders need initial training in school leadership and educational management and have the opportunity for regular professional development in this field.

