

Waldorf Education

The Waldorf Curriculum AN ASCENDING SPIRAL OF KNOWLEDGE

Each subject studied should contribute to the development of a well-balanced individual.

In the Waldorf grades, the school day begins with a long, uninterrupted lesson. One subject is the focus; the class deals with it in-depth each morning for several weeks at a time. This long main lesson—which may well run for two hours—allows the teacher to develop a wide variety of activities around the subject at hand. In the younger grades, lively rhythmic activities get the circulation going and bring children together as a group; they recite poems connected with the main lesson, practice tongue twisters to limber up speech, and work with concentration exercises using body movements.

After the day's lesson, which includes a review of earlier learning, students record what they learned in their lesson books. Following recess, teachers present shorter "run-through" lessons with a strongly recitational character. Foreign languages are customarily taught from first grade on, and these lend themselves well to these later morning periods. Afternoons are devoted to lessons in which the whole child is active: eurythmy (artistically guided movement to music and speech), handwork, or gym, for example. Thus the day has a rhythm that helps overcome fatigue and enhances balanced learning.

The curriculum at a Waldorf school can be seen as an ascending spiral: the long lessons that begin each day, the concentrated blocks of study that focus on one subject for several weeks. Physics, for example, is introduced in the sixth grade and continued each year as a main lesson block until graduation.

As the students mature, they engage themselves at new levels of experience with each subject. It is as though each year they come to a window on the ascending spiral that looks out into the world through the lens of a particular subject. Through the main-lesson spiral curriculum, teachers lay the groundwork for a gradual vertical integration that deepens and widens each subject experience and, at the same time, keeps it moving with the other aspects of knowledge.

All students participate in all basic subjects regardless of their special aptitudes. The purpose of studying a subject is not to make a student into a professional mathematician, historian, or biologist, but to awaken and educate capacities that every human being needs. Naturally, one student is more gifted in math and another in science or history, but the mathematician needs the humanities, and the historian needs math and science. The choice of a vocation is left to the free decision of the adult, but one's early education should give one a palette of experience from which to choose the

particular colors that one's interests, capacities, and life circumstances allow. In a Waldorf high school, older students pursue special projects and elective subjects and activities, nevertheless, the goal remains: each subject studied should contribute to the development of a well-balanced individual.

If the ascending spiral of the curriculum offers a "vertical integration" from year to year, an equally important "horizontal integration" enables students to engage the full range of their faculties at every stage of development. The arts and practical skills play an essential part in the educational process throughout the grades. They are not considered luxuries, but fundamental to human growth and development.

THE WALDORF CURRICULUM FOR GRADES 1-8

History, language arts, science, math, and history are taught in main lesson blocks of three to five weeks during the morning main lesson hours.

Primary Grades 1-3

Pictorial introduction to the alphabet, writing, reading, spelling, poetry, and drama. Folk and fairy tales, fables, legends, Old Testament stories.

Numbers, basic mathematical processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Nature stories, house building, and gardening.

Middle Grades 4-6

Writing, reading, spelling, grammar, poetry, and drama. Norse myths, history and stories of ancient civilizations. Review of the four mathematical processes, fractions, percentage, and geometry. Local and world geography, comparative zoology, botany, and elementary physics.

Upper Grades 7-8

Creative writing, reading, spelling, grammar, poetry, and drama. Medieval history, Renaissance, world exploration, American history, and biography. Mathematics, geography, physics, basic chemistry, astronomy, and physiology.

Special subjects also taught are handwork: knitting, crochet, sewing, cross-stitch, basic weaving, toymaking, and woodworking. Music: singing, pentatonic flute, recorder, string instruments, wind, brass, and percussion instruments. Foreign languages (varies by school): Spanish, French, Japanese and German. Art: watercolor painting, form drawing, beeswax and clay modeling, perspective drawing. Movement: eurythmy, gymnastics, group games.

THE WALDORF HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Ninth Grade

English: literature, English skills, grammar, composition, vocabulary, speech. Foreign Language: Spanish, French, German or Japanese (varies by school). Math: algebra 1,

probability and statistics, introduction to computer education. Science: chemistry, physics, biology, geography. U.S. History: early American history and government. World History: revolutions and history through art. Music: performing choir, orchestra, and jazz band or beginning instruments (varies by school). Art/Crafts: black and white drawing, woodworking, drama, calligraphy, clay (varies by school). Physical education and eurythmy.

Tenth Grade

English: literature, term paper writing, grammar, composition, speech, poetry. Foreign Language: Level II Spanish, French, German or Japanese (varies by school). Math: geometry and surveying. Science: chemistry, physics, biology and geography. U.S. History: the period 1789 through 1914. World History: ancient history, Greece, and the Far East. Music: performing choir, orchestra, and jazz band or beginning instruments (varies by school). Art/Crafts: drama, woodworking, block printing, weaving, clay, pottery, drawing, painting (varies by school). Physical education, eurythmy, health, keyboarding, and first aid.

Eleventh Grade

English: literature, composition, grammar, and vocabulary. Foreign Language: Level III Spanish, French or German. Math: advanced algebra, computer science (varies by school). Science: chemistry, physics, biology, biology lab. U.S. History: World Wars to the present. World History: Rome, The Middle Ages, and The Renaissance, music history. Music: performing choir, orchestra, jazz band or string ensemble (varies by school). Art/Crafts: bookbinding, clay, life drawing, drama, woodcarving (varies by school). Physical education, eurythmy.

Twelfth Grade

English: literature, review of English skills, word usage, vocabulary, composition, honors program. Foreign language: Level IV Spanish, German or French, Honors program and AP (varies by school). Math: trigonometry, pre-calculus and/or advanced math, AP. Science: Chemistry, physics, biology, Honors program and AP (varies by school). U.S. History: development of the 19th and 20th century economic theory from the rise of mercantilism to the present. World History: architecture, modern art, Third World nations, symptomatology. Music: performing choir, orchestra, Honors program (varies by school). Art/Crafts: clay sculpture, carpentry, jewelry, graphic design, metalwork, Honors program (varies by school). P.E. and eurythmy.

Revised for use on Why Waldorf Works, this article by Henry Barnes, former Chairman of the Board of AWSNA, originally appeared in the October 1991 issue of Educational Leadership Magazine.