

A History of Steiner Schools

Rudolf Steiner was an intellectual man who was always on a quest to find out how science and spirituality intertwined and how this tenuous string is linked to the way we as human beings learn (Nicol & Taplin: 2012, pp.1-4).

The first Steiner school was founded in 1919, just after the first world war, at a time of major public doubt in political and educational systems (Ashaly:2009, pp.210) as well as belief systems. Another element which assisted the growth of Steiner’s popularity was the fact that many peoples fabric of reality had been also recently been pulled in to question due to concepts to do with evolution, philosophy and science and people were searching for new ways to view and understand the world (Toncheva: 2013, pp.82).

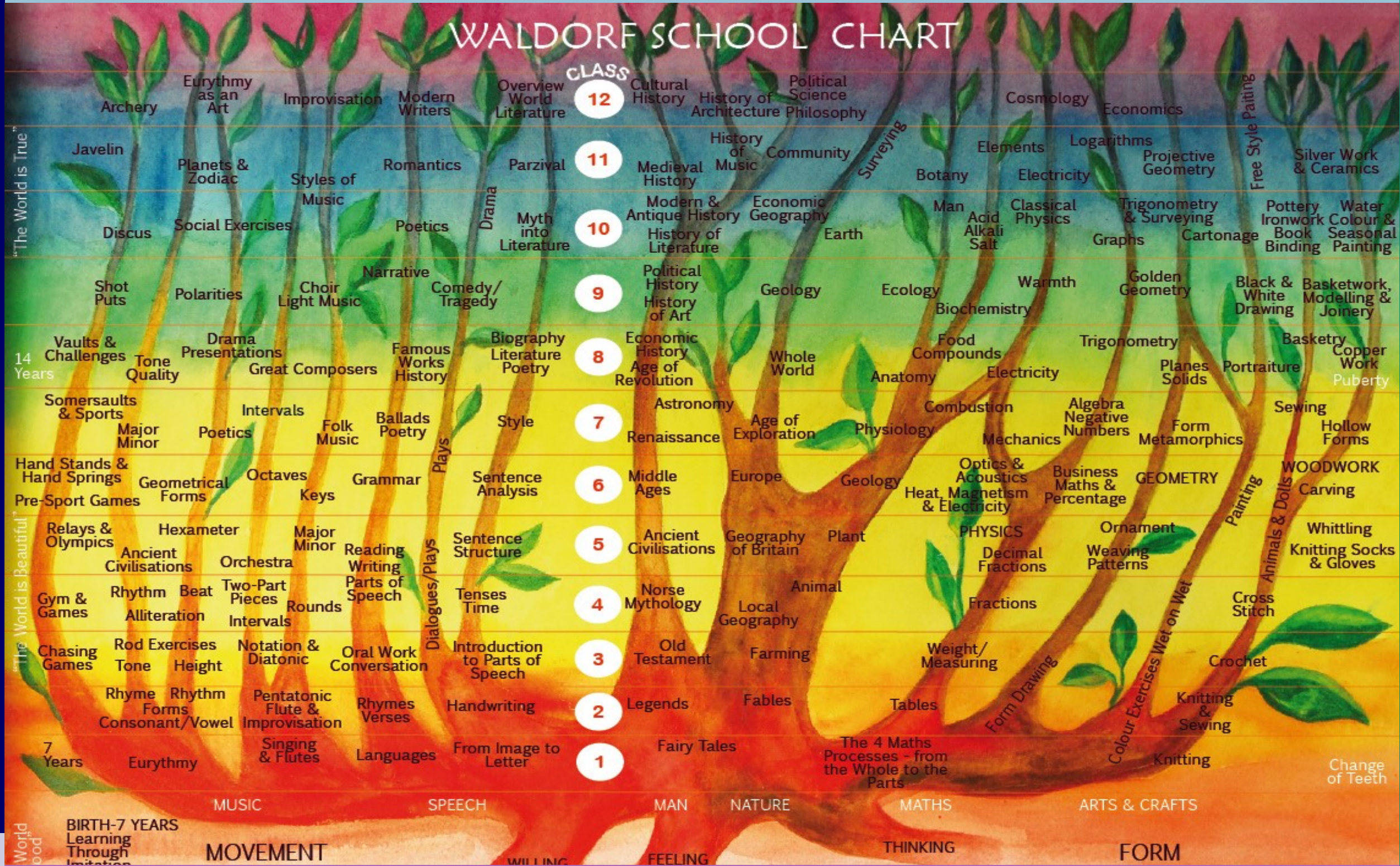
Other pedagogists, such as A.S. Neill, were also becoming popular at the time and their views were helping to influence the educational sphere in some parts of the world, though they were, and still are, seen by many as radical thinkers.

Anthroposophy

Steiner’s educational approach was based on themes of Anthroposophy and children's innate ability to learn according to their stage of development in order to grow the three aspects of their being, namely body, spirit and soul (Woods et al.: 2005, pp.14). The word ‘anthroposophy’ was created by Steiner and means ’wisdom of man,’ it’s core foundations are related with humans ability to acquire knowledge from everything they do (Ashley: 2009, pp.209-210). However, this can be said for many an acquisition theory. Anthroposophy is unique because its focus is on how we seize the knowledge through not only scientific but also spiritualistic means and ideals (Gronbach: 2010, pp.1). Steiner believed that the development of the self can be achieved through exploring and gaining knowledge of the natural world, seasons and science, making an anthroposophist ’a spiritual-scientific explorer’ who fuses the two differing worlds of thought (Toncheva: 2013, pp.84). The foundations of anthroposophy stem from theosophy, a Christian philosophical stream which Steiner was extremely involved with during his life-time, and both are very similar in regards to the streams of thought which form them as well as structurally (Clemen: 1924, pp.282).

Bibliography	Images
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The Advantages and Disadvantages of Steiner Education in the 21st Century.



The Steiner Curriculum

Contrary to popular public belief, Steiner schools do have a curriculum and structure which they work around, even if the structure is less rigid than often expected due to experiences in mainstream schooling. Pre-class 1 children are in Kindergarten (which is arranged in the way one might expect a home to be, with a kitchen and home corner etc.) where they experience the day through play and imaginative practices alone. After children start class 1, at around seven years of age, they are introduced to concepts which are needed to help them study, practicing shape-forming and letter making as well as story-telling. After acquiring the skills needed to create letters, numbers and use language effectively, the curriculum eventually incorporates subjects such as history, geography, geometry, algebra and literature into the daily lessons.

Conclusion

Though there are both advantages and disadvantages to the Steiner approach, it seems as though both the positives and negatives intertwine. The closer educational community and teacher/student relationships seem to have lowered bullying levels and generally had a positive effect on the schooling system, however, it has also created a Steiner-type bubble in which all people who attend the school have a similar ethos and value system. Due to this, students who attend Steiner school are often detached from the outside community, which may affect their future views and dealings with people from outside their community. According to O’Connor and Angus (2014), the age at which children start formal schooling within the Steiner philosophy is beneficial to their development, however it could also be argued that children at age four *are* able to do the same thing as those within Steiner settings at age six, and are therefore at an advantage for starting earlier. The lack of GCSE’s and A-Levels offered in Steiner schools also makes it harder to compare how mainstream schooling and Steiner schooling differ in regards to effectiveness, however, both educational streams have a completely different ethos and structure and one could argue that the life and independent thinking skills as well as the freedom which a Steiner education can offer is worth more than the extra qualifications. Students families often need to have the financial means to send their child to a Steiner education, which also limits what students are able to attends Steiner schools, however with the emergence of Steiner Academies within England, this is now starting to change in Britain.

Advantages

- Steiner schools have a strong focus on their sense of community, this has helped keep levels of bullying very low in comparison to mainstream schools (Sutton & Smith: 1999, pp.108).
- Students start formal education at the more developmentally-appropriate age of six. This is two years after mainstream schools in Britain, where schools start formal education at four years of age, the youngest school start age in the whole of Europe (O’Connor & Angus: 2014, pp.489).
- There is a strong focus on art within the Steiner methodology, and the teaching methods and theories which govern the way that art is used within Steiner classrooms has been noted to be superior than techniques used within mainstream education (Hallam et. al: 2016 pp.143-144).
- The way the Steiner curriculum uses art to teach phonics has been argued to be a very effective method which was very much ahead of its time (Burnett: 2007).
- Teachers are required to constantly review their practice and are trained to do so, in order to constantly ensure that the methods that they are using are in accordance to Steiner’s educational approaches. (Woods & Woods:2009, pp.206)
- Students stay with the same ‘main’ teacher for eight years, creating a strong familial type bond between teacher and student (Woods & Woods: 2009, pp.215).

Disadvantages

- Students leave compulsory education with less GCSE’s than mainstream students, mostly because the GCSE curriculum often is at odds with the Steiner approach (Woods et al.: 2005, pp.61).
- Most Steiner Schools are independent schools and therefore charge a considerable amount in fees, effectively making the educational values of Steiner only available for those wealthy enough to afford a private education.
- Steiner teachers are put in a position of authority over the entire development of the children they teach, constantly having to show them that the world is a good place, this could lead to unrealistic expectations of reality outside of school settings (Woods & Woods: 2009, pp.211).
- Teachers are given a lot of freedom to teach the curriculum in their own way, this can lead to different interpretations of the curriculum and methods of teaching. Some teachers can take advantage of this and stray from Steiner’s original ‘Konferenzen principles.’ (Woods & Woods: 2009, pp.212)
- Though students are part of a closely-knit educational community within their settings, Steiner schools in the past have noted that students do not often feel as connected to the outside world or community (Woods & Woods: 2009, pp.214).