

Waldorf/Steiner Schools

On the 6th November 2011 I wrote to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship outlining my concerns about the ideas expressed by Rudolf Steiner and how they were reflected in the pedagogy of Steiner/Waldorf schools. One of the first surprises in the reply was the contention that 'none of Steiner's particular ideas are taught in Steiner schools'. In view of the fact that teachers are expected to undergo training in anthroposophy and the statement in the [Fellowship's publication](#) that "The educational content of anthroposophy informs the work of teachers; it is not a belief system and is not taught in our schools.", how much confidence can we have in this assertion? A teacher who undergoes training in anthroposophy may spend 8 years of early education with the same group of children. According to the same publication, this education "has a proven track record for providing a sound and practical basis for working with children, enabling them to find their creativity and to become free individuals who can think for themselves, make their own judgments and find their own purpose and direction in life." This is laudable, but there are many accounts of Steiner school experiences where the reality has not matched up to this aim. Many would probably challenge the assertion that anthroposophy is not a belief system. There is a suggestion in the reply that Steiner's idea that humans are composed of 'body, soul and spirit' is no longer an aspect of Steiner education, but this is followed by the remark that "The views of individual teachers are of course their own. Many schools make reference to 'head, heart and hands' and in so doing they are recognising distinct aspects of the human being that need recognition for effective learning." Are such distinctions a form of deception that gives the impression that Steiner school education is secular in nature? Also, if a school does not teach or reflect Steiner's occult ideas, then why would it want to carry the Steiner label? I have provided the links mentioned in the reply at the foot of this page.

Despite Steiner's racist comments I do not believe that racism is likely to be a feature of the activities of these schools. I am also inclined to believe that the extent of incorporation of anthroposophical ideas into the pedagogy may well vary from school to school. However, I also believe that to say that anthroposophy is not taught in these schools is, in general, just a simple lie. Most of the schools will have teachers that have [received training in anthroposophy](#) and this is reflected in the reading lists with which they have been provided. Many of the books were written by Steiner himself. To suggest that anthroposophy is not taught is to stretch the imagination beyond credulity.

The suggestion that different Steiner schools might teach Steiner's ideas in different ways should also be of concern to parents. The assertion that "The theory of evolution is certainly taught, as are all contemporary theories and scientific views" is not reflected in Steiner's own ideas about human evolution. Steiner, and some interpreters of Steiner pedagogy, ridicule Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. The fundamental basis of Darwin's theory has been supported by archeological studies and other scientific discoveries which suggest that this evolutionary process that led to the development of homo sapiens began when sea creatures developed legs and crawled onto the land. There were some slight differences between Darwin's ideas of how evolution developed and those of Alfred Russel Wallace who came up with the theory of evolution by natural selection independently of Darwin and suggested that geographical location had a part to play in evolution as evidenced by animals of a certain type only being found in a certain geographical area, as in Australia for example. The point is that scientists in general would not believe that their theories are infallible and would accept that these will change in the light of further scientific discovery. That is the very essence of science.

I maintain that Steiner's irrational occult ideas about the origins of human beings based on reincarnation should not be reflected in the education of children. However, I think that a religious studies subject can legitimately explain the beliefs of a variety of religions, especially in Britain's multicultural society. The problem with many Steiner schools is that their sectarian nature may feature in a wide range of the day-to-day activities. Anyone thinking of sending their children to a Steiner school in the belief that they are non-sectarian, needs to be wary. Some careful questioning of staff about the school activities and some research, should be a prerequisite to making a decision. If, for example, left-handedness or drawings with outlines is discouraged, there is a biodynamic garden, eurhythm, stories about the Old Testament, gnomes, fairies, Norse mythology, or celebration of pagan festivals, then I suggest questions about the purpose of such

activities and ideas should be asked. It is interesting to note the different ways that eurhythmy is described by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship as compared with that of Steiner himself:

Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship - "Eurhythmy is a form of movement that attempts to make visible the tone and feeling of music and speech. It helps to develop concentration, self-discipline, spatial and aesthetic awareness and a sensitivity to others. Eurhythmy lessons follow the themes of the curriculum, exploring rhyme, meter, story, and geometric forms."

Rudolf Steiner - "We pass over to movements representing the possibilities of inner activity, movements which have their origin in the planets. In their sevenfold nature we have synthesized the animal element in man. The nineteen possibilities of sound: the consonants have their source in the Zodiac; the vowels in the dance of the planets. A cosmic activity may be brought to expression by means of human gesture and movement. The word of the heavens is really the being of man. By means of an imitation of the dance of the stars, discovered through spiritual knowledge, we have the possibility of renewing in eurhythmy the temple dancing of ancient Mysteries." ([Eurhythmy as Visible Speech](#) - Rudolf Steiner Press 1984 from Waldorf Watch.) In the same article Marie Steiner is quoted as referring to Negro dances as 'decadent'.

Former students' perception of eurhythmy may be the former description, but perhaps anthroposophists might hope that they might grasp the latter meaning later in life. It would be interesting to conduct a survey of what former Waldorf students thought about eurhythmy. I think that as a young person I would have hated it!

"Not only should we study the cosmos and the stars. We should also look for the cosmos and the stars within us".

This statement was part of an address given by school principal, in September 2012 to a gathering of parents and students of the Frome Steiner Academy funded under the UK Government's controversial Free Schools Policy.

Interviews with the staff of the school and those opposing its establishment and government funding for the school, were featured in a BBC South West investigation. A [shortened version](#) of the programme is available on the BBC web site and the original programme is also available as part of "The [BBC Report on Frome Steiner Academy](#)" by Andy Lewis on the Quackometer web site . It would appear that the quote used by the BBC was intended to emphasise the esoteric nature of Steiner education, but when I sent my first draft of this page to the principal for comment he pointed out that the words were taken out of context and "were attributed in my speech to Professor Martin Evans (Cardiff University), who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2007. Professor Evans made these comments during his appearance on Desert Island Discs - a BBC Radio 4 Programme. The BBC South-West programme makers were fully aware of the actual content and context of my remarks, including the words cited above and the person who spoke them. I can see that the broadcast clip was designed to suggest that the words were either Steiner's, or some 'religious' figure. In fact, the quoted comments were made by a leading, cutting edge scientist."

The principal maintained that it was not true to say that Steiner believed in re-incarnation and that his own beliefs did not have any bearing on his job. However, it may be hard for many people to accept that a person's spiritual beliefs and training in anthroposophy is not going to have an influence on teaching methods and the curriculum. In view of my own reading of Steiner's books I find it hard to believe that Steiner did not believe in reincarnation.

At the end of his response to my EMail he invited me to visit the school "have a look round, dip into some lessons and have a discussion." This was a generous offer and after some reflection, I accepted.

On the 7th May 2013 I visited the school. Overall it was a positive experience enhanced by rare sunny weather and a train journey through some of what I believe to be the most picturesque scenery in England. I had the opportunity to sit in on two lessons, one of which appeared to revolve around a story from the Old Testament. I was also given the opportunity to inspect some of the craft and artwork and some of the children's arithmetic and writing books. It appeared that much of the history curriculum related to the mythology of many cultures and religious beliefs and confess that I failed to see the relevance of this to the

subject. I did not feel qualified to comment on the children's work books, but my personal view is that both arithmetic and reading are useful for children to learn at an earlier age than is the case in Steiner schools. I was shown some of the artwork. Some of the pictures had a similar appearance and it was clear that Steiner's own ideas about 'wet in wet' colouring were conveyed to the children. I recollect from my art lessons at college the teacher frequently using the words 'put it and leave it'. This is quite a contrast to the blending of colours advocated by Steiner. I confess to blending colours frequently in my own paintings, but think my teacher advocated a technique which I think would produce more pleasing results. There were several pictures of suns that resembled circular rainbows and did wonder if they were imbued with some spiritual meaning. Other pictures were of tree scenes which again looked very similar to each other. However, I thought the craftwork - models of different types of dwelling - showed a high degree of skill and originality. I was not sure of the degree of teacher or parent input. All of the staff were friendly and welcoming and I was even given the opportunity to convey a very impromptu simple craft idea to the children in one class.

There are, I believe, many positive aspects to Steiner pedagogy which conventional state funded schools would do well to copy, but this does not dispell my deep reservations about some of its esoteric underpinnings based on many of Steiner's ideas which I believe to be both irrational and unscientific. The following statement by Steiner in his book 'Theosophy of the Rosicrucion' serves to illustrate this point "As the highest Regent of Saturn, the Ego Spirit appears to us as the Father God, the highest God of the Sun, the Sun God, as Christ, so will the Regent of the Moon-stage of the Earth appear to us as the Holy Spirit with His Hosts, which in Christian esotericism are called the Messengers of the Godhead, the Angels". This example also serves to illustrate the difference between Steiner and Christian beliefs about the nature of Christ.

I do seriously question whether some of the ideas conveyed to children in Steiner schools can be regarded as a violation of what I believe to be their basic human rights. This concern was heightened by an [article](#) which the principal of the Frome Academy sent for me to read entitled 'Teaching Biology in a Human Context'. He also sent one on 'The Riddle of Teacher Authority - its Role and Significance in Waldorf Education' written by himself. I do not feel qualified to comment on the latter article nor on the description of the human body contained in the first article by Graham Kennish. However, one section of the first article, was of particular concern:

"One of the hallmarks of a good scientific theory is that it should be capable of being disproved. This would seem to guarantee the absence of dogma in science as any theory worth its salt will eventually be superseded, by definition. Human nature, however, is stronger than scientific principle, so from black holes in space to human evolution, theories rapidly harden into tablets of stone brought down from a mountain of research. If we experience surprise, displeasure or vague discomfort in reading such statements as those below, then we can be sure that we are taking current theories for granted or carry memories of school science unchallenged within us:

- atoms do not exist,
- human beings did not evolve from apeline ancestors,
- life did not arise from a primeval organic soup, nor the universe in a gigantic explosion,
- the sun is not a ball of atomic fire,
- the heart is not a kind of pump,
- the brain is not a kind of computer."

Does Waldorf/Steiner education seriously call into question what scientific and archeological evidence has revealed?

The article does not offer any alternative explanations. The evidence indicates that humans did indeed evolve from apeline ancestors and going further back in time can most likely be traced to creatures residing in the oceans. If the sun were not predominantly comprised of fire then no humans would survive on the Earth. Also if the heart did not pump blood around the body, the body would die. Describing the brain as a 'computer' is, I suggest, quite a good way of distinguishing it from other main body parts. Can we afford to deny children a rational education based on reason and scientific study and evaluation?

The contention that 'scientific theory should be capable of being disproved' and that 'theories rapidly harden into tablets of stone' are also open to question. I would think that even the most eminent scientists will accept that their theories will be modified in the light of new discoveries and theories.

If eurythmy and biodynamic gardening are a part of the education in Steiner schools then I maintain that anthroposophy is in fact being taught to the children. It is my understanding that both have irrational spiritual underpinnings. This indicated to me that anthroposophy was being taught to the children. The BBC programme highlighted some of Steiner's racist statements and I believe this to have been unfair in the context of the opening of the Frome Steiner Academy. The principal commented on the distress this had caused to both parents and teachers at the school. I think that a programme on this issue might be justified in another context, but would need to present a more balanced assessment of the totality of Steiner's ideas. However, I do not believe that these racist remarks can be glossed over on the basis that they represented only a small part of what he said in his lectures and writings.

An [article](#) in the Guardian by Jeevan Vasagar (May 2012) comments on the government decision to fund the Hereford Steiner school. After describing the positive aspects he observed at the Hereford school, he commented "But there's also something deeply contradictory about a government so wedded to exams and school league tables extending taxpayer's cash to schools that offer such a meager set of GCSEs. The Herefordshire school offers just five GCSEs: English, English literature, maths, Spanish and art. No physics, chemistry, biology, geography or history. It's quite common for pupils to take just the English and maths GCSEs, and a BTEC in Countryside and Environment."

The article also refers to an observation on the teaching of science. "Mark Hayes, director of Cambridge University's eScience group, which specialises in the application of computer science, has explored the Steiner approach to science, and is disquieted by what he found. When Hayes contacted the academy to discuss their science teaching, he was referred to a book on the Steiner curriculum that the school uses as a guide.

'Darwinism', the book notes, is 'rooted in reductionist thinking and Victorian ethics', while homeopathy is given as an example of 'an effect that cannot be explained'. A typical passage on biology reads: 'A reductionist biology which states or implies that the human body is a machine ... is not one which nourishes the adolescent's deepest concerns. The current theories are just that - theories. They have not been in existence long and though presented as 'truth' they will inevitably change.'

Hayes became interested in Steiner when he was looking at private education for his son after his local state school went into special measures. 'One of the things that attracted us to it was the fees, which are considerably lower than other private schools,' he says. 'The schools market themselves as being very based around the arts, children spend a lot of time outdoors, there are gardening lessons. They go off into the woods once a week.'

The family joined a Steiner parent-and-child group in Cambridge, but Hayes quickly felt like an outsider. 'I can remember feeling slightly patronised, as probably the only person around the table that didn't see alternative medicine as a great thing.'

Behind the Steiner movement is the philosophy its founder devised, known as anthroposophy. This includes elements akin to Hindu belief - karma and reincarnation - but is centred on using the mind and senses to explore a spirit world.

Hayes says: 'What's unique about Steiner schools is anthroposophy as a basis to education. The way they stick very rigidly to the Steiner philosophy. It's a kind of semi-religious outlook on life. There is an emphasis on reverence for nature. Steiner believed in things called elementals, nature spirits you can't see but are out there in the woods.'

There's little evidence of this philosophical backdrop in the Herefordshire school's everyday life, however. It's clear from talking to the pupils that they don't regard Steiner as a religious movement. And the children are confident and inquisitive."

With regard to Hayes's observations, since when has a reductionist biology thought of the human body as a machine? Such a remark appears to me to be an attempt to hide Steiner's own irrational ideas that humans have had spiritual beings in their ancestry and that a person's current physical state of health or well-being is

connected with what they did in a previous life. [The British Humanist Association \(Sept 2012\) raises concerns](#) similar to Mark Hayes about the lack of teaching in science subjects and the giving of homeopathy to students.

One interpretation of Steiner pedagogy is described in 'An introduction to Steiner Education' by Francis Edmonds (Sophia Books 2004). Edmonds confirms the idea that humans are composed of 'body, soul and spirit'. He also states that "Darwin spent much of his time studying the grimaces in animal physiognomies in search of human origins, being so convinced that man is derived from animal origins - a fascinating study, but it led to nothing more conclusive than that animals also have emotions, likes and dislikes, advancing with desires or retreating through fear and antipathy. It belongs to the blindness of our time that we still perpetuate the idea that man is an animal derived from an animal". This statement reflects not only Edmond's patronising attitude to a great man's enlightened scientific discovery, but is perhaps a reflection of the supreme arrogance that has often evolved with the development of the human mind and the human disregard of nature and other living creatures. Other aspects of Steiner pedagogy presented in the book are seriously open to question and perhaps Steiner's and Edmond's disregard of science is well reflected in Edmond's comment that "Modern science has little place in it for man - it leaves him a homeless and lonely figure in the universe".

Edmond's repeats many of Steiner's occult ideas that I have already mentioned and different practical aspects of the pedagogy are explained in occult spiritual terms. Colours are seen as a 'direct language of the soul' which is represented in particular colours and shades. For some inexplicable reason black is associated with evil. He repeats Steiner's classification of groups of children according to their temperaments - (i) blood - sanguine - flighty (ii) black bile - choleric - irrational (iii) yellow bile - melancholic - peevish, jaundiced (iv) phlegm - sluggish. He suggests that children, and the stories they are told, should be grouped according to these temperaments. I find this very idea highly objectionable and open to abuse. There is a suggestion in the book that a girl's hollow chest had been cured by eurythmy (another of Steiner's ideas that places spiritual connotations on special dance movements). Steiner even developed ideas for what he called bothmer gymnastics which according to Edmonds "sees the body as a temple from which all other temples have originated, bear witness to the divine".

Steiner's esoteric ideas about child development stated in 'Being Human' (P69) are incapable of rational analysis:

"According to spiritual science the human being passes through several births. At birth the child is still enclosed in a second material shield, an etheric one. At the change of teeth the etheric shield is stripped off. The etheric body is then born. Human ego is born at 21 through the evolution of previous incarnations."

A general aspect of Steiner education appears to be that children should be shielded from change, variety and noisiness up to the age of five and that they should not have any reading, writing, arithmetic or regimentation of any kind preschool. Why deprive young children of the joy of learning numbers and words? Watching television and using computers is discouraged. There appears to be an assumption that exposure to these means of communication and entertainment will mean that children are deprived of play, story telling, crafts and outdoor activities so important for a child's development and appreciation of the natural world. I can identify with some aspects of this Steiner approach which are similar to my own interaction with my grandchildren. These approaches are described by Bob Hale and Karen MacLean [From Steiner Schools in Australia]. There is a focus on practical activities, arts and crafts and storytelling in the early years and the individual needs of each child. However, I find the nature of the stories to be sectarian and unrelated to the real world. "The stories told by the teachers change as the child develops, correlating the era of human history with the developmental stages of the child. For 6-7 year olds the teacher may draw mainly on folk and fairy tales, moving on at age 8 to fables and legends, to Old Testament stories at age 8-9. Norse stories and sagas are presented at age 10, Greek myths and legends at age 11 and the Roman period at age 12." I find this narrow focus to be not only an insult to children's intelligence, but a distorted view of history unrelated to the evidence of archeological discovery. This may also be true to some extent of established state educational systems and suggests that the broader perspectives obtained from the Internet (properly supervised), books and history programmes on television, is better suited to child education over

the age of six. Do Norse stories have much relevance to children even in Scandinavia? Many of these stories are a reminder of brutal aspects of human nature and might give the impression that European myths and history are superior to those from other parts of the world. Also, is it not also the case that factual stories about human ingenuity and courage are of more interest and relevance to children than 'fairy stories'? And what are we to make of Steiner's belief that gnomes really existed?

An example provided for arts and crafts pursues the Norway theme and I have noticed this in Steiner school accounts from other parts of the world; "For example, in a class 4 history main-lesson the children may learn Nordic dancing, construct a Nordic ship and paint a Nordic shield." The purpose of this preoccupation with Norway is all the more surprising when "There is an international group of over 800 schools and 1,200 kindergartens in many countries including Australia, Britain, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, U.S.A and Canada".

The [experience](#) of a student teacher at a Waldorf school recounted in 'Montessori Answers' for me at least, is the stuff of nightmares! This is another case where the public presentation of the pedagogy was far removed from the reality. Myths were presented to the children as facts, schoolground play was unsupervised and bullying permitted, a broad teaching of historical fact was absent, some colours were associated with negative spiritual ideas, teachers tried to dictate the nature and content of out-of-school activities. Circumstances led her to become a student teacher in another Waldorf school and these experiences led her to hate everything to do with Waldorf education. I identify strongly with the account of the way she sees the child - "I see the child as a budding person, interested in all that is around them, with their own individual interests, strengths, learning styles and needs. I believe in working with the whole child not just their artistic, verbal and kinesthetic modalities. I believe in following a child's natural interest in the world around them and helping them to learn to use their strengths and interests to their highest potential". For some children this might be the reality of their experience at a Steiner Waldorf school if they are lucky and if Steiner's spiritual ideas are absent. But given the nature of anthroposophical training teachers are expected to undergo, I am doubtful this will be the case in most instances.

June Keir, who enrolled her two sons in Waldorf Steiner primary schools after bad experiences at state schools, has provided a generally positive account of their education. She explains what is unique about these schools, why she sent them to the schools and the advantages and disadvantages she witnessed. She made no mention of the spiritual aspects of Steiner's pedagogy. She refers to eurhythm, but this was one of the activities one of her sons did not like. However, despite the "warm and loving atmosphere that encourages all children to relate in a positive way to other students and teachers" she clearly had concerns about the levels of academic achievement. Of particular concern was the lack of book reading and she compensated for this by reading to her sons at home. She also decided to send her children to state high schools -

"Because I believe that high school teachers need to be specialists in their field I sent my sons to state high schools. The transition was very difficult for them."

Whether the Steiner school experience for a child and its parents is a positive one is of course governed to a great extent by the quality of the teaching. The account of Glen Faulkner, two of whose children attended a Steiner school in Melbourne, Australia, shows how a reflection of the spiritual aspects of Steiner pedagogy can result in some very bad experiences for both parents and pupils. According to this account, the school brochure he was shown indicated that "the school offered an environment of creativity, imagination, lessons through learning of ancient legends, an arts and music focus and a promise to nurture and encourage individuals in their strengths". The reality proved to be almost the exact opposite. Creativity was discouraged. The imagination was limited to what teachers wanted the children to imagine. Some of the Grimms fairy tales were the unedited gruesome versions. Art expressions were very limited and much of this looked the same. Solid outlines to drawings was discouraged. Songs sounded very muted, dull and repressed and the children looked bored. Passion and fun was nonexistent. There was no evidence of nurturing the child's strengths. There was a secretive atmosphere and parents were not kept properly informed about what was happening in the school or instances of bullying. His children had to wait so long to be taught how to read and write that they were over a year behind children who went to other schools and it proved difficult to find novels that were of interest to them. The children were expected to take part in

regimented ceremonies which had a 'pagan feel'. The parents views were considered to be secondary to those of the teachers. Pupils had very little relationship with teachers other than the one who was assigned to them for 8 years. Facilities at the school were very basic and bullying was rife. Faulkner summed up the experience as follows:

"My experience reveals a school with poor facilities, a culture of repression and conformity, teachers that believe that parents are secondary in the raising of children, where transparency about how the children are educated is not something aimed for".

Faulkner's experience was similar to that of Sharon Lombard and Amos Miller, a couple from the United States. As in Faulkner's case, Sharon Lombard was initially so impressed by the public presentation of the ethos of a Steiner Waldorf school in Wiscconsin, that the couple decided to move there from Ohio so that their daughter could attend the school.

At the outset Sharon wanted to be involved in the school fundraising activities, but her initiatives met with great opposition from the school. Her first shock was to be told that markers and dark pencils could not be used on her tea shirt idea. Her daughter stopped drawing and when she made enquiries about this with the teacher was told that linear work must not be encouraged until the child was older. Also, when told that brown and black crayons were prohibited in the lower grades, she asked how African-American pupils could depict themselves. As with the Australian experience, the wet-on-wet drawing and colouring processes was used involving repetitive compositions drawn from a single source - so much for encouraging child creativity!

Her daughter's school experience was an extremely unhappy one and Sharon soon began to realise why - "Mounting idiosyncrasies, prayers and religiosities (including my daughter's announcement that she had an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other) suggested an undercurrent that emanated from the faculty. These were not just isolated beliefs of mystical seekers in the parent body. Legends of holy people, old testament stories, and much ado about demons, devils, angels, fairies, gnomes and St Michael (all taught as fact) added to the fear that we had allowed a tiny head to be opened and filled with a syncretic, superstitious miasma of ages past. Contrary to the claims of non-sectarianism, it was becoming very apparent that everything revolved around Rudolf Steiner; the founder of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education."

The school experience proved traumatic for both daughter and mother and the health of both deteriorated. At this point she was to discover the quackery inherent in anthroposophical medicine when her daughter became ill and lost a lot of weight. The Anthroposophical doctor recommended that her daughter draw with healing warm coloured crayons and Sharon was to make the sign of a flame on her heart with aurum cream at bedtime. I recommend that anyone contemplating sending their child to a Steiner Waldorf school read [Sharon Lombard's whole article](#) as she has carried out far more research on Steiner's ideas than I have and has provided an impressive set of references to these in her bibliography.

Another good source of information is [Waldorf Straight Talk](#) by Waldorf Watch. " Rudolf Steiner often denied that Waldorf schools teach Anthroposophy to their students, and Waldorf teachers today often echo this denial. But Steiner also sometimes explicitly acknowledged that Anthroposophy does intrude into the Waldorf classroom, and Waldorf teachers today sometimes reveal that this does indeed occur. Waldorf teachers often argue that their work is guided by Anthroposophy but that classwork contains no Anthroposophical doctrines. The idea is that Waldorf schools work to help children incarnate their invisible bodies, fulfill their karmas, and so forth, without teaching the children about these things. Many Waldorf teachers may truly believe that they work this way. But for the majority of them, Anthroposophy is the truth, so completely hiding it from the students would mean hiding the truth from the students. In good conscience, Waldorf teachers really cannot do this all the time. Here is Steiner affirming that Waldorf students are exposed to Anthroposophy: 'You need to make the children aware that they are receiving the objective truth, and if this occasionally appears anthroposophical, it is not anthroposophy that is at fault. Things are that way because anthroposophy has something to say about objective truth. It is the material that causes what is said to be anthroposophical. We certainly may not go to the other extreme, where people say that anthroposophy

may not be brought into the school. Anthroposophy will be in the school when it is objectively justified, that is, when it is called for by the material itself.'

Since Anthroposophists believe that their doctrines are the Truth underlying all other knowledge, they think that the presence of Anthroposophy will be "justified" at virtually every point in every subject studied. And here is one example of Steiner telling Waldorf teachers to convey a specific Anthroposophical belief to the students. (To understand, you need to know that in Waldorf belief, there are nine ranks of gods. The lowest rank consists of the gods we usually call angels, and the second rank consists of the gods we usually call archangels...."

Despite the positive experiences I have found from people who have undergone a Steiner education (such as learning three languages and gaining a knowledge of differing religious beliefs and some important ethical ideas about finance and the environment), I believe that the Steiner Waldorf pedagogy has far too many negative aspects to be endorsed or supported by state funding. Ian Robinson, who worked for more than twenty years as a senior curriculum officer, researcher and professional development officer with the Victorian Education Department and wrote their basic curriculum document, has written an [article for the Australian Rationalist](#) which supports this view. In this article which makes the case against a proposal to establish a Steiner Education annex to a primary school in Victoria, he states:

"There are three major grounds for opposing Steiner 'Education', any one of which would be sufficient to disqualify such a proposal, and which taken together constitute a totally persuasive case for summarily dismissing any such proposal now and for all time:

1. Steiner 'Education' is an aspect of Steiner's invented religion, Anthroposophy, and as a religion it has no place in a secular education system.
2. Steiner 'Education', while not without some superficially acceptable features, is at its core seriously flawed, and should be rejected on educational grounds.
3. Steiner himself was a (well-meaning) religious 'crank', and while his ideas should not be banned or suppressed on this account, neither should they be given any suggestion of acceptance by the state.

I should point out at the outset that none of what I say below should be taken as reflecting on the integrity of any individual Steiner teacher or follower. They are for the most part very dedicated and very sincere people. They are also very wrong about the relevance and applicability of the ideas of Rudolf Steiner to education, and for this reason should not be allowed to get a foothold in the state school system.

Many people when they first hear about Steiner 'Education' are very impressed, as I was myself. The rhetoric is quite compelling and the ideas superficially attractive. However as soon as one delves behind the rhetoric into the practice, and into the mishmash of ratbag ideas that give rise to the practice, one realises that Rudolf Steiner is really bad news for most kids, and that Steiner 'Education' must be rejected if we care about children."

How can the extent to which a Waldorf Steiner school be judged by parents? The answers obtained from a school's staff to the [questions suggested by Open Waldorf](#) should help.

The experience of Roger Rawlings, who was a student at the [Waldorf School, Garden City](#), New York illustrates the often hidden nature of occult sectarianism that pervaded the school he attended and is an extreme example of its dangers -

"There was a pervasive but unspoken spiritualistic vibe in almost every lesson, in almost every activity. It was hard for most parents to detect, but we students felt it to one degree or another. It was in the air we breathed; it defined the tenor and subtext of our days. Ultimately, it shaped and colored our education as effectively as if priests were delivering sermons to us.

The mystical core of Waldorf was well hidden. Only rarely did anyone get a clear glimpse of it. But on a single, dramatic occasion, the core was startlingly exposed. This occurred several years after I graduated - and long before I'd fully grasped what had been done to me at the school. In 1979, The New York Times ran an article about my alma mater: 'Psychic' Ex-Student's Influence Shakes Waldorf School.' Coming upon the article in a library, I was galvanized. The Times revealed that a former Waldorf student had started claiming that he had paranormal powers and could converse with spirits. And, shockingly, several teachers-including the headmaster, the former headmaster, and the high school principal accepted his story and began using him as a clairvoyant sage. In effect, they ceded control of the school to the young man and his "spiritual contacts," turning to them for supernatural decisions in matters large and small, ranging from curricular decisions to the selection of records played at school dances. When word of this remarkable administrative arrangement inevitably leaked, the occult beliefs of the school's leaders emerged into plain view." Has the Department for Education in the UK been duped? I think so! What has to be realised from Roger Rawlings account of his educational experience, is that the teachers at his school were caring and at the time he was unaware of the subtle indoctrination to which the students were being subjected.

Grace Chen, Editor PublicSchoolReview.com, offers [four successes and failures](#) of Steiner Waldorf education: "While many parents and teachers are enthralled with the unique approach to education Waldorf offers, others are significantly concerned about some of Steiner's philosophies:

Success 1: A Worldly, Humanitarian Education

Waldorf views education as a far greater responsibility than simply reading, writing, and arithmetic. In a Waldorf school, children are taught the importance of social responsibility, peace, respect, and compassion. The success of this education philosophy can be seen in various Waldorf campuses around the world, and most poignantly, in areas where tremendous racial tensions exist. During the South African apartheid regime, the local Waldorf school was one of the rare examples where Caucasian and African students attended classes together. Today, at the Harduf Kibbutz Waldorf school in Israel, Jewish and Arab students and faculty learn from each other.

In an Australian qualitative and quantitative research study conducted by Jennifer Gidley and published in 2005 in the Futures Journal, about 75% of the students surveyed could envision "positive changes in both the environment and human development," as well as socio-economically.

Success 2: "Looping" Builds Relationships

The Waldorf model encourages children to remain with the same teacher all the way through the primary grades of school until they head to high school. Theoretically, by spending eight grade years with a single adult mentor, children build long-term relationships and feelings of security. When students or parents have a conflict with the teacher, they are encouraged to work out their differences, building conflict-resolution skills in the process. In addition, the teacher theoretically should truly understand how each child learns and can personalize the lessons to specific learning styles.

With that said, some may argue that looping is a disadvantage, as there are certain drawbacks inherent in looping, and a growing number of Waldorf campuses are decreasing the amount of time looped.

Success 3: Learning through Art

The Waldorf model infuses the arts with academics all the way through the primary grades and into high school. The arts are part of nearly every lesson, using drama, music, dance (specifically called eurythmy, which is a form of dance that all children and teachers participate in for the purpose of expressing the "art of the soul"), crafts, and visual arts to illustrate what the children are learning. For example, typical textbooks are not found in the Waldorf classroom. Rather, each student draws and creates a personal book that exemplifies the lessons.

The artistic emphasis certainly shines through in the Waldorf students. According to research conducted by Earl Ogletree that analyzed students in both Waldorf and traditional schools, those in Waldorf schools scored higher on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking Ability. While not all children may thrive in this type of learning environment, this philosophy is a perfect fit for students who have an artistic and creative inclination.

Success 4: Children Begin Learning without Technology

Technology, including television and computers, are frowned upon in Waldorf schools during the early years of education, and parents are encouraged to ban these digital devices at home as well. Instead, children are encouraged to indulge in free play that nurtures the imagination and interactions with other students. The lack of media exposure may also reduce attitudes of consumerism in younger kids.

Failure 1: Children Not Taught to Read Until Permanent Teeth Sprout

According to Waldorf methodology, children are not taught to read in these schools until around ages seven or eight, or specifically, when their permanent teeth sprout. Instead, in the early primary years, oral storytelling and play time are emphasized.

Some parents and educators have voiced concern that the delay in teaching basic reading skills could put children behind in their studies, especially if they were to transfer to a non-Waldorf institution. Test scores for second-grade students in Waldorf schools do tend to lag behind scores of children in the same grade in public schools.

However, A New Zealand study conducted in 2009 found that Waldorf children do catch up in their reading skills by age 10. Sebastian Suggate of the Department of Psychology of the University of Otago compared public school and Waldorf students and found that by age 10, there was "no difference in reading achievement between children who had been given early instruction in reading and those who had not.

The delay in teaching reading can also mean that children with reading disabilities, such as dyslexia, are not diagnosed until a later age.

Failure 2: Steiner's Spiritual Worldview Passed to Teachers and Students

Steiner developed his educational model based on his spiritual philosophy known as anthroposophy. This philosophy subscribes to reincarnation, spirits on the earth and utilizing the inner self to serve community. While anthroposophy is not taught as a religious course in any American Waldorf school, it is a core part of teacher training.

Some parents believe their children are infused with New Age ideas at Waldorf that may run contrary to their own spiritual beliefs. Other parents believe that the prevalence of anthroposophy in the classroom is hidden from them. Still others believe that anthroposophy interwoven into the education makes Waldorf religious schools based on occult theory, as expressed by The People for Legal and Non-Sectarian Schools (PLANS), which was formed by former Waldorf parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

Failure 3: Bullying Issues Not Addressed

Bullying is a tragedy that occurs at too many schools, and Waldorf schools are not immune to bullying. While no quantitative study has been conducted to compare the prevalence of bullying at Waldorf vs. traditional schools, there are a handful of "Waldorf survivor" groups, where former Waldorf students and parents come together to heal from their traumatizing Waldorf experiences.

Failure 4: Lack of Student Population Diversity

In a study conducted by Freda Easton of the Columbia University Teachers College, students, parents, and faculty of surveyed American Waldorf colleges all affirmed that the student population could be more diverse, specifically including more minority groups. According to Vernon Dewey at Antiochne University, there is a "present lack of racial diversity in Waldorf Schools."

Most Waldorf schools are private, which may be a contributing factor to the lack of socioeconomic diversity. Waldorf education is typically a rather expensive undertaking for parents, which is why many schools have financial aid available.

The choice of schools is a personal one that parents have to make for each of their children. Many factors go into this decision, including the quality of the school and education and the temperament of the child. When it comes to Waldorf education, it is important to look at both the pros and cons before choosing this model for your child."

Grace Chen is the lead editor and writer for Public School Review. From teaching at-risk public middle school students to lecturing for the Haas School of Business and FIDM. I think that the descriptions attributed to the 'successes' and 'failures' above are to some extent debatable.

Further reading on negative experiences of Steiner Waldorf education:

Why parents should beware this cult - Glen Falkner, Australian Rationalist
The delusional world of Rudolf Steiner - Ian Hayward, Australian Rationalist
[Are Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf Schools 'Non-Sectarian'? - Dan Dougan and Judy Daar](#)
[A rational look at Steiner schools - Blog](#)

A visit to the Steiner Archive in the links provided by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship below will confirm the occult nature of anthroposophy and the ideas of Rudolf Steiner.

Web URLs provided in the reply from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship:

1. [SWSF Statements](#)
2. [Why Waldorf Works](#)
3. [Steiner Archive](#)

Waldorf/Steiner Schools and pedagogy were formed on the basis of the ideas of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), a self proclaimed Austrian clairvoyant, who founded a movement/religion which he named anthroposophy in 1913 after he split from the occult Theosophical Society.

Michael Thomas

BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE --- CAMPHILL COMMUNITIES --- ANTHROPOSHIC MEDICINE