



Frequently Asked Questions

How did Waldorf education begin?

In 1919, Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher, scientist and artist, was asked to establish and lead a school for the children of employees at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany.

Steiner agreed to do so with four conditions: the school must be open to all children, it must be co-educational, it must be a unified twelve year school and the teachers who work directly with the children should take the leading role in administering the school, with a minimum of interference from governmental or business concerns.

These conditions were met and the first Waldorf School was opened in September 1919.

Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) was a remarkable man by any standards, a man who left a lasting legacy, not only in education, but also in the fields of music, drama, eurythmy, architecture, medicine and agriculture.

After a brilliant career as a scholar, scientist, philosopher and writer, Steiner decided to openly discuss his inner faculties of spiritual perception, which he had known and developed since childhood. It was not until after the First World War and the massive social upheaval that followed in its wake, that Steiner's ideas gained wider recognition. Many people, among them doctors, farmers, business, scientists, priests and teachers sought him out for advice and help.

How many Waldorf schools are there and how are they organised?

There are over 700 Waldorf schools in some 32 countries serving in excess of 100,000 students. Each Waldorf school is independent responding to its own unique situation and constituency.

Yallingup Steiner School receives government funding which requires us to meet obligations set by the government. In order to satisfy one of these requirements we offer a Steiner curriculum integrated with the government's Curriculum Framework.

What is Waldorf Education?

Waldorf education is a unique and distinctive approach to educating children. Waldorf schools are dedicated to fostering creative thinkers who will engage life with confidence and curiosity and develop a strong sense of personal responsibility and reverence for life.

What is unique about Waldorf education and how is it different from other types of schools?

Waldorf schools are based on a consistent philosophy and understanding of the nature of children and how they grow and learn. Waldorf schools seek to educate the whole child, integrating academics with emotional and spiritual growth and physical skills.

The Arts play a big part at all levels as do movement and craft. Self-expression, self-discipline and the wholeness of life are the key elements teachers weave into every lesson. Schools often describe the whole child orientation as *head, heart and hands*.

Waldorf teachers aim to foster a genuine love of learning within each child. Through the skillful interweaving of arts and activities, students naturally develop their own internal motivation to learn.

Some distinctive features of Waldorf education include the following:

- ✦ Children learn as much as possible through direct personal experience and interaction with people, materials, subjects and ideas. In this way children become more personally engaged in whatever they are learning.
- ✦ Kindergarten and first grade set the stage for later academic learning while containing little direct academic material. Specific types of play, story-telling and artistic activities cultivate the skills that will make academic learning more interesting and effective in later years.

Learning in a Waldorf school is a non-competitive activity. Testing and grading are not used to motivate study.

Why do Waldorf schools discourage TV watching?

The value of television viewing and computer use for young children is being questioned by many people who are aware of the needs of young children. Apart from the questionable content and the reliance of the sense of sight in isolation from the other senses, primary school-aged children need movement and play for healthy growth. Every minute spent before a screen is a minute lost in creative activity.

At Yallingup Steiner school we wish to foster the children's imaginative capabilities. For this reason the bulk of our teaching is through stories of one kind or another and the children have to call on their imagination to fill out the stories. Television and computer images are ready-made and work against what we strive to achieve at school.

Why don't you have computers? Don't children need to learn computer skills?

Waldorf primary schools generally do not support the use of computers in educating young children. However, Waldorf high

schools in Australia do include computers as part of the high school curriculum. Material learned through computers arrives purely as information. Knowledge gained through direct personal experience and integrated into a broader understanding of life and the world is considered more vital than technology based on educational needs.

A recent book, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds for Better and Worse* by Jane Healy examines the subject in greater detail.

Do the schools teach religion?

Steiner schools are non-denominational; therefore children of all religious backgrounds attend Waldorf schools. However, attention is given to the spiritual dimension which is aimed at awakening the child's reverence for nature, humanity, and the beauty of life.

Our celebrations are continuously evolving and we look to including significant festivals of other cultures.

What kind of role do parents play?

Parents play a significant role at a Waldorf school. Since a Waldorf education concerns a child's whole life, communication between parents and teachers is frequent and important. Parents participate in special events and festivals and help on committees. The school offers occasional educational seminars and classes for parents. Active participation in school events by parents is beneficial for everyone.

How do children from Waldorf schools fare when they transfer to regular schools?

Generally the transition to public school, when properly planned, does not cause a problem. The most common transition from a Waldorf Class 6 to a traditional high school usually takes place without significant difficulties. Transitions in the lower grades, particularly between the first and fourth grades, can be problematic because of the differences in curriculum and the pace of learning.

What is Anthroposophy?

The term 'Anthroposophy' comes from the Greek 'anthroposophia' or human wisdom. Steiner believed that people are at essence spiritual beings. Many of his ideas came from his personal research, using scientific methods, into the spiritual realm. Through study and practiced observation, the student of anthroposophy awakens his or her own inner nature to the spiritual realities of outer nature and the cosmos. The awareness of those relationships brings deep personal gratification and a greater reverence for all of life. Steiner and others since him have applied this knowledge in various practical and cultural ways in communities around the world. Waldorf education is but one example. Steiner's methods in curative education for children and adults with intellectual disabilities have been particularly successful. Bio-dynamic farming and gardening greatly expand the range of techniques available to organic agriculture. Anthroposophic medicine and pharmacy are subjects of growing interest.

It should be stressed that while anthroposophy forms the theoretical basis underlying the teaching methods used in Waldorf schools, it is never brought directly into the classroom or taught to the students.

Recommended further reading:

Waldorf Education, A Family Guide by Pam Fenner

You Are Your Child's First Teacher by Rahima Baldwin Dancy

The Golden Years by John Benians