

# School leadership and governance in Waldorf /Steiner schools: A commentary on Steiner's original ideas and practice. The long read

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## Introduction

School leadership and governance are important and distinctive aspects of Waldorf education. For many people, the notion of the autonomy of the teacher and self-administration are absolute core values of the education, non-negotiable bottom lines that are intrinsic to and essential for the education. For some people and institutions the necessity for self-governance is the main reason why Waldorf schools can never exist in the public or state education sector, because by taking money from the state - in whatever form- the schools give a greater or lesser part of their autonomy away. In many parts of the world, they remain elite schools for well-off, middle class, educated minorities. Other parts of the Waldorf movement see state funding as essential to making the education socially equitable and accessible, and the price of regulation- which is after all the democratic responsibility of government- is one that is reasonable to pay. And they believe that high quality Waldorf education may be further by having professional school leaders (i.e. people whose main or only role is school leader).

One could also say that the notions of autonomy and self-governance are also the main reasons why many Waldorf schools struggle to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society, being unable to adapt until the process of decline leads to fewer children and even fewer qualified teachers. Self-governed schools are not always able to cope with quality issues, failing teachers, parental complaints and other crises, let alone face up to the rigorous demands of school inspections and school regulations. Even where school leaders are appointed there is often a residual feeling that this is not what was intended and is somehow wrong. Some teachers feel disempowered by school leaders and feel that the school is less Waldorf. In German Waldorf schools, where self-governance is still practiced in most schools, large sums of money are paid annually for consultancy fees for coaching and training in the arts of self-administration, without any obvious sustainable improvement. There has also generally been a lack of pedagogical innovation, though this may also be explained by the innate conservatism of the Waldorf movement.

## Paradoxes

There are paradoxes and ambivalences in the notion of self-governance. Are we talking about individual teacher autonomy or school autonomy? Are all teachers equally autonomous and how does teacher autonomy align with collegial self-governance. Does collegial self-governance mean consensus and unanimity in decision-making? Does collegiality include all teachers or just some (what about non-teachers?) and by which criteria is this decided (and by whom)? What role do democratic processes play? Does this involve voting, requiring simple

majorities (51%) or strong majorities (e.g. 80%) to make decisions? What about accountability and questions of Waldorf quality? Does self-governance cover only pedagogical activities in a school and which activities are not pedagogical (e.g. salaries, budgets, employment contracts, building projects)? Can teachers determine their own pay and benefits? If a school is dependent on parental fees, can it be said to be autonomous and what role, if any, should and can parents have in Waldorf schools, especially in schools founded by parents for their children. Can a Waldorf school be a private business or be funded by a private business? This paper does not answer all these questions, it merely documents what Steiner said about school governance and offers a comment about what he might have meant.

There is a widespread view that there is a way that Waldorf schools are supposed to be governed, just like there is a view that says, there is a single, definitive, original Waldorf curriculum and that specific Waldorf practices that belong to the system (8 years class teacher system, school readiness tests, we must teach the Old Testament in class 3 and Norse Mythology in class 4, foreign languages can only be taught in regular subject lessons, lower school children should be at home by lunch with their family). Steve Sagarin (2009) has listed over 20 ‘Waldorf myths’, not including these. Above all there are a lot of second-hand interpretations of how things should be that claim their validity with reference to Steiner or venerable Waldorf ‘elder’.

#### Intentions of this paper

My purpose in this paper is to draw together some of Steiner’s key ideas regarding school governance and put them in their historical context, partly to understand them better but also to show that they were often situated and specific to the situation of the Waldorf School in 1919 in Stuttgart. Many ideas about how a Waldorf school should be governed that have had a long-term impact on the growth of the Waldorf movement, claim their validity, sometimes wrongly in my view, by reference to the ‘origins’. There are what might call origins myths. For this reason alone it is necessary to re-visit the origins and take a closer look. I believe that many of these ideas have been misunderstood and some good ideas have never been taken up and implemented. I also believe that the first Waldorf School was not a good example to follow (it had Steiner as educational director and chairman of the board and it was initially funded exclusively by Emil Molt). I believe that there are many ways Waldorf schools can be governed that would meet the needs of the education. Thus I want to re-visit the ‘origins’, so that we can draw out the ideas that function as heuristics and then move on and apply these generative principles to develop new ideas.

I do not discuss more recent work done on Waldorf school leadership and management. That would take another paper- perhaps a book to explore more recent ideas and practices and to contextualize Steiner’s ideas in contemporary organizational theory. It would certainly be worth doing. My feeling is that we first need to do the history and then move on.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919 Steiner opened the first teachers' course (which I refer to here simply as the Foundations) for the people who would be the teachers in the Waldorf School, with some preliminary remarks, in which he outlined how the school would be governed. This short address comprises a statement of intent and thus has particular significance for ideas about Waldorf school governance. I will pick out what I think are the key ideas and comment on them. I offer my personal view of what generative principles can be drawn from Steiner that can guide us to develop new effective methods of school leadership. The reader can find these on the last page.

#### Reading Steiner the narrator

As in many themes in Steiner's works, we are not dealing with a structured and systematic plan, programme or carefully argued theory of school governance (like something that Steiner's contemporaries Max Weber or Georg Kerschensteiner might have produced) but with a form of documented orality, though to be fair he did produce a theory of society in book form (*Towards Social Renewal*, 1977, in revised translation, 2018) in which education was an important part, and he wrote a series of newspaper articles (Steiner 1985). However, as Ulrich Kaiser (2020) has pointed out, Steiner was primarily a narrator, a story-teller in the highest sense of that word, who spoke without script to specific groups of people in specific situations. He gave over 5,500 public lectures and the number per year increased towards the end of his life. The founding of the Waldorf School came after a very intense period of public lectures on the social threefolding.

Steiner worked on his lecture style over many years, starting as student in Vienna in his work with Karl Julius Schröer, practicing and refining and observing the effect on his audience. Later in Berlin at the Workers' Education Institute, he gave courses on public speaking. Eye witness accounts, even among contemporaries who were not anthroposophists (e.g. a journalist from the Manchester Guardian, see Paull, 2011) testify to the power and liveliness of both his presence and his speaking voice. He seems to have created an atmosphere that drew people into the theme, so that a kind of energy seemed to flow back and forth between Steiner and his audience. He wasn't just delivering a speech to a passive audience; it was a performance in which the audience inwardly participated, like a ritual. What impressed people who witnessed him talk was the fact that he spoke freely with no reference to a script or notes, maintaining eye contact with members of the audience throughout, sometimes drawing on a blackboard to illustrate his thoughts, using what we would today call a kind self-scribing. The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk joked that Steiner invented powerpoint, and in international art circles Steiner's blackboard drawings are more famous than all his other works (Kugler, 2007). Steiner's notebooks show that he jotted down only a few words, often lists and sometimes short outlines of ideas, but did not refer to them in his lecture, even such for complex themes such as the lectures of the First Teachers' Course.

Steiner clearly had that quality that is called charisma, in the sense outlined by Max Weber, but he did not use this as an instrument of control or manipulation but rather as a way of mediating knowledge. Ulrich Kaiser has opened up a whole new chapter in understanding Rudolf Steiner by applying contemporary narrative theory and hermeneutics. It is not possible to go into this fully but I draw a few key thoughts from his work, which unfortunately is only available in German. Therefore, I summarize some of the main points relevant to this theme:

1. Anthroposophy is narrative with a purpose; anthroposophical ideas are intended to direct our attention to the spiritual aspect in ourselves and from there to understanding the spiritual in the world.
2. The narrative lives in the moment; anthroposophy is not a compendium of knowledge that can be googled, but rather is emergent when we live and experience it, that is, it arises when we *do it*. Narrating has the function of bringing knowledge into being and making it experiential for those participating.
3. Narrative is situational; it relates to the narrator and the audience in the situation they are in. This means that records of the narration lack the immediacy of the moment and only permit careful reconstruction through thinking.
4. Narrative is productive; it produces an affect on those present. An affect is our response to sensations at the boundary between I and non-I and is prior to the experience and the emotions that accompany it (Massumi, 2002). It is both produced by the narrator and re-produced by the audience who actively open themselves and listen. Steiner himself spoke of three levels of listening- submitting to what is said, rebelling against what is said, and thirdly, simply letting ideas work in one and observing what effect they have (GA94, 41). One could call this dialogic listening.
5. Steiner's narrative is what he experienced; he himself said "I only narrate, I don't invent"(GA 253, 161), for as he put it in a letter to Rosa Mayreder "I don't teach, I tell stories about what I have inwardly experienced. I tell it as I have experienced it" 4.11.1894, GA 29, 231). He narrated in wide range of modes, including lectures, verses, mantras, choreographies, dramas, stories, private letters and conversations .
6. Steiner intended his lectures, but also his dramas, verses and mantras and even his books to be transformative in the listener, reader, audience, meditator, in that the recipient becomes active in her imagination and generates her own experiences prompted by the performance.
7. Narrative as opportunity; the listener is given the opportunity of an experience but is free to take this up or not.
8. Steiner is often describing things for which there is no unambiguous terminology, which is why he frequently describes the same or similar things with quite different words.

Comment: We should distinguish the inner intentions of lectures or talks from Steiner, from newspaper articles and books. In his narratives he was actively engaging with his audience in terms of shared intentions. If you publish education theories in books and articles, you have to found them on arguments and relate them to the existing literature. At the academic level this can be mean casting your net wide and backing this up with references. If you do this in politics or journalism, you can counter this with less formal arguments. If you present it verbally, you bring it all into the moment in order to move people, to activate the will and lead to action. This is effective if you are in a hurry and don't have time to convince the armchair critics, outmaneuver the political opposition, and you are speaking to those who have come to listen to you because they already know you have something interesting to say. The borderline to demagoguery is fine but discernable for the audience: if the speaker leaves you free to identify and act or not, then it is on the right side of the line.

### The threefold social order

As we know the Waldorf School was a child of the movement for Social Threefolding. In his book *Towards Social Renewal* (Steiner 1977), in newsletter articles and lectures during the tumultuous leading up the founding of the school Steiner made a number of important statement about school governance. In the Newspaper, *The Threefold Social Order*, Steiner wrote the following:

at every level, schools mold human beings into the form the state requires for doing what the state deems necessary. Arrangements in the schools reflect the government's requirements. There is much talk...of striving to achieve an all-round development of the person, and so on; but the modern person unconsciously feels to completely a part of the whole order of the state that he (sic) does not notice...that what is meant is molding the human being into a useful servant of the state" (1985, 70).

This is followed by the oft-quoted sentences saying that no one should determine what a young person should know or become in order to fit into the existing social order, but one should rather allow the latent capacities within them to develop, and "the life of the social order will be what is made of it by a succession of fully developed human beings" (ibid. 71). The beautiful risk of education, as Gert Biesta (2013) calls it, is trusting that if not molded to fit the existing structures, the rising generation will develop what society needs though what this will be, is fundamentally unpredictable. "It is neither for the state nor the economic life to say: we need someone of this sort for a particular post; therefore test the people that we need and pay heed to what they know and can do what we want" (ibid. p72). A healthy relationship between state and education can only be achieved, he went on to say, "if schools and the whole education system are placed on a footing of self-administration." (Steiner, 1985, p 72). Thus the care argument for school autonomy is established.

This core idea was outlined in Steiner's book, *The Threefold Social Order*:

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.)

Therefore, the administration "of educational institutions, the organization of courses of instruction and their goals should be entirely in the hands of persons who themselves are simultaneously either teaching or otherwise productively engaged in cultural life. In each case, such persons would divide their time between actual teaching (or some other form of cultural productivity) and the administrative control of the educational system" (Steiner 1985, p.73). Technically speaking in today's terminology, the organization of course and curriculum is the task of educational leadership, rather than administration.

Comment: Educational purposes, aims and outcomes should be defined and developed by educationalists and not bureaucrats and should be free of the expectations of the economy and the state, not because of some ideology but because anything else would simply reproduce the existing social and economic order, which was not great and had led to the catastrophe of the First World War. Do we see the state and Big Business today as the model for a just, ecological and socially equitable society? The OECD tries to tell us how to educate our children and waves the big stick of the PISA league tables, though it is the only big institution that keeps saying loudly that schools should be more inclusive, less exclusive and more equitable and use collaborative methods and focus on creativity and not learning standardized facts.

Following Steiner's threefold principles, the state would have the responsibility to ensure equity of access and guarantee high minimum standards. Steiner frequently referred to what he called *Winkelschulen* also called *Heckenschulen* or *Klippschulen*. These were a byword for unregulated small private schools in urban centres without qualified teachers that offered



poor quality education to the lower middle classes or aspiring working classes. Waldorf schools should avoid becoming *Winkelschulen*. In other words, they should be professional, have adequately qualified teachers, meet the regulations and offer a good quality of education. If schools were well-governed, they would not become *Winkelschulen*.

### The inaugural Address on the evening of 20th August 1919

The future teachers and guests gathered in the Landhausstrasse in Stuttgart on the evening before the Teachers' Course began the following morning. At this meeting there was no stenographer present and the text was compiled from notes made by Emil Molt and Karl Stockmeyer and edited by Erich Gabert. At the inauguration of the Foundations course for the teachers in the Waldorf School, Steiner explained core task of the education and outlined the basic principles of school governance they were going to follow. He started by pointing out that compromises with the state's requirements would be necessary and that this would require both flexibility in how they applied their ideals, and also certainty about the work. We should bear in mind that we do not have an exact account of his words.

In the inaugural Address speech on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919, Steiner dropped in several key phrases that can only be understood in the context of 1919 Germany. One of these was *Einheitsschule* and the other was *Lehrerrepublik* (teacher republic) and I will explore these below in a little more detail.

Steiner begins by reminding all present that founding the Waldorf School combines the aims of the social movement of renewal with a renewal of spiritual life and if therefore should be seen as a significant cultural act. He anticipated radical change in the world and the task of Waldorf education is to make a contribution the 'burning issues of the day' including the reform of the school system. The Waldorf School is to be a model for the renewal of education and an example of the practical and effective power of anthroposophical ideas in the world. The school was to be a great cultural significance and,

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, 19.8.1919, my translation).

However, compromises will have to be made because the state has prescribed the worst imaginable educational aims and final outcomes but think most highly of them. But these aims and outcomes will (in future) treat people generically and manipulate them to reproduce the ideal citizens. As an example of what is to come, he refers to the revolutionary education reforms in Bolshevik Russia at that time.



Later he insists that the school is not a *Weltanschauungsschule*, that is a school with a particular world view, that the children would not be taught ‘anthroposophical dogma’ but rather “we will strive to apply anthroposophy and what can be gained from it for education in general and for the method and practice of teaching in particular “(Steiner, 2020, 17).

Comment: Waldorf education has a cultural task to counter the forces of standardization and total control exercised by ideologically-driven governments. It was to show how the ideas of anthroposophy could be applied practically in education, though compromises will have to be made. It would be interesting to know what information Steiner had about Bolshevik education reforms. One can imagine that revolutionary schools in the midst of revolution and civil war were not ideal but the ideas behind them may be more interesting. Steiner would certainly have been aware of Krypskaya’s (Skatkin & Cov’janov, 2000) educational theories for a socialist school, which combined her reading of elements from Marx (polytechnical education should be a blend of productive practical and theoretic work), Tolstoy’s ideas (education should follow and foster the development of the child) and Dewey’s ideas (each subject can contribute something different to the overall development of the child). Her book *Public Education and Democracy* was published in 1917. Steiner does not refer to any other educational reformers.

Interestingly, some of the ideas associated with the Waldorf School were also being expressed elsewhere at the same time. In his research on the founding of the Waldorf School, Wenzel Götte (2006, 154) found a document in Steiner’s archived material entitled *School Problems in the Revolution* written by Alexander Schwab, published by Max Weber and others in 1919. It deals with questions about what a socialist school would look like. It shows how this aligned in some key respects with Steiner’s own ideas. Steiner has underlined a series of statements in the text including the following: a collegial system would substitute for the directorial system, new forms of learning would need to be found to replace authoritarian forms such as teacher lectures and control of learning outcomes, the pedagogical aims should include the planned and early educating of all the abilities relating to the whole integrated spiritual/bodily organism, school based on cognitive learning (*Lernschule*) should be replaced by a work-school (*Arbeitsschule*), using learning through doing, quality education should be available for all to overcome the class system, the structuring and organizing of education should be in the hands of teachers as workers, education should be autonomous, including freedom of curriculum. As Götte points out, all these ideas were part of Steiner’s concept and had been since his first works on threefold social structuring.

It is remarkable in many ways how little Steiner referred to the educational ideas of the Reform Pedagogy movement from 1890 to 1918, which was marginal in terms of actual impact of schools but involved a lot of ideas that bear a family resemblance to Waldorf education, though in terms of school governance they had little to offer.

Then we come the next key passage, which begins as follows (first the German original):

Zwei widersprechende Kräfte sind dabei in Einklang zu bringen. Auf der einen Seite müssen wir wissen, was unsere Ideale, und müssen wir noch die Schmiegsamkeit haben, uns anzupassen an das, was weit absteht von unseren Idealen. Wie diese zwei Kräfte in Einklang zu bringen sind, das wird schwierig sein für jeden einzelnen von Ihnen. Das wird uns nur zu erreichen sein, wenn jeder seine volle Persönlichkeit einsetzt. Jeder muss seinen volle Persönlichkeit von Anfang einsetzen.

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)

Comment: The crucial idea here is that there is a dialectic relationship between the ideals and possible practice and how the ideas of Waldorf education can be adapted to the context within which the education has to be practiced. This will only be possible if the teachers engage fully with the education.

The relationship between ideal and actual practice is interesting in the First Teachers' Course. Steiner more than once over the next two weeks refers to an ideal curriculum (*Ideallehrplan*) that needs to be adapted to the given circumstances. At the beginning of the course, there is a clear sense that the time is not yet right for anthroposophical education, that compromises have to be made. But when we look at what the ideal curriculum consists of, it begins to become clear that the term ideal can be understood in different ways. For idealists, anything less than ideal is imperfect, a weak compromise, making the best of a bad situation. However Max Weber (down the road, as it were, from Stuttgart in Heidelberg in 1919) was developing the notion of the ideal type (*Idealtypus*) as a heuristic tool or thought image (*Gedankenbild*) for the social sciences. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes the idealtypus, citing Weber as follows:

The methodology of “ideal type” (*Idealtypus*) is another testimony to such a broadly ethical intention of Weber. According to Weber’s definition, “an ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view” according to which “*concrete individual* phenomena ... are arranged into a unified analytical construct” (*Gedankenbild*); in its purely fictional nature, it is a methodological “utopia [that] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality” [Weber 1904/1949, 90]. Keenly aware of its fictional nature, the ideal type never seeks to claim its validity in terms of a reproduction of or a correspondence with reality. Its validity can be ascertained only in terms of adequacy, which is too conveniently ignored by the proponents of positivism (Kim, Sung Ho, 2021).

The ideal type in Waldorf education is the content of the Foundations (by which I mean Steiner's pedagogical anthropology and its implications for education). The ideal type for the curriculum is the actual development of the children (e.g. see Steiner's Methods of Teaching 4<sup>th</sup> September 1919). As Steiner puts it, "We cannot immediately create the social environment that a Waldorf school should live in, which means that much will come towards us from the present social environment that will interfere with our ideals. We will only be good teachers, however, if we know the relationship between ideal curriculum and the curriculum we need to follow..." (Steiner, 2020, 194, M. Saar trans.). In a similar way the ideal hebdomatic, seven-year developmental phases do not actually exist anywhere today (the average age of start of puberty in girls is 11 and in boys 12 years). Individual developmental trajectories run counter to standard models and interfere with them, setting up vital moments of interruption in which the individuality comes to expression. The ideal type gives up a theoretical point of reference, an imaginary Archimedean point or series of points, that we can orientate ourselves to. Furthermore, by constructing an ideal-typical developmental trajectory through the curriculum, teachers providing children with a flexible framework to harmonize individual developmental pathways within the heterogenous learning community of the Waldorf class.

### Self-administration

This passage is then followed by the key sentences:

Deshalb werden wir die Schule nicht regierungsgemäß, sondern verwaltungsgemäß einrichten und sie republikanisch verwalten. In einer wirklichen Lehrer-Republik werden wir nicht hinter uns haben Ruhebetten, Verordnungen, die vom Rektorat kommen, sondern wir müssen (hineintragen) dasjenige, was uns die Möglichkeit gibt, was vom uns die volle Verantwortung gibt für das, was wir zu tun haben. Jeder muss selbst verantwortlich sein.

The school, therefore, will have its own management run on a republican basis and will not be managed from above. We must not lean back and rest securely on the orders of a headmaster; we must be a republic of teachers and kindle in ourselves the strength that will enable us to do what we have to do with full responsibility. Each one of you, as an individual, has to be fully responsible. (translation Daphne Harwood and Helen Fox, 1966)

Therefore, we will organize the school not bureaucratically, but collegially, and will administer it in a republican way: In a true teachers' republic we will not have the comfort of receiving direction from the Board of Education. Rather we must bring to our work what gives each of us the possibility and full responsibility for what we have

to do. Each one of us must be completely responsible. (Trans. Robert Lathe & Nancy Parsons Whittaker, 1996)

For this reason, our school will not be governed from above but administered in 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).

Comment: Translators have struggled with the words *regierungsgemäß* and *verwaltungsgemäß*. *Regierungsgemäß* literally means 'according to (a/the) government', 'like a government' or 'in line with government policy'. This is contrasted with the term *verwaltungsgemäß* that follows and literally means, administratively. Of course governments also have and had administrations. In Germany, then as now, the regulation of education was in the hands of civil servants, whose legal loyalty is to the state and government. Thus the opposite of the state bureaucracy, which is top down, has to be a horizontal, non-governmental administration. The word *Verwaltung* originally meant having power over something, to control or direct something, but also being responsible for something on behalf of a higher authority (e.g. an estate manager). The history of *Verwaltung* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century implied a contrast or even conflict between having public control over something or having private control. In France and Prussia in particular, influenced by the Chinese Mandarin system, *Verwaltung* (usually translated as administration), meant a civil service, which was understood in Enlightenment terms as being rational and conducted by people with proven capabilities (i.e. by virtue of having had a specific education and having passed rigorous exams). In terms of governance, administration was an instrument of the executive, legislature and judiciary (e.g. the prison service). In totalitarian systems the administration is often organized in ideologically loyal cadres. The administrators or bureaucrats are non-elected officials and therefore outside of the representative system. It was not an exclusively European system, but was known to Arab, Persian, Chinese, Inca, Ottoman empires. The Ashanti Empire in West Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, for example, had a highly sophisticated bureaucracy that also exercised checks and balances on the rulers.

The English word administer goes back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and referred to the act of giving, dispensing, managing, and serving, but also implied helping, assisting, guiding and cooperating. In the English language the word bureaucracy, which came from the French, originally referred to the means by which the English colonial government tyrannized people such as the Irish, but by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century it had become a more neutral term.

The sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) used the term bureaucracy in more neutral sense of governance based on fixed rules by professional administrators. Weber described the distinction between traditional and modern societies; "in traditional societies individuals belong to groups that perform multiple, overlapping roles and constitute social selves that

pertain to all aspects of their lives...In contrast, a ‘modern’ society typically has ‘rationalized institutions’ in which it is a person’s ability to perform specific tasks that counts more than other aspects of his or her social self’ (Monaghan and Just, 2000, 64). Because of their scale and complexity, modern societies need to be governed by logic and rationality and therefore the quintessential modern institution is the state or corporate bureaucracy. Ideally such a bureaucracy should be run by people chosen for their abilities, adequately qualified and trained and able to make impartial, rational decisions based on evidence and following strict and written rules. Crucial to this ideal is the separation of the bureaucratic administration from political decision-making process. Weber was in no doubt that this ‘iron cage of rationality’ meant a loss of the sense of spiritual integration of the individual within social life.

In Weber’s view, legitimacy in traditional societies was based on divine sources experienced by people through direct participation, in modern societies legitimacy is based on rationality, efficiency and the instruments of performativity. Although he articulated the notion of the disenchantment of Modernist society, Weber himself is well-known to have been interested in and influenced by various esoteric streams. This has been well researched by Josephson-Storm (2017), whose book explores the close relationships between esotericism and modernism and has a final chapter on Rudolf Steiner’s contribution. Locating Steiner in what was a much wider field of quests into developing a modern form of spirituality that could reform capitalism is an important field of research yet to be undertaken by those who understand Steiner.

Therefore, one can question whether Steiner’s term *verwaltungsgemäß* is helpful today, however it is translated. Modern school management theory distinguishes between leadership, management and administration (e.g. Bush, 2011). Essentially, leadership is understood today as having intentional influence over processes in a school that can be exercised by individuals or teams. Leaders motivate and can articulate the vision and values of the school, so that others can understand and share this. Leaders take the initiative for change or recognize initiative in others. Management is the implementation of policies and procedures, and administration involves the practicalities of documenting and communicating.

### Replacing the school principal

The next brief passage is also important.

Ersatz für eine Rektoratsleitung wird geschaffen werden können dadurch, dass wir diesen Vorbereitungskurs einrichten und hier dasjenige arbeitend aufnehmen, was die Schule zu einer Einheit macht. Wir werden uns das Einheitliche erarbeiten durch den Kurs, wenn wir recht ernstlich arbeiten.

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)

We can create a replacement for the supervision of the School Board as we form this preparatory course and, through this work, receive what unifies the school. We can achieve that sense of unity through this course if we work with all diligence. (Trans. Robert Lathe & Nancy Parsons Whittaker, 1996)

We will replace the need for a principal with this preparatory course where we will engage in a practical study of what it is that makes the school truly comprehensive. By working together earnestly we will achieve this. (M. Saar, 2020)

Comment: The challenge connected with this idea, however it is translated, is seeing the alternative to a school principal (head teacher, directors or any higher authority) in the preparatory course. At one level a principal potentially can impose a unified interpretation of the task, I say potentially because even top-down hierarchical structures don't guarantee that everyone understands things the same way, though they may pay lip service to directives. Unity can only be attained in superficial ways by directive. A unity of purpose, perhaps of methods in a Waldorf school potentially can be arrived at by teachers working together on the Foundational ideas that Steiner introduced in the preparatory course. The problem with this idea is that it is uncertain what unity means among free-thinking autonomous people. Does it mean solidarity, consensus, a unified pedagogical approach (meaning what exactly?), a truly comprehensive school (comprehensive in what sense?)?

The sense begins to become clearer when one looks at what gives the school its coherence.

### Einheitsschule: a brief history

Let me return to the notion of an *Einheitsschule*. This term has multiple meanings. Historically Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767 to 1835), one of the leading figures in the German Enlightenment and a major thinker in the field of *Bildung*, developed the idea of a general education that would transcend the idea of specific educational approaches for the various social classes, in which students would succeed on the basis of their achievements and not on account of their social origin. Such Einheits-schools were to be secular and devoted to preparing children (boys) to be capable citizens. However, the idea was rejected by the monarchy and social elites. Each major political reform in Germany from the 1848 Revolution, via the famous *Paulskirche Constitution* to the *Weimar Constitution* in 1919 failed to challenge this dogma of a stratified school system. Even today Germany still has a selective school system, alongside comprehensive schools.



One of the Deputies at the *Paulskirche Conference*, Pauer, wrote that schools should be allowed to educate children in a free atmosphere, free from all church influence and free from utilitarian demands and above all free from the state, indeed children and youth should be protected from such influences. Teachers should orientate themselves to the needs of their pupils and should do so through the strength of their personality and character (quoted in Leber, 2000, 50). Stefan Leber (2000, 51) also quotes Adolf Lasson, a German commentator in 1871, saying that the first affliction of the school system was the bureaucratic form of its governance and that no area of public life, except the army and the post office, was so bureaucratic as schools. Lasson believed schools should be autonomous and should form themselves from within.

In the context of the November Revolution in 1918 many revolutionaries saw the overthrow of the existing school system as a vital goal and a movement called New Schools calling for *Einheitsschulen* was formed, within which parts of the Reform Education movement aligned. A Workers School was founded in Berlin-Neukölln in 1919 with the support of the socialist and communist parties. Some socialist politicians campaigned for publicly funded, secular and co-educational schools with a unified curriculum, which is what the Waldorf School became. However, in the discussions leading to the founding of the Weimar Republic, an educational compromise was adopted, which allowed *Einheitsschulen*, though without funding, thus privileging traditional selective schools, though later in Thüringen in Eastern Germany, *Einheitsschulen* were permitted with funding. Later, they were to be discredited as communist, especially after the communist GDR continued this tradition.

Through the various major reforms in Germany, no one in Germany questioned that the provision of education was the duty of the state. The Weimar Constitution did at least allow the possibility that citizens could found their own schools if they met the state's requirements, which was already law in Württemberg (thus making it possible to found the Waldorf School with its own curriculum and without state-qualified teachers). The only thing the spectrum of political parties involved in the National Convention, which sought to draw up and agree the Weimar Constitution, from right wing nationalists and the Catholic parties to the social democrats and socialists, could agree on was that there should be comprehensive schools (*Einheitsschulen*) but there was no agreement on what form they should take, otherwise everything should carry on as hitherto. The notion of *Einheit* or unity could mean all things to all people; for state or church school, conservative or socialist schools for the children of workers, in all cases, the unifying factor was the dominant ideology of the education. Every political party wanted an education that reflected its ideology.

Steiner's reference to the Waldorf School being an *Einheitsschule* therefore must be seen in this context. As in all his social theory, Steiner is basically saying that only a spiritual perspective makes sense. Even the socialists and Marxists, with whom his differences regarding the role of capitalism and its alienation of the workers were minimal failed to



understand that social justice could only come through recognition of the spiritual dimension and that the Waldorf School was to be proof in the field of education that anthroposophy's understanding of the spirit was right and would lead to social justice. The problem was not socialism as such in Steiner's view but middle-class *socialists* claiming to speak for the proletariat, whom he claims have an intuitive sense of the spiritual (see Steiner, 1985).

In the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949, the state has a duty of supervision over schools, though the rights of parents to found schools as valid substitutes for the state's duty of provision is enshrined in Article 7 § 4. This has proved to be of great benefit to the Waldorf schools in Germany since 1949, since they are eligible for state funding with, until now, relatively little direct regulation.

Before exploring what Steiner might mean by his reference to a teacher republic, I will look at the esoteric structure that Steiner gave to the college of teachers on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919.

Comment Steiner located the founding of the Waldorf School within an historical context of educational reform and yet he also distanced his concept from those ideological understandings. His notion of an *Einheitsschule* initially incorporated social inclusion but understood the unifying factor at another level. Critics could say that Waldorf is also an ideology and that therefore the Waldorf School was a *Weltanschauungsschule*- that is a school with a particular world view. As we shall see below, this understanding is a question of perspective.

### The College Imagination

The well-known 'unprinted' pages from the lecture on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1919, again reconstructed from several participants' notes and memories rather recorded by a stenographer, is a classic example of Steiner as narrator, generating a profound experience in the hearts and minds of those present. I encountered this first in the early 1970s in a hand-written copy handed to the founding College of Teachers at York Steiner School by our patron school Michael House which is sadly no longer operating. The esoteric nature of this text was clear from the way this ritual was conducted, quite apart from the content. The text has been publicly available since the 1990s.

The ideas that Steiner asked the participants to imagine, and any group of teachers can try to repeat this sequence of thoughts, uses images with names drawn from esoteric Christianity and Judaism and using terminology from the early Greek Gospels, best known outside of theology from the works of Dante and Milton, or in the architecture of medieval Church buildings such as the Chapter House at York Minster, a circle chapel, which offers a metaphor in stone of the three levels: the seats for the bishops, behind and above each an angelic being. The architecture of the octagonal space is self-supporting, reaching up to a

keystone with a carving of the Holy Spirit. Those meeting below sit as equals, as peers in an octagon facing each other, each on a throne. The consultations weave together in the form symbolized by the high domed ceiling, allowing the Spirit from above to inspire them.

The idea is that each participant invokes imaginatively the activities of the beings at each of three levels. The first level connects each participant to a spiritual being referred to as an angel, traditionally the messengers of the spiritual world. They are a source of the individual strength and the power required to participate of what could be called the spiritual community of teachers. Through the angel the individual can experience powerful imaginations, which are spiritual thoughts that take the form of a visual image- one can see something that is true. The next level up involves what flows from one to the other in the community and gives courage and inspiration. Steiner uses the image of archangels. The weaving of consciousness between the members of the community creates a metaphorical chalice form that is open to intuition and wisdom at the third level of activity. Here the image of archai as spirits of the times is used. Though the Christian angelology was obviously important to Steiner, not everybody has access to this esoteric background and even those who do, cannot be certain just exactly what Steiner had in mind, and others may simply not wish to engage with it. However, this should not be allowed to get in the way of what is a very central idea underpinning Waldorf self-governance. I believe it is also possible to think of the three levels as stages in a process.

Much has been written and spoken about the College Imagination. Let it suffice to mention some of the more obvious aspects for the question of school governance of what an esoteric meditative process is. We may understand the angel as a process through which we shed our egotistical interests and perspectives and open ourselves to what is emergent within us, perhaps connected to our innermost biographical intentions. It is certainly the case that in any structure of school governance high levels of personal initiative, responsibility and social awareness are called for, without which, regulation and direction are necessary. If individuals are not capable of the self-awareness, self-control of egotism, self-interest and defensiveness that any healthy organization depends on for a trusting basis between colleagues, then no one can complain if self-regulation is not trusted, and control becomes necessary. This amount of honesty and seeing one's impact on others from outside ourselves, takes, and probably generates, strength of character. Forgiving others their weaknesses is the precondition that others tolerate and accept our weaknesses on the understanding that we are willing to learn from mistakes.

Being open to what others bring, even when they cannot articulate it clearly requires courage, as does freely giving what one has worked on. Sharing experiences and perspectives, seeing things as others see them, means leaving one's own hard-won positions. Creativity comes from inner movement, trying out something new, and above all from being inspired by others. That is the quintessence of teamwork. It is not just effective; it is uplifting and makes

things possible that wouldn't happen without opening to others and to the world. If this can be achieved in the service of the education, the children and the school as a learning organization, then it is more likely that it will be able to encounter and recognize the future as it emerges. Otto Scharmer's Theory U is an application of the ideas behind the College Imagination. He and his colleagues at the Presencing Institute have developed social techniques to realize this esoteric vision in everyday organizational life. What in Steiner's day was still esoteric has begun to become widely practiced in many disciplines, including science today. Author Zajonc (2016) has developed what he calls methods of contemplative inquiry that draws on similar sources. Waldorf education is in many ways way behind in developing this idea, which has taken on a life of its own, beyond Waldorf. Taken together with the approach that Steiner (1982) presented a year later in 1920 that he referred to as meditatively acquired knowledge of the human being, which suggested how teachers can generate pedagogical knowing-in-practice, Waldorf teachers have tools for inquiry, research and enabling ability that also underpin school governance, but these remain largely undeveloped.

The College Imagination is a powerful counter to the notion of teacher autonomy. I need strength of thinking, feeling and willing to be creative in my pedagogical tasks but I do it freely in the service of the whole and because that is the case, I must expect to be transparent and honest and let others see and judge what I am doing. This requires courage, but if we do it, then as a whole learning organization, we are open to what is emergent. If I do what I do because I think it is right and the best possible action, the archangel level cannot be activated. We remain isolated and individualistic. When we operate as a self-critical and appreciative team, we bring out the best in each other, and in doing so we foster our own creativity. Jürgen Smit, former Leader of the Pedagogical Section said at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Waldorf School (in my words), there are high beings that accompany Waldorf education. Some are like midwives help schools bring this education into being, but other accompany the death of institutions. It depends on what we are doing as to which high beings are present. He not busy being born is busy dying, as Bob Dylan put it.

When Steiner spoke about establishing unity among the teachers, or establishing a coherent educational approach (as opposed to everyone doing her own thing, or simply reproducing a tradition) in the Address on the 20<sup>th</sup> August, I don't think he was thinking of unity in the sense of uniformity, and certainly not in the sense of aligning with a particular ideology. I think he imagined that there would be discussion, debate, lively exchange and argument. We get some hint of this in the transcripts of the teachers' meetings with Steiner, though I imagine teachers were generally on their best behaviour in his presence. People were encouraged to speak their minds (which for many requires strength) but at the same time be willing to be countered (which takes courage) and that by developing such a culture, they would be able to illuminate the many complexities that emerged. There is a fine line between

being a school with a clearly defined world view or ideology and a school in which everyone aligns themselves (or pays lip service to) anthroposophy.

Comment: It may be that Steiner hoped that Waldorf teachers would all be adept at self-development through meditation and the exercises he had offered, but the reality was and is certainly another. It may be a generational thing that it has only been possible in recent years to call on social exercises to structure the processes of working together, and even then, many colleges of teachers do not practice this. Teachers obviously need to do three things, if self-governance is to work at all:

1. practice self-development and honest reflexivity,
2. practice group development using social techniques and non-violent communication,
3. develop shared understandings of the education.

The fact that Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* valorizes autonomous thinking is no guarantee that everyone in an anthroposophical institution can actually do this. Indeed this has been one of the core problems of school governance over the four teacher generations since Steiner (see Alain Denjean's article characterizing these generations, 2017). There has been an expectation that 'real' Waldorf teachers are anthroposophists, or at least are working out of anthroposophy though what this means is ambivalent. At any rate, status and recognition are granted to those who can talk anthroposophy with conviction and perhaps with insight. There is no obvious corollary between this skill and being a good teacher, but that is difficult to ascertain in a school culture of closed doors, monarchs in their small fiefdoms and lone heroes.

Another aspect, that I believe has weakened Waldorf school governance is the anthroposophical emphasis on the I. Despite Steiner's social ethic, which links the well-being of the individual to the well-being of the community, there is little sense that the Self (as spiritual core of the person) comes to inner development only through the other. Anthroposophy has been called a system of self-illumination and the Self is very much seen as the most important part of the human being. I do wonder if this hasn't encouraged earlier generations to create role models of individualism, charismatic leaders, single keynote lecturers within Waldorf education. The shadow side of the lecture is that unless one can play the role of narrator like Rudolf Steiner or Joseph Beuys, the lecture form offers a particularly one-sided and masculine form of communication. One person stands in front of the others, often for over an hour, and lectures to the others, who sit passively looking at him. Interaction is not expected (perhaps a few questions at the end). The lecturer is freed from the need to prove or support what he says but can convince through rhetoric skill. A lecture can be an act of self-presentation and is of course competitive, especially in conferences with many speakers. There were times when a 5-day Waldorf conference 'enjoyed' three or more lectures a day, followed by lengthy, often undramatic performances (Goethe's Faust or

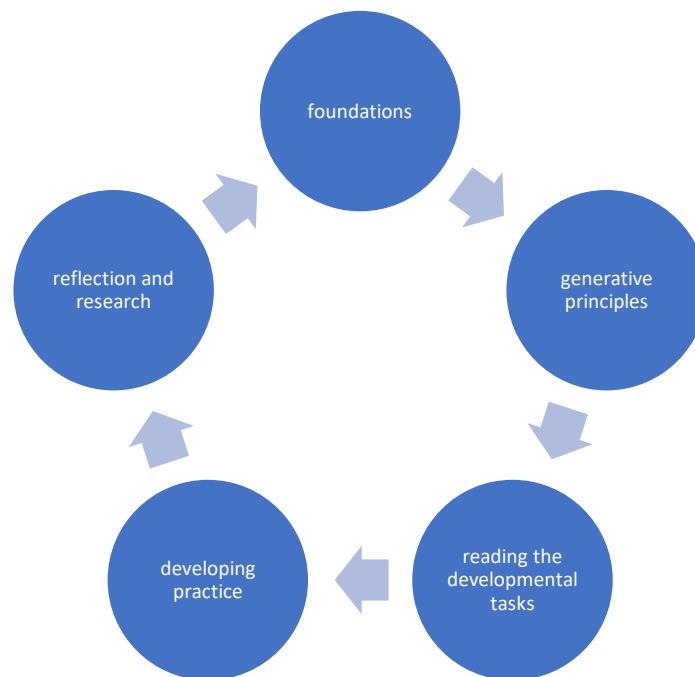
Steiner's Mystery Dramas). The trend today, is away from mass conferences with wall-to-wall lectures, towards group discussion and forums with participation. The Waldorf community has not really mastered the art of the 18-minute TED talk.

### The function of the teachers' meetings

Steiner developed his accounts of the function of the teachers' meetings (called *Konferenzen* in German) over the years, though the core idea was consistent. The primary function of the college of teachers, was to establish the pedagogical coherence of the school through working together on the ideas of the Foundations. The primary reason that teachers have to work together is so that they can develop their pedagogical approach, their curriculum and everything that flows from this, on the basis of an anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology. As Steiner put it elsewhere,

It is not about founding schools within the existing school system in which one practices a kind of surrogate teaching based on the courses I have given, because it is about the principle that pertains in this area of society- namely autonomy in the spiritual life... Don't call people together and give them the false idea one can simply remain in the old system and found Waldorf schools, because there is no programme and no curriculum, but rather there are teachers with actual abilities, not rules and directives that say what they should do and how much (Steiner, lecture Stuttgart 15.2.1921- GA 338, MR trans.)

That situation was not just because the Waldorf School was still new. It is the basic model, only modified by the fact that the more practice grows and develops, the more the teachers stand in this stream of practice. The stream flows from Steiner's pedagogical anthropology- what I refer to here as Foundational knowledge- and what has been developed from it over the past 100 + years (e.g. a fuller accounts of the senses and especially the sense of language, a coherent learning theory and salutogenic understandings of health, to name just a few additions to the original). All meaningful Waldorf practices derive from understanding how the pedagogical anthropology can be applied in practice (such as the idea of the main lesson, block teaching, the role of the class teacher, experiential learning, working with living concepts etc.). These generative principles are applied to develop curriculum relating to the time and place. Curriculum is not just what is taught, it includes how and why, where and when it is taught, and includes the school culture and teacher dispositions. Practice has to be continuously re-created in each situation. That is why schools need teachers' meetings that are effective places of teacher learning. The unified approach that Steiner referred to on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919 is established and continuously re-established by teachers working on the pedagogy together, creating, reviewing and recreating it. Practice is always related to the developmental tasks facing the children and young people. The ongoing process of developing Waldorf practice can be graphically shown as follows:



*Figure 1. The cycle of practice starting from the Foundations: the actual task of the teachers' meetings*

Such a cyclical process is iterative; our reflection and research should lead us back to the foundational ideas again and again, each time bring new insights to those ideas, new horizons of understanding. Furthermore, I do not see Steiner's foundational pedagogical anthropology as a closed book but rather as a remarkable composition, a work of art, that can firstly be 'translated' in the sense of Walter Benjamin (1996) by going back to the source and finding other words to express the core concepts, and secondly, can be expanded, as Steiner himself did (for example in 1920 when he introduced quite new aspects in the lectures known as 'meditatively acquired knowledge of the human being', Steiner, 1982).

In a lecture in Torquay, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1924 (Steiner, 1995) outlined what the function of the teachers' meetings were; they are the heart and soul in the school organism, study to develop capacity and which starts from sharing experiences, creating unity among the teachers, and generating vitality for the teachers through engaging with the Foundations. In Ilkley, two years before, Steiner elaborated the metaphor of the school as organism, with the teachers' meetings as the heart and the contact with the parents being equivalent to the sense organs, mediating what is happening in the world. The educational principles determine the organizational structure, "the organization of the school is conceived so that each activity has its place and fits into the whole. Individual subjects are introduced into the school from this perspective...nothing should be introduced artificially to the school [because it is good for the children]; everything should arise from life itself" (2004, 179).



He also made it clear what level the work in the teachers' meetings should have.

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).

Today we would call this practitioner research. Steiner's analogy with a university and academy makes it clear that he had high expectations about the quality and seriousness of the work.

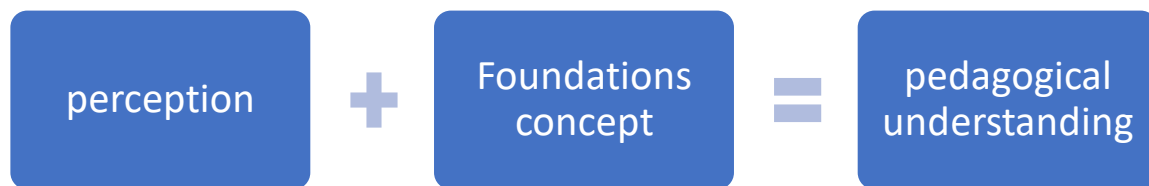
At a parents' evening in the Waldorf school in 1921, Steiner informed the parents why the school was self-administering and did not rely on teachers being civil servants of the state, or on school inspectors, principals and so on to control and direct them,

...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).

It is interesting to consider what Steiner meant by spiritual activity. On one level it almost certainly means meditation, perhaps even prayer, but thinking was the primary spiritual activity that Steiner's theory of knowledge was based on. Thinking is the activity of matching the perceptions we construct on the basis of what our senses convey to us, with appropriate

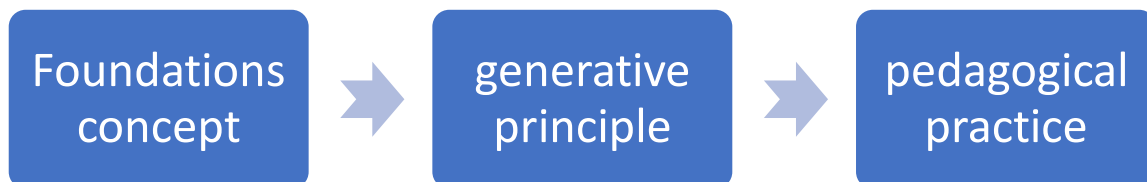


concepts that make sense of the perceptions. As I have shown elsewhere (Rawson, 2020 a & b), the basic idea of Waldorf teacher education, based on Steiner's own method, is hermeneutic study of and meditative work on the ideas in the Foundations so that teachers become disposed to interpreting their pedagogical perceptions through the lens of the Foundation concepts. That is, they learn to read the pedagogical situation in terms of anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology. We can formulate this graphically:



*Figure 2. understanding pedagogical situations using Foundation concepts*

The reverse process is also important, that is, starting from the Foundation concepts and generative principles of the education, we can develop practice.



*Figure 3. Developing practice from Foundation concepts and generative principles (and as shown in figure 1 is part of an iterative cycle of professional development).*

In the same parents' evening Steiner then made it clear that the Waldorf approach was not fixed but needed to be continuously reviewing and amended.

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 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).

This is a clear description of practitioner research and evaluation of practice. Steiner goes on to say that a profound interest in the children, anchored in collegial work combined with "honest upright intentions with regard to humanity's spiritual, economic and political renewal and progress, stands behind our college of teachers and all those who work for our school." (ibid., 79-80).

It is also interesting to note how the esoteric aspect of the work of the teachers is linked to the practical management of the school. At the Annual General Meeting of the Waldorf Association, of which Steiner was the chairman of the board, in 1921 Steiner expressed this as follows:

This spirit of the Waldorf School has increasingly become something living, something that one finds, that one is touched by, when one enters the Waldorf School. In this respect, we can say, from a proper assessment, that we can only report good things; we can hope that through the formation of the spirit we are striving for, we will gradually be able to provide clear proof that the Waldorf School will be able to achieve its goal. This is to be said about the spirit that prevails in the school, in the teachers' conferences, about the spirit that was noticeable in the way of thinking, in the attitude of the teaching staff for me, who had to examine this.

...I may say that in the teachers' conferences, which have been held in my presence, and also in my presence during the lessons, which have also taken place several times in the course of the two years, what I have now discussed has certainly come to light. That, in a nutshell, is what has to be said on the one hand; on the other hand, however, something else has to be said. I believe that I was fully justified in saying in all kinds of talks before and during the opening of the school that the task of the Waldorf School can only be fully fulfilled if other such schools are founded very quickly. With a single school, of course, nothing can be delivered other than a model in terms of

pedagogy and didactics... Of course, such a model is only a beginning in our times, when it is necessary to bring the spirit into the whole educational system in the sense of the threefold structure of the social organism, which demands a truly free spiritual life with regard to education and teaching.

The spirit that is meant can only be achieved by spreading the Waldorf school idea as widely as possible. The Waldorf School must be followed by others, and this naturally depends on interest being shown in the widest circles. (17.6.1921, GA 298, MR trans.)

This speech has several interesting aspects. Firstly, Steiner is being accountable to the Association, he is giving a report of the school's development based in his evaluation by visiting lessons and teachers' meetings. Secondly, the spirit of the school- and it remains ambivalent whether Steiner is using a metaphor here or referring to an actual being, because on other occasions he addresses the Spirit of the School (in English the use of capital letters would establish if this is the proper name of a being or figurative speech). A third reading would be to see that the being of the school is actually something like what we would call the school culture today, that is the sum effect of the actions, talk, thoughts and feelings of everyone involved, though in a school, the teachers obviously have a big input into the school culture. So, school culture is emergent and at the same time real, that is, it is a being that emerges. This could be what Steiner meant in his inaugural address on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919 when he spoke of that which unifies the school. On the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1921 Steiner (1996b) gave an address and wrote a verse for the laying for the Foundation Stone for the new school house. The verse begins;

Es walte, was Geisteskraft in Liebe  
Es wirke, was Geisteslicht in Güte  
Aus Herzenssicherheit  
Aus Seelenfestigkeit  
Dem jungen Menschenwesen  
Für des Leibes Arbeitskraft  
Für der Seele Innigkeit  
Für des Geistes Helligkeit  
Erbringen kann....

May there prevail in young human beings what spirit power can furnish in love, May there work in them what spirit light can furnish in goodness, Out of certainty of heart and firmness of soul For the body's ability to work, For the soul's inwardness, For the spirit's brightness. (Trans. Catherine Creeger, 1996, Anthroposophic Press).

The translation of the verb *walte* (from *walten* meaning to exercise power) in the first line with prevail is beautiful and implies a forceful process successfully applied against

resistance. Other translations have used “May here reign spirit power in love”, which retains Steiner’s brevity. Reign, rule, prevail are all verbs of governance. Who rules what? The spiritual power of love acts in/through young people. The verse goes on (here only the English translation)

To this end let this place be dedicated. May young sensibilities find here a human caring endowed with strength, devoted to light. Those who place this stone Are mindful in their hearts Of the spirit that is to prevail here, That this spirit may secure the foundation on which liberating wisdom, strengthening spirit power, and the manifest spiritual life Shall live, reign, and work.

The human caring (in the original *Menschenpfleger*, literally, ‘carer of people’) is the primary task of the teachers, who are to be ‘mindful in their hearts’ so that the spirit of the education and the spiritual dimension are relevant for life.

In the same speech to Association- the legal body responsible for the Waldorf School- Steiner goes on to make it clear that pedagogical decisions should be in the hand of the college of teachers (a request came from a member of the association to visit lessons, which was turned down because it might disturb the pedagogical process) but that the teachers should be unburdened by the questions how the school should be financed, or indeed how new Waldorf schools could be founded and served with support.

Steiner reiterated his idea of the college of teachers in lectures in Switzerland (Dornach, 22.4.23), England (Oxford, 23.8.1922, Ilkley, 17.8.1923, Torquay, 19.8.1924) and The Netherlands (Arnhem, 21-22.7. 1924).

Comment: The message is clear: the teachers’ meetings are not for management and administration but for study, pedagogical exchange and research. The sources for this work are the ideas of the Foundations and the observations made in the classroom. Through the pedagogical work, the learning and the relationships, a school culture (spirit) can emerge, which in itself has a beneficial effect on the whole school.

For those readers who want to read all Steiner’s key statements on school governance, Francis Gladstone (1997) has collated these and provided a commentary in his little book *Republican Academies*. In German I did the same (Rawson, 2001).

### A teachers’ republic

In Steiner’s inaugural address he said the school will be administered in a *republican* way in a *true teacher republic*. The meaning of this hinges on the meaning of the term republican as used by Steiner. The term in Steiner’s usage is essentially the classic Roman principle of *res*

*publica*, meaning, matter of the people, that is, the main alternative to government by a single, often non-elected authority. It also suggests delegation and elected representation, usually meaning governance by the people through representation by individuals of equal status.

Republicanism has a long history in political theory but following the Enlightenment ideas of Locke, Rousseau and Kant in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century it came to mean a form of government based on the consent of the governed and on a social contract and it embodied the central idea of disinterested and rational civic virtue. It was seen as an alternative to the tyranny of a monarch, or a state bureaucracy or indeed later, mass democracy. Kant, for example, saw direct democracy in the form of majority rule as a form of despotism since it limits the freedom of the individual. Rousseau's view was that each individual stands in a relationship to the state, thus obviating the need for political parties (see Rawls: 2005).

Republicanism in the context of 1919 in Germany meant above all the alternative to the monarchy or the rule of many small principalities and dukedoms by one or other form of aristocratic hierarchy. Since the unification of the German states into an empire in 1871, Germany had had an imperial Kaiser. In 1918 the Kaiser was persuaded to abdicate, and Germany became a reluctant republic, eventually the Weimar Republic with a constitution. The phrase "rational republicanism" was coined to describe the commonly held view of many intellectuals that a republic was the most sensible form of government under the circumstances (Wirsching and Eder, 2008).

The term teacher republic, however, had a very topical meaning since the founding of the Weimar Republic and the democratic elections based on the Weimar Constitution on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1919. During and following the November Revolution soviets or workers and soldiers' councils (referred to as *Räterepublik* meaning workers' councils or republics) were established in many large cities (not only in Germany but also in Austria and Hungary) along socialist and communist lines, many of which ruled for several months. The Revolution began with the uprising of sailors in the imperial navy on Kiel, which set up a sailors'/soldier's council to rule the city. The story of the Kiel sailors and workers republic is instructive. The Social Democratic Party in Berlin sent two of its most experienced politicians to Kiel who then took over the leadership of the council. This led to a dispersion of the troops and sailors, who were sent back to their home cities. This diffused the Revolution but distributed armed revolutionaries around the country (Kinzler & Tillmann, 2018).

The *Räterepublik* movement quickly decided in a national congress to move to a democratic model of parliamentary elections. In the chaotic context of early 1919 there were widespread political murders of mainly left-wing figures, including the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, with whom Steiner had worked for nearly 5 years in the Berlin Workers' Institute. Wilfred Jaensch, co-founder of the Berlin Waldorf Seminar after the fall of the Berlin Wall, has suggested that the spiritual relationship between Steiner and Rosa Luxemburg was profound. Jaensch, who

himself stepped down as an academic in the 1968 student uprisings and spent many years doing manual work as a labourer, commented shortly before his own death;

Rosa Luxemburg designed the programme at the Karl Liebknecht Workers' Education School and Steiner was employed there as a lecturer. Then she was killed, he was already in Dornach. He never commented on it. But he founded the school for workers' children in September 1919, after Rosa Luxemburg had been killed in January 1919. When I see that he is working with these children and wants to make the best possible school for them, I think I can discover that he spoke with the deceased. Because he once again took up this impulse from the workers' education school for the children. Even though Rosa Luxemburg expressed the idea of freedom differently from Rudolf Steiner. For her, freedom was always the freedom of those who think differently. Ideally, this also applies to anthroposophy (Langer & Jaensch, 2010).

The *Räterepubliks* were ultimately defeated by right wing militias and government troops, funded by major industrial interests. History has shown that some of the soviets did good things under very difficult circumstances, others made decrees but couldn't implement them and were fully occupied establishing themselves. The experience of the communist *Räterepubliks*, however, made many people wary of direct democracy. Even without the Kaiser, the new German republic retained many cultural and political attitudes belonging to the previous era. Republicanism has an element of elitism about it because people are theoretically elected by virtue of their abilities, powers of judgement and assumed lack of self-interest or as representatives of a certain factions or interests in society. People with adequate private resources are sometimes assumed to be less motivated by self-interest. Theoretically judgements in republican political life should be based on arguments and the common good. Individuals who are elected are then expected to make decisions based on their own judgement rather than on the wishes of their constituents. Debates are supposed to be conducted on the basis of argument rather than on political interests, that is, agonistic rather than antagonistic (Pettit, 1997). In democratic systems, political parties are expected to represent the interests of those who elected them, or those who funded their election. Theoretically republicanism sees elected individuals acting on behalf of the common good- the *res publica*- whilst democratic electoral processes work with majorities and representatives who reflect the interests of the people who elected them. In reality of course political systems are far more complex. It seems unlikely, however, that Steiner intended the Waldorf School to have a political structure.

When Steiner spoke of a "true teachers' republic" recent history must have been in everyone's minds. The word 'true' is presumably said to distance the idea from the often militarized soviets and their political leaders. However, by saying true, Steiner was presumably referring to the more philosophical notion of peers working collegially together in the interests of the school- the *res publica*, the common matter.



Within the Waldorf movement there has been a degree of unfruitful controversy about whether Steiner favoured an elitist but non-self-interested form of republicanism against democracy within the school. Steiner used both terms when referring to the governance of the Waldorf School and sometimes even combined them as ‘republican-democratic’ (e.g. in the teacher’s conference 16.1.1921). In an influential article Ernst Lehrs, one of the early teachers in Stuttgart, entitled *Republican not democratic* (published in Germany in 1966 and in English in 1987) promoted the view that an aristocratic form of republicanism was required. He based this idea on the Ancient Greek notion of *aristokratia* meaning literally “rule by the best”, which originally did not refer to a class based on birth and privilege but was based, he claimed, on merit. This originally applied only in a military context, referring to leaders among the *aristoi* the best warriors drawn from the ruling class. This idea was important to Lehrs and he speaks of the need for an aristocratic function in which the “best” –*aristoi*- i.e. most suitable, are empowered by the “demos” the people i.e. the teacher citizens in the true teacher republic, to take up office and use their initiative in the common interest. Lehrs’ notion of the *aristoi* was also linked to his view of the spiritual inspiration behind decision-making. The ‘best’ were in Lehrs’ terms, those most spiritually advanced, or those most attuned to the spirit of the school.

Clearly, any self-appointed spiritual elite is not likely to gain common support and recognition today. We have experienced too many bad examples of Kings/Wise Men (*aristoi*) and Shepherds and fortunately in most Waldorf schools or national associations, the era of the charismatic and elitist leaders has long gone, having served their function of getting things done. Nevertheless, the principle that the teachers in the republic are capable of recognizing competence in areas of leadership or management is a valuable one to hold onto, especially if competences are clearly defined and assessed in practice.

By insisting that every teacher take full personal responsibility, and social renewal depends on people being capable of taking responsibility, Steiner was showing what democracy is actually about. It has to do with the mutually formative relationship between the individual human being and the social structures the person grows up within. This process is fundamentally democratic because, as Bo Dahlin puts it;

According to this view a democratic society is characterized by making it possible for each individual to develop his or her own innate potential and then allowing society to develop in accordance with the abilities and the creativity that is released in this way. This means that the future development of a truly democratic society is, actually, unpredictable. The logical consequence of this idea is that schools are to develop the inherent positive abilities of all children, without considering what the state and/or economical agents currently believe that the nation needs. (Dahlin, 2010, 50).

The point about the domain of rights within Steiner’s threefold social order is that agreements and laws must be made democratically and applied equally to everyone. It is therefore



important to distinguish between making agreements collectively and individuals making decisions based on their own insight and conscience. Rules and procedures that are agreed democratically, which means based on a majority vote, are also the preconditions for individual freedom, or rather they map out the limits of individual freedom. Yes, there have to be limits to individual freedom in order to rein in egotism and self-interest and to foster collective systems that protect the weak and distribute what belongs to us all, such as health care, education, social security, healthy food, access to clean air and water, protection of natural habitats (i.e. finding the balance between human needs and nature), renewal resources and land in common ownership. Governments need to regulate these things and guarantee freedom of religion, science, art and expression.

This does not regulate the individual decisions people make, it merely creates conditions under which they have the right to make choices. Individuals who freely choose to act outside the law or social agreement are in a sense also free to do so, but they must live with the social and legal consequences of their actions, and the motives for doing so should be social and not egotistical (as Bob Dylan put it, “to live outside the law you must be honest”). Sometimes civil disobedience based on conscience is necessary for individuals, who may hope their example will lead to a change in the law because laws need to change, just like constitutions need to be adapted to changing circumstances. At the level of a school, which does not have laws and very few legal sanctions, agreements are made by procedures that have been agreed by the existing and acknowledged system for making decisions. These agreements are just as morally binding as actual laws, even if they can’t be enforced so readily. That is what democracy means.

Since Steiner (and since Lehrs’ article) there has been a lot of discussion interpreting Steiner’s intentions but is actually very hard to imagine what went on in the minds of people in the 1920s in Germany and to imagine what their understanding of democracy was, since most of them had never participated in it. My sense is that notions of democracy and republicanism were theoretical and ideological. Until 1918 and Steiner’s development of a three-fold social structure, he made very few references to democracy. It was not a significant part of anthroposophy.

More recent approaches in Waldorf schools take the ideas of contemporary organizational development into account. The problem with organizational development is that most of it does not relate to the education process and the school management literature addresses conventional schools with different concept of education, one that focuses increasingly on optimizing outcomes and is based on top-down structures. Nevertheless, in my view there are ideas about democratic education, common schooling and holistic leadership from which Waldorf could well learn (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, Fielding & Moss, 2011, Osberg & Biesta, 2008, 2020, Wood and Woods, 2008, 2012).

Comment: Steiner's terminology is historically located but also has a general meaning. A republican form of governance means that the leadership serves the interests of the whole - the education, the students, the staff and the school - and it is non-hierarchical. School leaders need democratic legitimacy and have to take full personal responsibility for their actions. An organization derives its energy and renewal from its members, and it has to ensure that its members get the support they need.

It is the role of leadership to define and articulate the values and vision of the school. This assumes a process involving all the teachers, perhaps not on a weekly basis but frequently enough that all active staff understand what the principles are and perhaps periodically explicitly acknowledge their validity or modify them by common consent. Core policies outline the purposes of the school and the quality of the relationships and processes this requires. Such values may be enshrined in founding statutes and may be the explicit criteria for other Waldorf schools recognizing this school as a Waldorf school and member of its association. They can be elaborated into policies and strategic plans and made available to all as a mission statement or vision or set of guiding principles.

### The original School organization

Dietrich Esterl (2006), a teacher at the Freie Waldorfschule Uhlandshöhe (the continuation of the first Stuttgart Waldorf school) and historian, has researched the origins of the school using archive material in the school. He has drawn up an organigram of the school's organization as it was during Steiner's time as director. It comprises three concentric spheres around the central activity of teaching and learning, which he describes as the productive activity of the organization. Around this is the body of teachers organized into meetings responsible for leadership, organizational management, educational study, meetings of teachers in specific classes or faculties (class conferences or subject conferences). Around this are the structures of the legal framework of the school such as a board of management of the school association. This is the legal body responsible for the ownership of the buildings, the employment of staff and the management of resources. Finally, around this is the realm of parents, friends and supporters of the school and links to the wider community. Curiously missing from the structure is Steiner himself who was both the official school director and in reality, the educational director and chairman of the Association. During the illness that led to Steiner's death in 1925, he wrote a letter to the College of Teachers in Stuttgart handing them

full collective responsibility for the school and for other new schools that had been or would be founded.

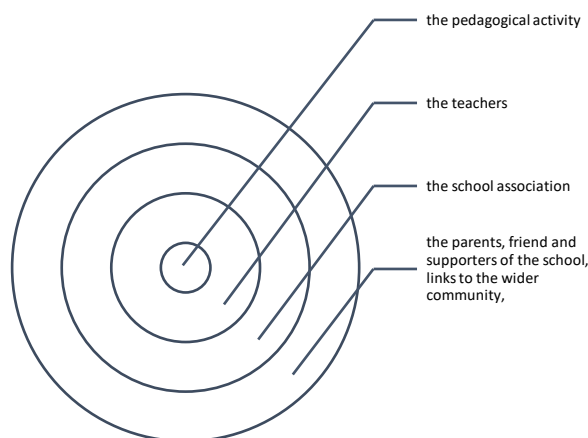


Figure 4. Organizational structure of the Waldorf School (after Esterl, 2006)

Schools are public and accountable institutions and must have some kind of legal form. In many countries Waldorf schools adopt the form of not-for-profit, charitable associations with members drawn from the teaching body, co-workers and parents. Some are formed as foundations or cooperatives. Usually, these forms require the election of some kind of management council drawn from the members. One of the tensions in school governance has arisen with regard to the assumption, based on Steiner's threefold social principles, that only teachers should make decisions about the education. This has often been interpreted as meaning that teachers should decide everything and run the whole school, using the argument that everything in a school has pedagogical significance. This is then at odds with the fact in many countries that employees (i.e. teachers) legally cannot be their own employers (i.e. cannot sit on the board of management). In many schools' teachers are regular members of the school association with voting rights like parents. The members of the association elect a council or board of management who act as an executive. In other schools, the teachers appoint representatives to sit on the board/council, though they may not be in a majority.

Clearly there are different forms of legal status in different countries, and these have to be respected. The generative principle, however, is that teachers should be responsible for the education and the quality of the pedagogy. How that is internally organized must fit within the given legal framework. To some extent it is possible to distinguish between strictly pedagogical questions such as the curriculum, matters concerning individual pupils, teacher education, and matters of organization, finance, buildings, outreach and so on. Thus, pedagogical decisions can be made by teachers and everything else can be decided by 'mixed' groups of teachers, parents and members of the school council or board. The

appointment of teachers is usually done by teachers, even if formal aspects such as employment contracts and budgets are a matter for the council of management, which ultimately is the legal body representing and being financially accountable for the school and its financial accounts. One can of course be quite ideological about these issues and insist on strict separation of powers, but this rarely leads to social harmony within the school. The reasons for having a *teacher republic* are not ideological but a practical recognition of the fact that pedagogical decisions should be free from the influence of the state and economy interests (and also the personal interests of parents) and should be based on individual needs for learning and development of the person. That respects the sovereign integrity of the individual. Only those close to and responsible for these processes are likely to have the necessary insight, which in effect means that the teachers (including their role as parents, if they have children in the school) must take a professional distance and act in the interests of the students and the school as a whole.

Questions involving legal or social agreements, such as employment contracts or procedures agreed by those involved, are not governed by the principle of individuality but of equality and fairness. Teachers are not free to work according to their own timetable and they have to abide by the agreements and regulations agreed by due process within the school, or indeed by statutory requirements of the law (such as wearing masks during a pandemic if that is required by law). Most arrangements in a school have the character of binding agreements based on due process – especially within the kind of flat, non-hierarchical structures that ought to pertain in Waldorf schools. Such agreements only make sense if they apply equally to all and are binding for all and if they are reviewed and reaffirmed at appropriate intervals.

Regarding the economic sphere of productivity, schools are cultural institutions and not businesses and thus do not produce a service or product with a market value, though private schools may in fact ‘compete’ in a marketplace of other providers and to some extent their fees function as a price. Following Steiner’s threefold social model, teachers and other workers in a school should earn enough money to enable them to do their work and support their families *within* the budgetary possibilities of the school. Clearly if schools exist in the private sector, their fee structures and salary structures must align and the schools must find sufficient ‘clients’ capable of paying whatever fees are needed.

There are in effect two possible solutions, given that Waldorf schools as cultural institutions also wish to be inclusive; either the school charges high enough fees to pay the teachers what they need to do their work, or the fees are kept low and bursaries are provided to enable all, or as many children as possible access to the education, with the consequence that teachers are paid minimal salaries. This often means that the schools can only employ people who have other jobs to meet their financial requirements or are financially supported by their partners or families. There is no magic solution to this dilemma. In a pioneer situation teachers may be more willing to make sacrifices, later less so (speaking personally).

Therefore, private schools need to tap into other revenue sources or garner regular donations. A series of case studies of the various models of funding and maintaining Waldorf schools that have been tried and tested around the world would be instructive, as well as being a tribute to the sacrifice, sense of service and ingenuity of Waldorf parents and teachers. The effect on children of knowing that their school community is doing everything to be equitable is incalculable.

Comment: In a Waldorf school it is necessary that the teachers are solely responsible for the pedagogy as regards teaching and learning. Individual teachers are responsible for their actions, and they are accountable to the school as a public institution. The institution and specifically the college of teachers and the school's leadership are responsible for the quality of education throughout the school. The school requires a legal framework and a body that is accountable for the institution financially and legally.

## Conclusions

The first and most important conclusion we can draw from this interpretation of Steiner's ideas on school governance and the practice in the original Waldorf School is that we cannot find an organizational model that can be applied to schools today. When people naively ask, what is the correct way (in the sense of what is faithful to the original model or true to Waldorf principles) to organize a Waldorf school, we should advise them that there is no correct way in terms of specific forms. The social, cultural and legal context in every country is different and allows only certain forms of structure and governance. People often do not realize that the way things are done in their country and the way Waldorf schools have historically developed, reflects the local cultural assumptions, expectations and legal frameworks in different countries.

What lessons can be learned from Steiner's ideas on school governance? I would like to summarize my interpretation by in effect re-writing the Inaugural Address as follows.

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 faculty 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 they 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.

Yilan, 25.7.2023

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