

# Waldorf Approach in All Aspects

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## Abstract

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) revealed the paradigm of free thought that formed the basis of libertarian education in the 18th century. Rousseau's theory of education is based on the natural and pure nature of the individual. The main point he wants to emphasize is the fact that any individual is born sinless and right, but all the institutions, including society and education, destroy the integrity and cleanliness that one brings to birth. According to Rousseau, education is not about the imposition and imposition of certain systems on the child, but on the contrary, education must be a system that provides for the natural development of the child (Ergün, 1994). Many western educators such as Salzman, Pestalozzi and Froebel were also influenced by Rousseau's educational philosophy (Ata, 2003). On the other hand, Rousseau's approach to human nature has been a philosophical/theoretical starting point for alternative educational approaches. The emergence of alternative education approaches also affected early childhood education and different approaches rised in preschool education. One of these approaches is the Waldorf Approach, developed by Rudolf Steiner. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to give information about Rudolf Steiner who is an early pioneer of the Waldorf Education.

**Keywords:** Alternative Education, Waldorf Approach, Rudolf Steiner

## Introduction

Steiner, the founder of the Waldorf approach, was born in Kraljevec in 1861 as a child of a German family. Steiner studied at a technical school in Vienna and became interested in mathematics and science at an early age and began to consider it important to provide people who could not sense the spiritual world with a way to learn about spirituality (Easton, 1980). In this context, Steiner studied with great admiration Goethe, a German poet, philosopher and scientist who lived in the 19th century and even began to give meaning to his own spiritual experiences through the work of Goethe (Carlgrén, 1993; Easton, 1980). After Steiner began studying Wolfgang von Goethe's work in 1879, he worked on methods for the development of educated spiritual thought, and in 1883 he began to organize Goethe's Natural Scientific Writings for the study of one of his professors. He made a connection with Steiner Goethe through spiritual observations of Goethe; the reason for this is that he is the first person he has ever known to be able to establish a conscious connection with the spiritual world. Although Steiner understood that Goethe could not get an "emotional" perception that is capable of feeling reality on ordinary perceptions, he saw that Goethe was very close to it, so Goethe's work influenced Steiner throughout his life.

Steiner was an active participant in the Theosophical Society between 1902 and 1913 (Easton, 1980; Richards, 1980) in order to help his own "above-emotional" knowledge. In 1879, H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. The Theosophical community founded by Olcott in New York to support spiritual development (Richards 1980). According to Steiner, theosophy (the whole philosophy that all religions and beliefs are supposed to find "the Divine", and thus all religions and beliefs have a part of the truth) generally emphasizes Eastern religious beliefs, Steiner has gradually moved away from this community because it was not based on scientific facts and observations (Richards, 1980). Also, Steiner had a hard time believing the idea that Jesus would come as a resurrection, and this was also a factor for leaving the community (Richards, 1980). As a result, many German members of Steiner and Theosophical Society founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1913 (McDermott, 1984; Richards, 1980).

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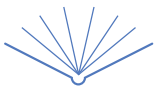
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## Literature Review

### *Philosophical Foundations of the Waldorf Approach*

The philosophical foundations of the Waldorf approach are based on the philosophy of critical idealism, known as "anthroposophy". Social events that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the economic and social consequences of these events; prepared Rudolf Steiner to carry out studies on the position of the individual in the newly formed social structure. He then put forth a different approach called "Waldorf" by making these studies systematic later (Gürkan and Ültanır, 1994).

In Steiner's statement, Anthroposophy is not an "intellectual science" but a "spiritual science" that requires a combination of inner perception and objectivity (Richards, 1980). Steiner (1965, 1992, 1994) notes in his writings and lectures that the soul is different from the mind and that spiritual humanity is the essence of the universe (Richards, 1980).

Nowadays, modern thinking has begun to account for what is being measured is largely observer dependent (Miller, 1992). Measurement (observation or knowing) always requires a person (observer or informational) who influence the interpretation of the results (Miller, 1992, Richards, 1980). Steiner and a multitude of spiritual, esoteric body (all kinds of knowledge, doctrine conveyed to only a narrow circle that is not communicated to anyone except a particular group of people) is the manifestation of spiritual activities that are visually observable, and this makes them above emotion or only an over-perception of their existence is developed. With the acquisition of anthroposophical education, which is a spiritual science, people can acquire this extreme perception and make an invisible reality appear (Richards, 1980).

Basic Principles of Anthroposophy: Anthroposophy is also defined as a special system in which each individual develops his own developmental capacity with the wisdom of humanity. This system is shaped by the environment in which the individual's internal tendencies are lived and influenced by the cultural, academic, and social aspects of the environment in which they grew up (Whedon, 2007).

To understand that anthroposophy was behind Steiner's educational ideas, it is necessary to touch upon the principles that Steiner refers to as "three births of mankind" and "three times human". Steiner's explanations of "three births" and "threefold human" first appeared in his book, *Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy* (1965), published in 1909. According to Steiner, the first birth is the birth of the physical body that emerges immediately, the second birth is the birth of the etheric body, and the third birth is the coming of the astral body that emerges in adolescence (Steiner, 1965). The physical body is born with birth, and it is the life that is sustained by cell metabolism. The etheric or earthly body is an energy field that interacts with both the physical world and the different bodies (Steiner, 1965). Steiner (1965) tells us that the etheric body is on the physical body and is present in animals and plants as well as being very important in man. The etheric body cannot be perceived by ordinary senses but can be seen by those who have developed the correct perception organs. It is believed that the etheric / earthly body enriches the powers and materials of the physical body and exposes its internal movements of growth, reproduction and body fluids. The etheric body may become habitual, memory, temperamental and thoughtful during its development (Steiner, 1965).

The third birth, the astral body, is believed to be pain, pleasure, passion and nudity, which is why it is the instrument of the senses. Steiner (1965) plants must reflect things that are physically fruitful because they do not have such senses. Steiner (1965) states that these three births are different organizations, organs or members who are in the human being and are a quadruple. This fourth member, which is present in human beings, is a man of ego in other words "I". When one defines himself as "I," one defines his own individuality and distinguishes himself from others. All these organizations or organs influence the growth of each other throughout their lives.

Steiner (1965) describes the three-fold explanations of human beings as follows; It includes the relationship of the human body, spirit and soul with the main functions of desire, feeling and thinking. Steiner (1965) believes that the limb system, is extremely important for the child during the period from birth to seven years of age. If cognitive development is hastened and desire is squeezed at this moment, a destructive force will come into play in the process of thought. After the development of the good, it will develop in the first years, not to think, to feel. However, in every child, mental development can progress after emotional development (Harwood, 1979).

Steiner (1965) also states that through the limbs and the metabolic system, the body naturally comes to develop, and that the senses emerge through the heart and the rhythmic system, and that the spirit that comes to mind through the brain comes to the fountain. Steiner thinks that the body needs nutrition in the same way that the spirit needs nutrition for development. Steiner argues that the basis of the functions necessary for soul feeding must be taken in childhood.

### *Child by Anthroposophical Perspective in the Waldorf Approach*

Being conscious of "the three births of mankind" and the four different bodies that exist within man has very important implications for how anthroposophers are educated, enumerated, respected, seen, guided and educated (Harwood, 1979). Thanks to anthroposophical knowledge, educators and parents understand what is appealing to the soul of a developing child. Similar to the explanations for child development, the anthroposophical view on development also considers the first seven years to be the most important for children to develop in the best way (Almon, 1992). Child-educators and educators can understand how understands children and appeals to the inner world of the child, how they are developing and closely following each child's individual development. In this context, Rudolf Steiner's understanding of the periods from the child's point of view becomes important.

Steiner argues that there are three universes for seven years for both physical and mental development. These phases are expressed as physical consciousness phase (0-7 years), perceptual consciousness phase (7-14 years) and intellectual conscious awareness phase (14 years and over).

Phase of Physical Consciousness: Steiner emphasizes the importance of the first seven years of a child's life when they considers healthy or unhealthy development of an individual in their work. The developments and changes that have taken place during these years provide the prerequisites for the mental and moral life of the individual and the shaping of the character of the child (Salter, 1987). Steiner (1965) believes that children before the age of seven establish a



relationship with their environment through imitation and sampling. As a result, it is important that adults who interact with the environment and it can be thought that the child imitates this process (Carlgren, 1993; Salter, 1987). In addition to understanding its importance in terms of children during this period, it is also necessary for children and educators to understand how important it is for the child to perform music-related activities, play games, and listen to the story. Until the age of three, the child imitates the characters around him, but most of the time he is unconscious (Carlgren, 1993; Steiner, 1965). Imitation becomes a conscious movement after three years of age and is the first action that the child will consciously undertake to learn and develop (Carlgren, 1993). For this reason, the physical environment around the child should be so appealing to the child's feelings. The environment is both the material surrounding the child and the behavior of the adults around the child (Willson and Wierbicki, 1988).

It is important to remember that during this period, the development is the child's etheric body and that the main focus of this development is the child's ideas, habits and memory. At the same time, the environment in which the child lives will be a "protective cover" that will give the child love and warmth, as well as provide good examples to imitate and follow. For this reason, educators are always required to pay attention to what they say, do and their moral values (Almon, 1992). Both educators and child-educators should observe themselves very well and ask themselves: "Did I approve this if the child would imitate it?" (Querido, 1987). In these early years of the child, songs and rhythmic voices appeal to the child's inner world and imagination well (Willson and Wierbicki, 1988). The dance movements in the music rhythm have a strong influence on developing physical organs and lower limbs, but nowadays it is seen that they are not given enough importance in preschool education institutions (Carlgren, 1993; Querid, 1987; Steiner, 1965).

Playing a game is also a very important factor in the development of a child. The child learns about life by playing games. Playing games will meet situations that may happen in the future (Salter, 1987). With the gaming activities, new situations related to life come to the fore, and the child needs to establish friendship and problem solving. At the same time as playing games, child growers and educators develop the mobility and desirable bodily organs of the limbs they are trying to develop in children younger than seven years (Edmunds, 1987). Playing games and acting like adults is a way to participate in the world. For this reason, the game should include painting, modeling, cooking, sewing, constructing and doing things, singing, listening to stories and portraying stories (Edmunds, 1987).

In the preschool years, when thinking becomes more visual and desirous, play becomes more creative, and examples become so important in terms of the development of the child that the child's intelligence evolves by taking part in fantastic events (Grunelius, 1991). Again, it is believed that the child's consciousness is full of imagination (Salter, 1987). Child growers and trainers can also improve the child's intelligence in this period by telling stories that are visual and rhythmic. According to Steiner (1965), stories and tastes related to nature address the child's inner world because these stories reveal spiritual truths that enable the child to visually understand the moral concepts and facts (Grunelius, 1991, Salter, 1987). They should remember that the child's mind power is visual during the first seven years of the child's life, keeping in mind that adults at this age are not the basis of the child's thinking but the wish-based foundation. Salter (1987) likens children's thought processes to painting. Since

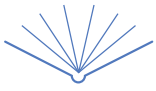
the child's visual thought and the request are closely related, their movements are also creative, because the child moves and creates as it thinks visually. It is not the end of this activity. On the contrary, the child is visually impaired during the activity. The child must listen and observe the characters of the environment so that the child can develop the spirit further and sustain the imagination of the soul (Salter, 1987).

**Perceptual Consciousness Level (7-14 years):** With the change of teeth around 7 years old, children become aware of new awareness, self-awareness and environmental awareness (Edmunds, 1987). Children aged seven and eight think visually and their way of thinking is a mood of emotion; (Edmunds, 1987). It is also important that the child has an authoritarian figure between the ages of seven and fourteen; because at this age the child must trust someone else with both heart and soul (Edmunds, 1987; Richards, 1980; Steiner, 1995). For this reason, the teacher stands in front of the child as a representative of humanity, and the child learns to trust mankind through the teacher (Edmunds, 1987). During elementary school years, the ethereal body works with education rather than education (with more teacher influence and orientation). A child's etheric body is developed by the teacher with pictures and examples, and the child's imagination is directed (Steiner, 1965, 1995). Visibly, what the child sees glimpses are things that affect him more after seven years of age (Steiner, 1965). The child's emotions are developed by the adult through illustrations and shorts about nature, past stories and historical events, so that beauty and artistic emotions are aroused (Steiner, 1965, 1995).

**Intellectual Awareness Level (14 years and over):** Physical, emotional, and mental development are integrated in this period (Ogletree, 1997). The inner world feelings (the feeling of creating their own world) give the adolescent a power that has not been before. Abstract thinking skills developed during this period (Aydin, 2009). Steiner states that in this period the individual is the investigator of the truth, the only thing that he deals with is reality. At this stage, according to Steiner, the analytical thinking ability develops in the individual, and as a result, the individual creates self-discipline and realizes his own independence (Uhrmacher, 1995).

### *Historical Development of the Waldorf Approach*

After World War I, Germany was in ruins and those living there had to rebuild their country. At this point, it is no coincidence that Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education began to develop while Europe and the rest of the world were having a very difficult economic period. Steiner (1965, 1993, 1995) emphasizes the importance of creativity and moral judgment as much as the importance of intellectual development of teachers. This will provide a holistic education that will balance the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of the students, and the differences of each child will be appreciated, and the child will develop at his own pace (Wilson and Wierbicki, 1988). Steiner (1995) seeks to develop a curriculum that integrates academics and arts with a unique teacher-student relationship that will awaken students' respect for goodness and integrity. A curriculum and education formulated in this way will create a more humane society in a world that needs more moral and social reforms. With that in mind, Steiner (1995) defined the "three dimensions of social order" which he thought would be effective in moral and social reform. Three dimensions of social order; (a) politically independent cultural life, self-directed and sustainable; (b) economic life, free national and international political influence based on the principle of solidarity; and (c) a strong and self-limiting government that can and will take place spontaneously according to



the time consciousness (Steiner, 1995). In July 1917, a class Rudolf Steiner, made a proposal to the German and Austrian governments and elaborated on the principles of how the three dimensions of social order could be realized. In this talk emphasized that a real society can only be possible through the cultural development of people. "thinking", "feeling" and "wanting" abilities.

In this context, others such as Rudolf Steiner believed that it was necessary to create an education reform to rebuild Germany and to teach future leaders of Germany how to create and maintain a true human society (Easton, 1980). In April 1919, Steiner made a speech to his employees at the Waldorf-Astoria Smoke Company, and during this conversation he explained his vision and the role of education in human development. Emil Molt, who is the manager of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Company and a student of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, has proposed to Steiner to establish a school on the basis of his views (Barnes, 1991; Carlgren, 1993; Easton, 1980; Steiner, 1995). Shortly thereafter, two factory workers, Steiner, Molt and the first teachers at the school, came together and the German Ministry of Education approved the new school on the condition that it met the standards set for public schools at the end of the third, sixth and eighth grades.

In this newly opened school, what and how should be given to students is determined by the pedagogical decisions of the school. The first Free Waldorf School was founded on September 7, 1919. The Free Waldorf School was founded on the idea of a Threefold Social Organism and for social change (Carlgren, 1993; Easton, 1980; Steiner, 1995). Through Rudolf Steiner's spiritual vision and his own involvement, the teachers tried to teach the students the power of thought, depth of emotion and desire. According to the teachers, the development of the students in this way would make them a better part of the "Human Community" and better prepare them for changing the world around them (Steiner, 1995). The Waldorf approach, an educational approach incorporating Steiner's philosophical point of view, has quickly become a widely accepted approach throughout the education system worldwide after the first Waldorf school opened in 1919.

#### *Waldorf Education in the Early Childhood Education*

It is very important to have a very sensitive and conscious training in the natural behaviors of imitating the adults around the child, from the preschool age to the time of the second child. According to Steiner, preschool children are "organs of feeling" that attract the world and copy what they see (Carlgren, 1993). It is seen as a playroom, not as a classroom, where the kindergarten teacher has rich possibilities for children to develop their imagination and imagination (Grunelius, 1991). Those in the Waldorf preschool and kindergarten are actually seen as "breathing" in terms of activity (McEldowney, 1997). This movement, defined as "breathing", occurs when children are playing games while the teacher is doing activities such as cooking, sewing, wrapping, painting and drawing pictures. Children are allowed to come in freely every morning and participate in the activity the teacher is doing. This can happen both with the help of the teacher and with the willingness of the student to participate in that activity. Students can paint, sew, cook, etc. Once completed, they can return to play without intervention by teachers (until the games start to become destructive). Average playing times range from sixty to ninety minutes. In addition, children can read the story every morning, sing poetry or singing a song, and portray the stories (Grunelius, 1991).

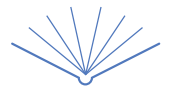
In the Waldorf preschool education method, children are expected to participate in group activities under teacher leadership. Within one day, the program is prepared considering the holistic development of children and this program includes activities such as drama, art, and music. Studies in both the mixed age group and the single age group can be carried out within the class (Hughes, 2013).

#### *Waldorf Education in Elementary School*

The education of children entering the second seven-year period of their life is much different from the first seven years. From a period when the child lives with the limbs of a small child, a period of time has begun to develop in which the rhythmic systems are beginning to develop (Steiner, 1965, 1995). Individuals' hearts and lungs are now considered to be the most important organs with which the periphery will deal (Easton, 1989). The heart speaks about the emotions and feelings of the individuals, which is the purpose of the education given in this period. As a result, education between the ages of seven and fourteen concentrates on his artistic, poetic and imaginary qualities to reveal the emotional life of the individual (Easton, 1989).

A preschooler wants to act like an adult, while imitating the actions of their parents or teachers (Carlgren, 1993; Steiner, 1995). Waldorf schools provide training with the same teacher from the first year to the eighth grade when possible (Carlgren, 1993). For this reason, the person undertaking this role has a great responsibility; the model should be a human and have strong relationships with all his students. This relationship is based on the spiritual development of the teacher and the mutual respect and affection between the child and the main teacher (Easton, 1989). Steiner (1995) believes that if a teacher remains with the children for eight years, a human relationship develops, because the teacher also develops with the students. If the teacher does not have enough knowledge of the subject to be addressed in the past eight years, the teacher must develop with the students, while still acquiring more experience and knowledge (Easton, 1989). Since the students are not given official grades in the first eight years, the teacher assesses their work because they know the student and prepares a detailed report on each student at the end of the year (Carlgren, 1993; Richards, 1980). For this reason, it is very important for a teacher to know and support each student so that a teacher can really understand and support the growth and development of the student (Edmunds, 1987).

Because the purpose of the Waldorf education is to educate the child as a whole with his head, heart, and hands (Trostli, 1995), the curriculum from the first to the eighth grade is quite broad and the academic subjects are balanced with artistic and practical activities such as dyeing, clay sculpture, knitting, wood cutting and sewing. Each year the curriculum is changed, because the subject is chosen not for its intellectual significance, but for its special spiritual qualities manifested at any age (Easton, 1989). It is therefore important that children stay together in the same age group from the first year to the eighth grade and be with the same teacher. Steiner schools organize their days in a more rhythmic manner compared to most educational approaches in public schools (Easton, 1989). For example, the day starts with the main course, which can last from three to four weeks, lasting one to two hours. All subjects are taught in an artistic way and students prepare the main course book and equip it with colors (Carlgren, 1993). After the afternoon, movement activities such as handicrafts, gardening, music and rhythmic movement, gymnastics and group games are taught (Richards, 1980). Foreign language is taught in



Waldorf schools and counted as a course. In general, two foreign languages are taught by expert teachers and the specialist speaks only in their native language, so students never hear the language spoken incorrectly (Richards, 1980). These languages are taught in smaller classes in a rhythmic manner, and grammar is learned naturally. From the 1st to the 3rd grade, children learn the alphabet with beginner level information including writing, reading, poetry, and drama. People's stories, folklore, fables, and excerpts from the Old Testament are read. Progressively numbers, simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division operations are shown. In order to get informed, nature stories are explained, activities such as house building and gardening are done (Schwartz, 1997). Writing, reading, spelling, grammar, poetry and drama are taught from the 4th to the 6th grade. Four mathematical operations are glanced, and fractions, geometry and percentages are taught. Norse is used to teach history, and stories about ancient civilizations. At the same time, zoology, botany, beginner physics and geography are taught (Schwartz, 1997). 7th and 8th grades are continued with creative writing, reading, poetry and drama. Medieval history, Renaissance and country history are taught, and physics, basic chemistry, astronomy, geology and physiology in the field of mathematics and science (Schwartz, 1997).

### *Waldorf Education in High School*

Waldorf education continues in high schools in many schools. Thinking is developing in this period of the life of the student and the student is acquainted with many other teachers. Art continues to be the main teaching mechanism in this period (Carlgren, 1993). Because higher education institutions require evidence of the performance of students, students are graded, but teachers' assessments still have significant weight and prerequisite within the school (Easton, 1989). Waldorf high school teachers also think that the most important task of a teacher is to facilitate the integrity of each student (Easton, 1989). In doing so, teachers ensure that students develop as stable, ego-possessive beings who can decide on their own, solve problems that are so crucial to their peers in society, and can develop as productive adults. The Principles of the Waldorf Approach

In his many talks on child development, Steiner emphasizes the importance of children acquiring three human-specific qualities and stresses that a natural ordering in their development leads them to walk, speak, and think (Salter, 1987). As the child progresses in each developmental area on its own initiative, it naturally contacts both the world and the spiritual world (Easton, 1989). After learning to talk, the child begins to think and starts to say "I" to himself around the age of three, seeing himself as a separate individual from others (Almon, 1992, Harwood, 1979). Steiner says that this is the first turning point in a child's life, and that children are beginning to have their first memories with their own consciousness (Easton, 1989).

In line with Steiner's thought, the following basic principles have been established for the construction of Waldorf schools (Steiner, 1995; Foster, 1984; Gürkan and Ültanır, 1994)

1. All children have the right to benefit from this educational system without any distinction in terms of social class, ethnicity and belief.
2. Waldorf schools must be economically and politically independent of the state. This independence should be regarded as a necessity for the application of the concept of democracy in Waldorf schools.

3. Waldorf schools should be managed by teachers who implement the practices themselves, not by an administrator.

4. The Waldorf schools should embrace social issues and be associated with the child's true life.

5. Individual differences of children should be respected and a training program should be organized according to the potential and development level of each child.

6. The child's education should continue with the same teacher each year, not with a different teacher. In this way, the teacher can follow the child's development and prepare the appropriate educational program for the child.

7. Assessment in Waldorf schools requires that the child be observed in a developmentally careful manner. In the light of these observations, the teacher should make arrangements according to the development areas of the child. Classical assessment instruments should not be used and longitudinal observational evaluations should be prepared separately for each child in a report.

8. At Waldorf schools, the development of the child should be holistically addressed and all areas of development should be supported.

It is the most general principle of Waldorf education (Schmitt-Stegman, 1997) that by developing self-consciousness, the child's real potential is freed up, so that the child's potential reaches the top level and humanity and the world become a useful element.

### *Learning Environment in Waldorf Education in Early Childhood*

Steiner considers the environment that encompasses classrooms, gardens and other building areas used by children as the first area of learning. The aesthetics of the playroom play a key role in the overall learning sense, which is relevant to children's developmental needs. The Waldorf preschool education environment supports children's beauty and order emotions (Williams and Johnson, 2005).

Steiner states that children are largely sensitive to their surroundings, have five senses and knowledge of the environment and gain experience with their bodies. For this reason, Steiner especially focuses on subjects such as the color of walls, class materials and furnishings. Steiner recommends that the walls of the preschool environment be painted with plain and bright colors without the use of wallpaper. Colors play an important role in the Waldorf approach. For example, extremely bright colors are overactive, gray and brown tones are bleak, plain and bright colors can have a warm effect. In the Waldorf approach, the classes evoke a sense of continuity with their design and function. Daily work creates an atmosphere that replaces the traditional home environment providing the rhythm of family and community experience (Williams and Johnson, 2005).

In Waldorf schools, kindergartens are perceived as an extension of the home, and it is aimed to maintain consistency between kindergarten and home. Classes usually include a wooden kitchen area where children can gain daily living skills, wooden chairs, tables and seats suitable for children's sizes (Stehlik, 2008).



In the Waldorf approach, most of the materials in the nursery room are soft and handmade. For example, plush animals, dwarfs and elves are usually made by the teacher (Granelius, 1991; Richards, 1980). These materials are so simple that they do not dominate the imaginations of children, they are intended to play games. Materials commonly found in Waldorf classrooms include polished wood pieces, silk and cotton fabrics, wool to weave, stones and sand. In the room, there is usually a wooden kitchen area. Children imitate adults in their lives by cooking methods, sleeping habits, and looking at babies or small animals during play (Richard, 1980).

#### *The Role of the Teacher in the Waldorf Approach*

Teacher training in the Waldorf approach is based on the lessons and writings of Rudolf Steiner (Williams and Johnson, 2005). To become a Waldorf teacher, you must apply to the Waldorf Teacher Training Institute as a graduate of at least one-degree program and complete the 1060-hour certificate program successfully. The Waldorf Teacher Certificate program is a holistic program that focuses on Steiner's teachings, child development, the Waldorf approach, and the cultural development of the teacher. This process includes the theoretical training of the Waldorf teacher candidate, the observation in Waldorf schools and the practice in Waldorf schools. Successful completion of this process makes it possible to receive teacher certifications from Waldorf teacher candidates (Wessling, 2005). Steiner argues that people who are defined as teachers must accept their own roles with great enthusiasm. According to him, not everyone can be a teacher, but those who choose to be teachers must have made the right decision about the responsibility they have. Feeling the enthusiasm of the teacher, the child will have the same enthusiasm. Another task for the teacher is to protect the children attended from physical, emotional, social and psychological aspects (Williams and Johnson, 2005).

According to Waldorf teachers, real education does not work unless the school is inspired entirely by the body-spirit relationship and does not work for the human's threefold nature (Easton, 1989). The reason is that the soul-spiritual existence of the child develops only when the individual is ready and talent shows. The Waldorf educators believe that after that the children are ready for the world, the ego is powerful and self-sufficient (Querido, 1987; Richards, 1980). From an anthroposophical point of view, Waldorf teachers are perceived differently by most students than educators. The teacher is also a thinker, a scientist, a poet, an artist, a musician, and an environmentalist (Edwards, 2002). The job of the Waldorf teacher is to help the child achieve the material and spiritual realities and earthly existence of the child, and the greatest benefit from them (Ogletree, 1996). The Waldorf teacher needs to understand the development of the child. Teachers also need to have similar behavior with Steiner's point of view on children, working with children and understanding them (Stehlik, 2008). Waldorf teachers do not use direct teaching as a teaching method in their kindergarten. Teachers consider this method to be a method that has a negative effect on the child's participation. Waldorf teachers encourage children to discover their own. Waldorf teachers teach children how to explore the world through play (Williams and Johnson, 2005). The information is learned by singing songs and playing animated games, not by teaching children how to read and write in formal ways (Richards, 1980). For Waldorf teachers, it is important that children's parenting experiences are much different than primary school experiences (McEldowney, 1997). For this reason, children are allowed to be children, and their

wishes for mathematics, reading and writing will be on their way to the first class.

#### *The Role of the Family in the Waldorf Approach*

The Waldorf approach involves family and education. The Waldorf approach knows the role of families in the development of the child. So, school-family relationships are quite frequent and strong. Information gathering for families is organized, teachers monitor how long families watch TV at home, make home visits, provide family education services (Kurtulmuş, 2012). In Waldorf kindergartens, a committee is established between parents and teachers so that family participation activities can be sustainable. It is expected that their parents will take part in these specially created committees. The "family school council" of families consists of setting up a discussion forum for families to determine their needs and conducting an effective work in the Waldorf school, responding to parents' questions, encouraging parents to contribute to the school, providing home support to families in need, adopting the basic principles of the Waldorf approach, have responsibilities such as adding parents to festivals and events ([www.whywaldorfworks.org](http://www.whywaldorfworks.org), 2015). Waldorf teachers educate parents on the goals and principles of the Waldorf approach to the goals they choose and set for their children. Teachers also find it useful to observe families and children in the home environment and often do so (Williams and Johnson, 2005).

#### **Conclusion**

Considering the Turkish education system, the effect of alternative education approaches on our education system is an undeniable fact. In addition, the institutions that provide education through alternative education approaches are increasing day by day. Especially in the field of preschool education, it is obvious that these developments are experienced rapidly. It is known that there are still approaches like Montessori, Waldorf, forest schools, which are not enough. Many of the institutions that exist at this point are still in the process of accreditation and yet do not feature a true Montessori or Waldorf school.

Considering the basic features of the Waldorf approach in this context, it is seen that there are some points parallel to the Turkish Education System and Turkish culture. Particularly, it can attract great interest in places where the Waldorf Approach is present, with its properties that are suitable for natural life philosophy which is becoming widespread nowadays. However, at this point, there is a spiritual dimension of the Waldorf approach. Anthroposophy, which is the basis of the philosophy of the Waldorf approach, does not quite agree with the culture of inroads common in our country. For this reason, schools that implement this approach are more likely to stretch this dimension of the philosophy. Otherwise, a certain resistance and prejudice may be encountered by people. In addition, Rudolf Steiner advocates a free educational environment in which every child can develop their own potential. However, most outcomes for children in early childhood classes ignore the individual characteristics of children in Turkish educational system. When planning activities, the teacher ignores these characteristics, skills and personalities of children. Teachers use generally pre-prepared plans to apply them to the class. However, these plans do not appropriate the developmental characteristics of some children. For this reason, the intended objectives have not been achieved. Freedom, which is an expression in the papers written in the Turkish education system, cannot show itself in practice. It is difficult to talk about the concept of freedom in an educational system where teachers are



often directed by children. It can be said that child-centered programs are shown in the curriculum documents, but the teacher-centered approach is dominant in practice. For this reason, schools that implement the Waldorf approach need to be careful in choosing teachers and pay attention to their teachers have engaged(?) Waldorf philosophy. In the Waldorf approach nature is seen as a third teacher. However, it is seen that the concept of nature is not given enough importance in the Turkish education system. Especially in kindergarten, garden time is frequently used in the Waldorf approach. However, when we look at the practices in the Turkish education system, it seems that children are very limited and inadequate at the time they spend in the garden.

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