Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach

Early years education in practice

Janni Nicol and Jill Tina Taplin

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Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach

Understanding the Steiner Waldorf Approach is a much-needed source of information for those wishing to extend and consolidate their understanding of the Steiner Waldorf approach. It will enable the reader to analyse the essential elements of the Steiner Waldorf approach to early childhood and its relationship to quality early years practice.

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Written to support the work of all those in the field of early years education and childcare, this is a vital text for students, early years and childcare practitioners, teachers, early years professionals, children's centre professionals, lecturers, advisory teachers, head teachers and setting managers.

Janni Nicol has worked as a Steiner kindergarten teacher in South Africa and the UK. She is now the UK early childhood representative for Steiner Waldorf schools and kindergartens and writes, consults and lectures on Steiner early childhood in the UK and internationally.

Jill Tina Taplin works in teacher education in the UK and internationally, advising, teaching and writing, after many years as a Steiner kindergarten teacher in Scotland and England.

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Introduction

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), in his many lectures and writings, pointed to the need for a spiritual renewal of Western culture, in areas including agriculture, economics, the sciences, religion and the arts, as well as in education, as discussed further in this book. Today there are thousands of schools, farms, clinics and other organisations doing practical work based on his insights. He offered a comprehensive path of spiritual development and research, which he said could contribute to the creation of a more humane world.

For nearly 100 years the unique and unusual education he founded has spread and grown throughout the world. The educational philosophy, which was developed in the first Waldorf School in 1919, was based on the thoughts, ideas and spiritual insights which Steiner gave of the developing human being. Waldorf education is also known as Steiner or Steiner Waldorf education and encompasses the child from pre-birth throughout life. In many countries, particularly in Europe, the day care, kindergartens and schools are fully state funded, and the later school starting date of many countries fits with the later introduction of formal learning which Steiner propounded.

The aim of the approach is to help the child to develop into a morally responsible, free individual, able to fulfil his or her unique destiny. To do this, the focus is on following and extending Steiner's ideas on the nature of childhood and the development of the growing human being, which, for education purposes in particular, is divided into seven-year periods.

For the first seven years (the years of early childhood), education is taken up with the nurturing of a strong healthy physical body, out of imitation of the practitioner (or kindergarten teacher) in an enabling 'home like' environment. This takes place in a pleasant and calm setting, which, in the case of kindergartens, focuses on developing practical life

skills in mixed age (familial) surroundings. The use of the term 'kindergarten' to refer to a class of children aged between three and six or seven years old, is common in Steiner Waldorf terminology and will be used in this book. This book focuses on the stage of development from birth to age seven, giving examples of how Steiner's ideas are put into practice.

Many who hear about the education are keen to visit a setting, and it is difficult for the kindergarten teachers who are trying to create this intimate and sensorially protective environment to accommodate visitors. (However, schools and settings regularly hold open days and information sessions for interested visitors as well as fund-raising events such as summer fairs and Christmas markets, which do convey something of the flavour of the education.) It is very difficult to give a true picture in writing of what visitors experience when they are in the kindergarten as it appeals to what Steiner refers to as the 'feeling life' – it impacts emotionally, and visitors have described their experiences as 'it took me back to my own childhood', 'it made me want to cry' (some do); 'I felt like a little child again', 'I felt comforted' and so on. It is difficult to intellectually understand the emotional impact the experience has on the individual but we hope that the liberal use of examples, anecdotes and descriptions in the following chapters will help.

Often there are comparisons made between the Montessori, Reggio and Steiner approaches, but, as you will see in this book, although some of the impulses are similar the philosophy underpinning the principles and much of the practice is fundamentally different and distinct. Rod Parker-Rees, in his introduction to *Meeting the Child in Steiner Kindergartens: An exploration of beliefs, values and practices* said, 'Where the Reggio Emilia preschools appear to buzz with the energy of children busily engaged in studying all aspects of their world, Steiner kindergartens are more likely to impress visitors with a pervasive feeling of calm, unhurried "just being" – more like a home than a studio or academy' (Parker-Rees 2011: 6)

Many educators who have been touched by some aspect of their experience in a kindergarten would like to adopt the Steiner Waldorf approach, or parts of it. There are some aspects that are transferable; however, as you will see from this book, the philosophy is one that calls for immersion in Steiner's insights and theories of child development. It also calls for self-development and transformative learning on the part of the educator. It was Froebel's belief that early-years teachers should ideally be like a 'mother made conscious' (Steedman 1985), it was Steiner's that they should develop themselves in order to be a role model worth of imitation in thought, word and deed.

Background to the UK interest in the Steiner Waldorf approach

As you will read in Chapter 1, interest in the UK began with the visit to the UK by Rudolf Steiner in 1923. The approach was developed by the teachers involved in the first kindergartens, and much of the practice came from studying Steiner's ideas on the developing child and Steiner's other impulses. These are explained in more detail in subsequent chapters. Many readers will find similarities in other approaches, such as in Montessori, with the spiritual view of the child and the self-development and transformative learning of the educator. Froebel has contributed much to the approach, in the ring time, in the household activities and the outdoors as a classroom which is also a feature of the recent forest schools movement. The creativity has much in common with the Reggio approach, and many Steiner educators contributed to the One Hundred Languages exhibition in Cambridge in 1997, particularly in the areas of storytelling, puppetry and play. It was after this exhibition that interest in visiting kindergartens began in earnest. Local authorities began asking Steiner practitioners to give workshops, and universities began including Steiner early childhood in their comparative-education modules. Steiner practitioners were consulted during the initial Foundation Stage framework planning. The Steiner and Montessori educational approaches are recognised in the UK as having their own ethos and curriculum, distinctly different from all others. (See Appendix I.)

In the review of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) in 2011, Dame Clare Tickell said,

> Ministers have consistently agreed that there is a conflict between the philosophy of these [Steiner] settings and some of the early learning goals, and have granted exemptions from the affected goals to this end. *I recommend that the Government extend the exemptions from these early learning goals to all settings within the Steiner-Waldorf (Schools Fellowship).*

The structure of the chapters

At the beginning of each chapter there is a brief summary of the content, followed by a more detailed description of the aspect under consideration. References relating to each chapter are included at the end of the

chapter. Each chapter is summarised in a set of ten key points. Finally, there is a section entitled 'Reflections on the Steiner Waldorf Approach'. It is offered as a starting point, not a comprehensive list. It is primarily designed to be used as a group exercise, to highlight issues you may wish to consider as a team when reflecting on your practice and reflects questions that we have often been asked over the years when introducing Steiner Waldorf early-childhood education.

The structure of the book

A glossary is included at the end of this introduction to introduce some of the terms used, and at the end of the book there is a list of key texts to encourage readers to extend their own research and understanding of the Steiner Waldorf approach.

Chapter 1 describes the history and personal background of Rudolf Steiner, his original work in many areas and how he developed his ideas on an educational approach that met the needs of the 'whole' human being. It also presents the beginnings of Steiner Waldorf early childhood education and how it grew to be an international movement. In Chapter 2, the twelve essential principles of Steiner Waldorf early childhood are discussed. The image of the child as a spiritual being, bringing gifts and with particular tasks to do in his or her lifetime is introduced. This stands behind the educator's reverence for the child and sense of responsibility as an educator to be involved in a continuous process of inner self-development. Chapter 3 focuses on the picture of child development that underpins Steiner Waldorf practice. Steiner's ideas of both the threefold and the fourfold human being are introduced, and the division of education into seven-year stages is explained. Then the methodology is outlined that springs from the focus of the first seven years as those of imitation and example. Chapter 4 begins to look more closely at this methodology and leads into the heart of the Steiner Waldorf setting by describing the environment where the child's senses are protected and authentic learning can take place. All the children's areas, indoors and out, are designed to be both beautiful and functional as the environment enables the practitioners to bring the simple activities of everyday life to the children within a 'home from home' atmosphere. In Chapter 5, the practitioner's use of young children's innate imitative capacities as the prime teaching method is explored. The Steiner practitioner sees both the

environment and the activity of the adults as actually forming the children in ways that will affect them for the rest of their lives. The development of imitative skills in the growing child is discussed as is the importance of the models given by the older children in a mixed-age kindergarten. Chapter 6 reviews the child's self-initiated play in early-childhood education and its central place in the Steiner setting. Steiner pedagogy sees this kind of play as the young child's way of exploring and developing his or her own learning needs, and practitioners provide time and space in the ideal environment and sensitively support such play. In Chapter 7, the key concepts of rhythm and repetition in the Steiner setting are covered. We explain how these concepts support early-childhood learning and build confidence and resilience in the child. Details are given of how the Steiner setting works with rhythm through the day, the week and the year in a way that engenders a mood of unself-conscious participation in the children. Chapter 8 looks at domestic and artistic activities in the Steiner early-childhood setting. The pedagogical significance of domestic activities, or the art of living, is described, as is the value of time spent in artistic creativity for both the child and for the adult who works as an educator or carer. Examples are included of the activities common in Steiner kindergartens. Chapter 9 looks at child observation and its development within Steiner pedagogy into the child study – a spiritual and artistic deed undertaken by a group of colleagues. Record-keeping and the making of both formative and summative assessments for individual children are also addressed. Chapter 10 brings us to the sense of colleagueship that needs to be built in the adults around the child, including not only parents[1] and practitioners but also support staff and specialists. From the initial meeting with the family to the family's ongoing part in the life of the setting, the child is nurtured and supported by close partnership. Working with outside agencies and Steiner-trained specialists is also covered here. Chapter 11 ranges through current issues of interest in Steiner pedagogy. These include work with the very young child in day-care settings and parent and child groups, home childcare and home schooling, wrap-around care and working with the mixed-age kindergarten, with particular emphasis on the needs of the oldest children. The attitude of Steiner pedagogy towards early formal learning and electronic technology is discussed as is working with diversity and inclusion in the Steiner setting.

Appendix 1 considers future issues, including initiatives and challenges to Steiner early-childhood education in Britain and worldwide. Brief introductions are given to the organisations both at home and

abroad that support Steiner education and Steiner teacher education. Appendix II lists typical equipment and activities that are to be found in the Steiner Waldorf setting, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 8. An example of a seasonal 'ring time' is given in Appendix III to illustrate the descriptions of ring time that are in Chapters 5 and 7. Appendix IV provides an example of a child-observation schema as discussed in Chapter 9.

Note

1 *'Parents' could mean mothers, fathers and carers.*

References

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The authors

Janni Nicol and Jill Tina Taplin have been practising kindergarten teachers for many years, both having been pioneer teachers in kindergartens which have developed into full Steiner schools. Their understanding of the Steiner Waldorf approach is based in practical life work and deep study of Rudolf Steiner's ideas, both in theory and practice. They have worked as kindergarten teacher trainers and as advisers, visiting many kindergartens in the UK and around the world. The picture of the education given in this book is both theoretical and practical, and they have tried to focus on those areas that address the principles underpinning the practice.

Glossary

educator As referred to in the book, 'educator' could mean kindergarten teacher, assistant, or parent or carer: anyone who is in contact with the child. There is acknowledgement that the parent is the child's first and primary educator.

kindergarten 'kindergarten' was the name originally used by Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel to describe his pre-school setting, referred to by him as a 'paradise garden'. In German it is a directly translated as 'children's garden' or 'a garden for children'. In this book, we have used many terms to describe the Steiner Waldorf setting or early childhood setting. 'Setting' is commonly used in the UK to describe the place where children are cared for and educated in or out of the home. 'Kindergarten' is how most Steiner settings refer to themselves, and is how they are registered with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF). A kindergarten is generally for the ages from three to seven years and runs in the mornings only. Aftercare is often provided as extended kindergarten, but it is not a repeat of the morning session. Some Steiner Waldorf early-childhood provisions have playgroup or nursery classes which are for the two- to four-year-olds, but in others these younger children are included in the mixed-age kindergartens. Parent-and-child groups are for parents and carers who accompany their young babies and toddlers to a specific Steiner group run by a professional leader. Daycare covers a wider age range than kindergarten, usually includes babies and toddlers and could run for extended hours. 'Centre' could describe a setting where more than one activity takes place, and a Steiner Waldorf early-childhood centre generally includes playgroup, parent-and-child group, kindergarten and aftercare. Many are attached to Steiner schools which provide the full age range of primary and in some cases secondary education. 'Setting' could also be used to describe the place where home childcare (childminding) takes place, possibly for a wider age range.

kindergarten teacher and assistant In this book we have used many terms to describe the Steiner Waldorf kindergarten teacher. 'Kindergarten teacher' is the most commonly used term, but 'kindergarten practitioner' helps to emphasise how distinct this is from the normal role of a teacher. In the UK, we also refer to the Steiner practitioner or early childhood teacher or leader. In the USA the term used is often 'educarer. Kindergarten teachers are male or female, and there are

practising male kindergarten teachers in the UK. The kindergarten teacher is also the registered person, the leader, the manager and the key person. The kindergarten assistant is in place to support the teacher in the kindergarten. He or she may be a student undertaking a work placement as part of training. Most kindergartens are of such a size that a teacher plus one assistant fulfil the statutory requirements for adult-to-child ratio, but in the case of larger groups additional assistants will be present to meet the required ratios.

Steiner Waldorf The names used to describe the education are used differently in many countries. In some it is 'Waldorf' (referring to the original name given to the Stuttgart school started by Emil Molt for the workers of his Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory) or 'Steiner', after Rudolf Steiner. In some countries, both names are used. There are times when the content of the education is referred to as 'Waldorf', as in 'the Waldorf curriculum' or 'Waldorf education'. In this book we have used all three forms: 'Steiner', 'Waldorf' and 'Steiner Waldorf'.

1 History and foundations

Introduction

In this chapter we will look at the history and personal background of Rudolf Steiner (see Fig. 1.1) and how he developed his ideas on an educational approach meeting the needs of the 'whole' human being.

Rudolf Steiner and his work

During the late 1800s and early in the 1900s there were great changes happening in Europe: the beginning of the Industrial Revolution brought about the first electric light, travelling took place by car and airplane, cinema, telephone and telegraph changed the way people communicated with each other, travellers were able to publish photographs of their journeys, and scientists focused their attention on movement, matter and overcoming the forces of nature. This was the beginning of the 'modern (materialist) age' when mankind no longer separated science and religion, knowledge and faith, matter and spirit – all these things were now open for discussion, and 'free thinkers' developed who took these discussions into different dimensions: Einstein, Darwin, Tolstoy, Marx, Freud. The world was full of intellectuals, artists, dramatists, thinkers, politicians, scientists and explorers. It was an exciting time in which to be born.

Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner was born to Franziska Blie and Johann Steiner on 27 February 1861. He was their oldest child, followed by a brother and a sister. His father was a hunter, working in the service of a count, in Lower Austria north of the Danube (now Croatia). The Count refused to give permission to Rudolf's parents to marry, so Johann left his

Figure 1.1 Rudolf Steiner.

employment and joined the railways as a telegraph operator. He was sent to Kraljevic (Croatia), where Rudolf was born. The children took part in family life, sharing household chores and working in the orchard or with the pigs. Rudolf was fascinated by his father's telegraph, and also by nature, and spent time with farm workers and woodcutters, collecting berries and fruit. He preferred to be on his own and was an independent and isolated child, particularly because of some early clairvoyant experiences he had (which he described in his memoirs) and also because he had no time to play with other children. He had few toys but often referred to picture books with figures that could be made to move by pulling strings attached to them at the bottom. He associated little stories with these figures, 'to whom one gave a part of their life by pulling the strings. Many a time have I sat by the hour poring over the picture-books with my sister. Besides, I learned from them by myself the first steps in reading' (Steiner 1928: 7). He spent a lot of time with his father and learned to write by imitating him. He was as interested in the shapes of the letters as in putting them together.

At the small village school which Rudolf attended at around eight years of age, he first learned to read, and from that moment he devoured books on all kinds of subjects. He studied the people around him, the mysteries of the Mass, the social tension between the aristocracy and the workers, the industrial activities of the factories and railways and the peace and beauty of nature. He also discovered geometry, which he said gave him happiness for the first time. He realised that knowledge of the world could be carried within and that one could speak of the world of the mind with clarity and scientific precision.

At secondary school, Steiner studied mathematics, science and philosophy. He taught himself Greek, Latin and accountancy and gave lessons to private pupils to supplement his income. At the age of eighteen he went to university in Vienna, where he studied biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics and attended classes in philosophy and literature. He continued studying everything that interested him, including his experiences of the spiritual world through clairvoyant incidents. He became determined to find a way to explain his spiritual experiences in the light of scientific materialistic concepts of the time in which he lived. Steiner was asked to edit the complete works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and here he began to make links between scientific knowledge and his own observations of the actions of spiritual forces.

Steiner worked as a tutor for a wealthy Viennese family, looking after their four boys, one of whom had physical and learning difficulties (who

ended up becoming a medical doctor). It was through these experiences of trying to find a way to educate this child that Steiner began to develop his theories of education and of therapy. After achieving his doctorate in 1891, he developed his spiritual and scientific research and wrote his first book, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, where he described for the first time the relationships between his observation of the modern natural sciences to an inner world. He named this spiritual science 'anthroposophy' and gave countless courses and lectures throughout Europe, setting out his programme for spiritual reform of life in the areas of art, education, politics, economics, medicine, agriculture and the Christian religion. His love of drama, theatre, puppetry and music brought him onto the lecture circuit, and he wrote many journals and papers.

The education of the child

Steiner was invited by Emil Molt, the Director of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany, to give a series of lectures to the workers in his factory. Molt had read an essay by Steiner called 'The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy' (written in 1907) and appealed to Steiner to develop this 'art' of education so that he could open a school for the children of his factory workers. It was important to both that education should not impose ideology, whether political, religious and economic – nor an anthroposophical one either. Anthroposophy should also not be taught as a subject but used to inform teachers about the global image of man, the respect for human individuality and for self-development. It was during these lectures that Steiner developed his spiritual insights, including that of reincarnation and karma, in his ideas on the development of the individual from pre-birth to after death. He gave indications on the developmental phases of the human being, which he explained in much detail, and spoke about his ideas for social renewal after the impact of the First World War. The first group of teachers encouraged by Rudolf Steiner developed the educational approach with him. Steiner said that in order to educate teachers must educate themselves throughout their life and that only the teacher who is committed to this will be able to inspire students.

The first Waldorf school

Steiner ceremonially opened the first 'Free Waldorf School' on 7 September 1919. It was, from the beginning, a full primary and secondary school for 256 children drawn mainly from the families of the workers in the factory. They were divided into eight classes, and it was the first time that children of both sexes, from different social strata, nationalities, religions and abilities all shared a classroom. Steiner's educational reform also worked with the structure of the school management, bringing his ideas on social reform, namely the threefold structure, where governance took place in the three areas of the cultural life, economic activity and political administration.

Although Steiner was an idealist who never compromised his beliefs, he was also a pragmatist in the realm of education. He agreed with the Stuttgart educational authorities that although the Waldorf curriculum would remain uncompromised and that the students would not follow the state curriculum, the pupils would be able to transfer from the Waldorf school to state schools at certain key stages. He modified the work done in the school to ensure that the children had also covered all the subject matter and attained the same skills as children in other schools at the appropriate ages.

Steiner initiatives worldwide

Steiner gave thousands of lectures and courses throughout Europe, setting out his programme for spiritual reform of life in the areas of the arts, education, politics, economics, medicine, agriculture, religion and social organisation. He died on 30 March 1925 in Dornach, while still working on his autobiography. Notes of his lectures were published in countless papers and books and were translated into many languages. These lectures form the basis for further study, and today there are an estimated 10,000 initiatives worldwide working in the fields of:

- education (Steiner Waldorf kindergartens, schools and training centres);
- agriculture (biodynamic farms and vineyards);
- art (architecture, eurythmy, puppetry, theatre, music, sculpture, painting);

- medicine (anthroposophical clinics, hospitals, homoeopathic pharmacies, training centres for doctors and nurses, massage, art and movement therapies, beauty products);
- natural science (water purification, composting, astronomy);
- scientific research, literature, philosophy, social renewal (care of the dying, and the Camphill schools for people with special education needs);
- economics (banks and ethical investment).

The beginnings of Steiner Waldorf early-childhood education

In 1914, before the first school opened, Rudolf Steiner met Elisabeth Grünelius. Grünelius had joined a group of artists working under Steiner's direction on the building of the first Gotheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. (This is now the headquarters of the pedagogical section of Steiner Waldorf schools and other initiatives working out of the guidance given by Rudolf Steiner, such as anthroposophical medicine, biodynamic farming and the arts.) Elisabeth attended lectures by Steiner before continuing with her studies at the Pestalozzi–Froebel Seminar in Berlin, where she was studying to become a kindergarten teacher.

Steiner would have liked to include the kindergarten years (which he felt were the most important) in the first school and asked Elisabeth to write a proposal on how one would work with three to five year olds. She wrote:

> I felt I had to have experience first. One could not sit at a table and figure it all out. Today it is perhaps difficult to imagine a time when no one had worked consciously with the imitative capacities of the child. We need to remember that class teachers teach, but the kindergarten teacher must show what should be done through her life and being.
>
> (Howard 2006: 6)

In 1920, due to a change in school starting date, there were a number of pre-schoolers who needed care for a few months, and it was with this group of six-year-olds that many of the basic ideas were developed. Grünelius had only Rudolf Steiner's statements that meditation should be the basis of life in the kindergarten and that she was to work out of

imitation – two entirely radical thoughts which she had never encountered before in her training for early-childhood education! She had no toys for the children to play with and therefore spent much of the time outside. The children did activities such as drawing, watercolour painting and clay modelling. She told stories to the children, learning them 'by heart'. The class did not last long due to lack of space and financial difficulties, but Elisabeth continued to extend her studies, attending Steiner's lectures and developing her own ideas. In 1926, eighteen months after Steiner's death, the first kindergarten finally opened. Elisabeth built up the activities out of her own 'sense' of what the children needed, working meditatively and with imitation rather than didactics. Susan Howard wrote the following in her article on the beginning of the Waldorf kindergarten movement:

> Once she invited a basket maker to come and work in the presence of the children. 'He was a young man, and he had his shirt sleeves rolled up so that the children could see how strong he was. He had a big basket, and he finished it with large branches. On the next day, in the cloakroom, I saw reeds hanging from the coat hook of one of the children, a very inhibited girl. I asked her why she needed the reeds. "To make baskets," she replied. Then I immediately went out and bought reeds and bottoms for baskets and on the next day, all the four-year-olds made baskets. I wanted to help them, but they could do it themselves. They never could have done that if they had not seen the basket maker at work.'
>
> (Howard 2006: 2)

Klara Hatterman, a young woman from Germany who wanted to become a Waldorf kindergarten teacher, asked Elisabeth to start a kindergarten training course, but Elisabeth did not feel ready for this and said that she needed more experience. Klara became Elisabeth's assistant for a while, until she founded a small 'home' kindergarten near a Waldorf school in Hanover, Germany, in 1931. The kindergartens blossomed, but the two schools were eventually closed by the Nazis. The home kindergarten, which was less visible, remained open until 1941 when it too was closed, as was Klara's next home kindergarten in Dresden.

Elisabeth went to the USA in 1940, where she founded two kindergartens and published her book *Early Childhood Education and the Waldorf School Plan*, which was translated into many languages. She founded another kindergarten in France in 1954 when she returned to Europe. In 1955, a second version of her book was published in England, *Educating the Young Child*.

Klara opened her new kindergarten after the war in the rubble of Hanover, and it was not until early 1950 that she opened the first purpose-built kindergarten. She eventually began meeting with other kindergarten teachers for a few days each year to deepen their knowledge of the young child out of the anthroposophical view of the human being. This developed into a regular conference which still continues today. It was also the beginning of the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens, which is now the International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE). Many kindergartens and teacher-training programmes developed out of these beginnings and spread throughout the world. They now include home- and centre-based childcare, parent–child groups and family centres.

Elisabeth Grünelius and Klara Hatterman were researchers 'intuitively feeling their way along out of exact observation of the children in their care. They were visionaries, able to see far beyond their own immediate surroundings, and able to consciously work with the reality of the spiritual nature of the child' (Howard 2006: 3).

Steiner Waldorf education in the UK

Many teachers from other countries heard of the 'new' educational approach being developed in the first Waldorf School in Germany, and they visited to observe. As a result, in 1923, Rudolf Steiner was invited to speak about the Waldorf approach in England, a country which at the time was extremely interested in education. He met with public recognition, not only regarding the education, and was asked to speak about his other ideas on many different subjects. It was at one of these lectures that he met Margaret MacMillan, who, with her sister Rachel (a nurse), had been campaigning to improve the health and education of children. In 1914, the MacMillan sisters opened an 'open-air' nursery school and training centre in Peckham for children from eighteen months to seven years. Margaret had progressive ideas on education and was also interested in an active spiritual life. She attended many of Steiner's lectures and in 1923 invited him to visit her nursery school in Deptford. He described this visit at the time:

> Today I was able to accept her invitation to visit the nursery and school established by her at Deptford, London. Three hundred of the very poorest

> population, from the ages of two to twelve, are wonderfully cared for there by her . . . one sees at work in the various classes youngsters who are spiritually active, happy in soul, well-behaved and growing healthy in body. It is an equal pleasure to see these children at play, to see them learning, eating and resting after meals.
>
> (Steiner 1998: 5)

She also gave him her book *Education through Imagination* about which Steiner wrote,

> With real genius for education, Miss MacMillan seeks to penetrate the peculiarities of the child-mind. Her book is a treasure chamber of precious observations concerning the child's soul, and is full of guiding hints to those engaged in education. Such a chapter as that on 'The Child as Artisan' cannot be read without a feeling of deep satisfaction'.
>
> (Steiner 1923: 1)

Steiner asked Margaret MacMillan to give the opening lecture and to chair the first of his lecture tours in England in 1923.

Many others attended Steiner's lectures and also heard about the schools being established in Europe. A few nurses and teachers decided to study in Germany or Switzerland with the then small group of kindergarten teachers. They returned to England, joined by others who had already been working in Europe, and became the first established Steiner Waldorf kindergarten teachers in the UK, working in and around the first Waldorf schools which opened as early as 1925.

In the 1960s, Dr Helmut von Kügelgen, who was the head of the Kindergarten Association in Germany, suggested that the kindergarten teachers in England should meet together on a regular basis. They formed a group that organised yearly national conferences to share inspiration and good practice and to meet each other for support. They called themselves the Kindergarten Steering Group, which carried the original impulse to create loving 'gardens' in which little ones can flourish. Later, the name changed to the Steiner Waldorf Early Years Group (SWEYG), which reflected a greater involvement in the wider early-years movement covering all aspects of early-years work including day care, and parent and family work. Early 'years' has now been changed to early 'childhood', which embraces the whole realm of the child from birth to seven and includes both care and education. SWEYG carries and holds the overview for the support and development of Steiner Waldorf early-childhood

education and care in the UK and Ireland. There is further current information in Appendix I.

Key points

1. The historical, social and political culture had an influence on the development of Rudolf Steiner's ideas.
2. Rudolf Steiner attributed his insights to clairvoyance and spiritual influences.
3. Steiner wrote about his spiritual, physical and scientific research, which he called 'anthroposophy'.
4. The development of the Waldorf educational approach grew out of a need identified by Emil Molt.
5. Steiner gave thousands of lectures in Europe and England, the transcripts of which became the substance for many books.
6. The development of the child in the light of anthroposophy formed the basis for the educational approach.
7. The self-education of the teacher was as important as the subject taught.
8. Elisabeth Grunelius and Klara Hatterman were the pioneer kindergarten teachers who began what is now the worldwide Steiner Waldorf early-childhood movement.
9. Steiner had a deep influence on the work of Margaret MacMillan.
10. The kindergarten movement spread worldwide, encompassing care and education between birth and seven years.

Reflections

Rudolf Steiner and his work

- What do you think were the political, educational and cultural conditions that dominated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Steiner was developing his ideas?
- Can you think of other influences in education which were pioneered at the same time?

The education of the child

- Steiner practitioners see the self-development of the teacher as an essential activity. How relevant does this seem to you?
- Can you identify the qualities that you most appreciated in your teachers when you were a young child at school?

Steiner initiatives worldwide

- The variety and spread of initiatives inspired by the work and ideas of Rudolf Steiner encourage the possibility of a working together of, for example, educators and architects or educators and agriculturalists. Can you see benefits in this?
- Do you know of any other individuals who have initiated such a diverse international movement?

Steiner Waldorf education in the UK

- Are you aware of and have you visited any early-childhood centres or schools based on the work of Rudolf Steiner in your area? If so, what did you find most striking about them?

The beginnings of Steiner Waldorf early-childhood education

- The first Steiner Waldorf school was opened as a response to the chaos that followed the First World War in Germany. Do you know of any other educational initiatives in Britain that were a response to newly perceived social needs at this time?
- What other educational impulses do you know of that are built on a view of child development that extends from birth to age twenty-one?

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References

Introduction

Glossary

educator As referred to in the book, ‘educator’ could mean kindergarten teacher, assistant, or parent or carer: anyone who is in contact with the child. There is acknowledgement that the parent is the child’s first and primary educator.

kindergarten ’kindergarten’ was the name originally used by Friedrich W ilhelm August Fröbel to describe his pre-school setting, referred to by him as a ‘paradise garden’. In German it is a directly translated as ‘children’s garden’ or ‘a garden for children’. In this book, we have used many terms to describe the Steiner Waldorf setting or early childhood setting. ‘Setting’ is commonly used in the UK to describe the place where children are cared for and educated in or out of the home. ‘Kindergarten’ is how most Steiner settings refer to themselves, and is how they are registered with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF). A kindergarten is generally for the ages from three to seven years and runs in the mornings only. Aftercare is often provided as extended kindergarten, but it is not a repeat of the morning session. Some Steiner Waldorf early-childhood provisions have playgroup or nursery classes which are for the two- to four-year-olds, but in others these younger children are included in the mixed-age kindergartens. Parent-and-child groups are for parents and carers who accompany their young babies and toddlers to a specific Steiner group run by a professional leader. Daycare covers a wider age range than kindergarten, usually includes babies and toddlers and could run for extended hours. ‘Centre’ could describe a setting where more than one activity takes place, and a Steiner Waldorf early-childhood centre generally includes playgroup, parent-and-child group, kindergarten and aftercare. Many are attached to Steiner schools which provide the full age range of primary and in some cases secondary education. ‘Setting’ could also be used to describe the place where home childcare (childminding) takes place, possibly for a wider age range.

kindergarten teacher and assistant In this book we have used many terms to describe the Steiner W aldorf kindergarten teacher. ‘Kindergarten teacher’ is the most commonly used term, but ‘kindergarten practitioner’ helps to emphasise how distinct this is from the normal role of a teacher. In the UK, we also refer to the Steiner

practitioner or early childhood teacher or leader. In the USA the term used is often ‘educarer. Kindergarten teachers are male or female, and there are practising male kindergarten teachers in the UK. The kindergarten teacher is also the registered person, the leader, the manager and the key person. The kindergarten assistant is in place to support the teacher in the kindergarten. He or she may be a student undertaking a work placement as part of training. Most kindergartens are of such a size that a teacher plus one assistant fulfil the statutory requirements for adult-to-child ratio, but in the case of larger groups additional assistants will be present to meet the required ratios. Steiner Waldorf The names used to describe the education are used dif ferently in many countries. In some it is ‘Waldorf’ (referring to the original name given to the Stuttgart school started by Emil Molt for the workers of his Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory) or ‘Steiner’, after Rudolf Steiner. In some countries, both names are used. There are times when the content of the education is referred to as ‘Waldorf’, as in ‘the Waldorf curriculum’ or ‘Waldorf education’. In this book we have used all three forms: ‘Steiner’, ‘Waldorf’ and ‘Steiner Waldorf’.

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