

The Waldorf School Movement in the US Midwest

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of Waldorf school movement in the US Midwest. For about six months, this case study was conducted at four different Waldorf schools and in a Waldorf teacher training center located in the Midwest of the USA. I informally interviewed and observed several Waldorf school teachers and teacher educators as well as parents who sent their children to the schools. I found four major characteristics of the current Waldorf school movement in the US Midwest. The Waldorf school movement is not religious, anti-intellectual, or limited to creativity, but focuses on individual students' spiritual well-being and artistic practices with activities and curriculum inspired by Steiner's Anthroposophy. The Waldorf school pedagogy and teacher training programs were also educational, collaborative, and artistic practices inspired by Anthroposophy (e.g. using the threefold method such as spirit, soul, and body or willing, feeling, and thinking). Fine-Arts integrated pedagogy and practices for students at four different Waldorf schools and pre-service teachers of a Waldorf teacher training program highlight the significance of these aspects of Waldorf learning. This implies that educators need to investigate the Waldorf school movement in the US and over the world.

Keywords: Waldorf school movement, fine arts integrated curriculum, anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner

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Introduction

Early History of Waldorf Schools

Emil Molt, the founder of Waldorf Astoria Tobacco Company, asked Steiner to assist in establishing a new school for the children his company's employees after listening to Steiner's lecture of education and spiritual development for the company workers just after World War I (Compani & Lang, 2011/2014). Steiner taught his core ideas of *Anthroposophy* to the teacher candidates for the school before the school opened to the public in Stuttgart, Germany in September 1919. Steiner's pedagogy in the Waldorf Schools should be the true art of developing the humans who will become a knowledgeable whole man in a new society after World War I, emphasizing students' individuality of threshold (i.e. body, soul, and spirit) (Steiner, 1972). The first Waldorf kindergarten was established by von Grunelius in Stuttgart in 1926. During World War II, German Nazi party banned all the Waldorf schools in Germany because they thought that Waldorf schools only cared about students' individuality of threshold (i.e. individually spiritual well-being instead of nationalism). After World War II, Klara Hattermann developed the Waldorf kindergarten education and parenting method based on Steiner's Anthroposophy in Hanover, Germany. Freya Jaffke and Helmut von Kügelgen expanded Waldorf pedagogy of Early Childhood Education (ECE) each in Reutlingen and in Stuttgart, Germany (Compani & Lang, 2011/2013).

Waldorf School Movement in the World

Waldorf education is a rapidly growing school system; at least 1,000 Waldorf schools exist worldwide (Paull, 2011). According to International Forum for Steiner/Waldorf-Education (2015), there were about 1,063 Waldorf and Rudolf Steiner schools in 61 countries in 2014. Mazzone (1999) pointed out that there are more new independent Waldorf schools, Waldorf methods, or inspired schools around the world and it is necessary to investigate more about how Steiner's philosophy has been applied to the recently established Waldorf schools because the application can be diverse in education.

The Waldorf School and Early Childhood Education (ECE) Movement in the US Midwest

When I manually calculated the number of Waldorf schools through the links of Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (2018) and Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (2018), there are about 113 Waldorf schools which include the Early Childhood Education program. Most of these schools are located in urban or suburban areas of the states in the US Northeast or West Coast. The “Midwest” consists of 12 states in the north central United States: Illinois (IL), Ohio (OH), Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan (MI), Minnesota (MN), Missouri (MO), Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (WI). In the Midwest, Waldorf schools exist in only six states (i.e. IL, OH, MI, MN, MO, and WI) out of twelve. Furthermore, the Midwest has only 14 Waldorf schools out of 113 in the USA.

In the Midwest, there are only three Waldorf teacher training centers located in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Although there are no data for how many pre-service teachers graduated from the centers and became Waldorf school teachers, the number of Waldorf schools doubled from 7 to 14 between 1998 and 2015. In other words, we can assume that Waldorf school teachers and current Waldorf teacher training centers’ roles are in demand because of the sharply growing number of Waldorf schools; however, the growth of the Waldorf school movement in the Midwest has been slower than in the west or northeast coastal region of the USA.

Waldorf education has been growing in popularity in the twenty-first century. There are currently several publications on the Waldorf education approach which apply Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy, Anthroposophy (Compani & Lang, 2011/2013, 2011/2014; Han, 2007; Junemann & Weitmann, 1976/2015; Kim, 2014; Mazzone & Laing, 2010).

However, some people think that the Waldorf education movement is going against the twenty-first century stream of education (e.g. less emphasis on early literacy and technology use in Early Childhood Education from birth to grade 3 and introducing different religions as a part of the school curriculum). Some have criticized positive findings about the worldwide Waldorf school movement and the application of Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy in the Waldorf school and its movement (Lewis, 2013; Perra, 2011; Tucker, 2001). For instance, some of the criticism addresses whether or not Waldorf

schools are “religious ... secretive about their anthroposophical foundations ... anti-intellectual and hold children back, or if Waldorf pupils are expected to imitate too much, and imitation is not creative” (Powell, 2012, p. 2).

Research Question

The purpose of this case study is to describe the characteristics of Waldorf School movement in the US Midwest. One major research question guided this case study: What are the characteristics of the current Waldorf School movement including ECE in the US Midwest?

Method

Site and Participants

For about six months, I visited and observed four different Waldorf schools in two major cities located in the US Midwest and participated in two teacher training programs (called “Focus Weekends”) at a Waldorf Teacher Training Center located in one of the biggest cities in the Midwest. For the interview, ten participants were randomly selected from among the people I met informally at the school visits or Waldorf teacher training programs: four Waldorf school teachers (i.e. pre-k, one Eurhythmy class, and 1st grade teachers), two parents (one had one daughter in pre-k and the other had two daughters in the 3rd grade and the 6th grade at the school), two pre-service teachers, and two teacher educators. For the Waldorf school observation, I visited several pre-k through 3rd grade classrooms, participated in school events such as Open House and Holiday Events, and attended two two-day-long Waldorf teacher training programs as a student participant.

Data Collection and Analysis

I informally interviewed ten participants, observed seven classrooms, took field notes, kept reflective journals for the Waldorf school visits, and conducted four participant

observations for the Waldorf teacher training programs and school events (Creswell, 2009; Spradley, 1980). In the process, I interviewed randomly selected parents, pre-service teachers, school teachers, and teacher educators within about ten minutes per person at four different Waldorf schools. The major interview questions were about why Waldorf schools are unique including school mission, educational philosophy and curriculum, and what kinds of characteristics the Waldorf schools and teacher training program have. I also collected online resources from Internet news, newspapers, radio interviews, blogs, school websites, and Facebook pages.

For the thematic analysis, I followed Creswell (2009)'s recommendations in collecting the initial data, coding patterns, and identifying four themes: (1) anthroposophical foundations as Waldorf school mission and philosophy; (2) Waldorf schools' roles in students' intellectual development; (3) Waldorf schools' viewpoint of religion; and (4) the curriculum of Waldorf schools (Creswell, 2009). I interpreted the data based on these four major themes of characteristics of Waldorf Schools.

Results

Anthroposophical Foundations as Waldorf School Mission and Philosophy

Waldorf schools with ECE are open to the public about their anthroposophical foundations. A critical concept in these foundations was Rudolf Steiner's threefold such as Willing, Feeling, and Thinking or Body, Soul, and Spirit by age.

In Waldorf School A, I informally interviewed primary grade level teachers and one Eurhythmy teacher about the school's anthroposophical foundations. They are not secretive about Anthroposophy in spite of Powell (2012)'s discussion of the issue. They talked about their understanding of the practical process of *Thinking, Feeling, and Willing* to reach the spiritual realm although they do not directly teach their students about *Anthroposophy*. One preschool teacher said:

I understand that many people are not familiar with Anthroposophy. Thus, if parents are interested in Anthroposophy, we can provide the information to parents. We have parents' study group once a week.

The Eurhythmy teacher said:

I do not think that a Waldorf teacher should be an anthroposophist. By the way, I have my educational freedom to study and include various concepts in my teaching. For instance, I am studying how to apply Chinese zodiac into my Eurhythmy lesson for students and how to express the images of twelve different animals from the zodiac.

She looks very excited and proud of her study and showed me a handout she had made for her class.

At Waldorf School B, several ECE teachers discussed the Waldorf school philosophy and mission. One elementary teacher A said:

If a parent wants to know more about Anthroposophy, I can explain it to them and also recommend some books or resources for them. If I have a chance to explain it to them, here is the way (she then drew an example of Steiner's concept of the life cycle on the blackboard; see Figure 1). As you see, Rudolf Steiner saw the human's life span by 7 years. From birth to the age of 7, each child has their own will to do or act (i.e. willing). Thus, it is important for a teacher to introduce the new environment including people, animals, natural, and material world nicely and peacefully without compulsion. From the age of 7 to 14, it is the critical period to educate the children using a variety of materials as they started to understand themselves and outer world using their senses (i.e. feeling). From the age of 14 to 21, they can think and act with the critical thinking skills with questions (i.e. thinking). Therefore, by age, we (i.e. Waldorf school teachers) need to provide our lessons developmentally appropriately.

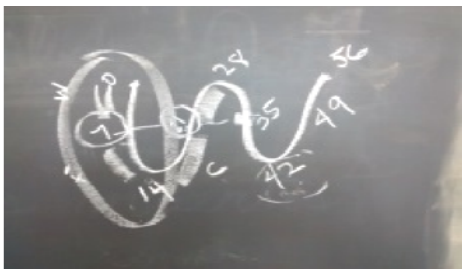


Figure 1. Teacher's Hand Drawing of Life Cycle and Age from Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy

In the interviews and observation, the Waldorf school teachers were open about their anthroposophical foundations, which helped them think about their lessons creatively and developmentally appropriately. When they talked about Anthroposophy, they frequently

used the terms such as *Willing, Feeling, and Thinking* by age. The websites for the schools that I visited clearly explained their educational foundation as Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy and provided various resources about the philosophy. One of the four Waldorf school websites does not clearly explain about Anthroposophy as the educational foundation but explain their ECE curriculum as an "interdisciplinary hands-on approach" or "play-based approach." Thus, Waldorf schools with ECE are open to the public about their anthroposophical foundations. A critical concept in these foundations was Rudolf Steiner's threefold such as willing, feeling, and thinking or body, soul, and spirit by age.

Waldorf Schools' Roles for Students' Intellectual Development

Waldorf schools with ECE are intellectual and do not hold children back; however, the schools encourage children to be imaginative and creative with critical thinking skills.

There were no bookshelves or picture books in the elementary and ECE classrooms at Waldorf Schools C and D. When I asked why, many teachers told me that they do not use any picture books for circle or whole group time in their ECE classrooms. They normally talk about a concept or do their own storytelling or puppetry instead of using a picture book. They believe that these teaching tools can help young children's phonological awareness through speaking and listening in the early ages, and young children gradually become interested in sight words in their environment (e.g. at home or school) and then start to read books later on. They do not stress early literacy by introducing picture books which may provide young children with stereotyped images or illustrations without imagination. Steiner (1916/2011) pointed out that it is important for a Waldorf school teacher to plan activities that will encourage the children to use their imaginations while they are at an early age. Many Steiner education researchers pointed out the Waldorf school teacher's roles for students' intellectual development are very important in a classroom setting (Silverman, 2015; Tyson, 2015; Wagemann, 2015). When I met a male parent from Waldorf School B and female parent from Waldorf School C and asked them about their opinion of not using picture books at school, they did not mind at all. The male parent from Waldorf School B said:

I have two daughters at this school. One is a 3rd grader and the other is a 6th grader. No problem for their reading competency. Did you know that teachers do not use any textbook? Students

create their own book including all the lessons that they learn from their teacher. It is amazing to me!

The female parent from Waldorf School C said:

That is okay to me. I do not think that it is really necessary to introduce the printed books in early age. My daughter is five now. If she really wants me to read a picture book at home, I can do that for her or bed-time story.

The website of Waldorf School D stated that technology devices would be used from the 8th grade level. That means no technology use in the classroom setting for either teachers or students at the primary level. The parents did not seem to care about no technology use in the early childhood classroom setting (pre-k to 3rd grade level) and they told me that students' interaction with others would be more important than the interaction with technology devices at the school. One parent said:

If my child wants to know more about the technology devices, I can let them explore it at home. By the way, the Waldorf education program discourages students' use of technology, even TV at home, because it does not help students' appropriate growth of creativity or imagination.

From my interview and observation, early literacy or technology use for early childhood period (birth to 7 year olds) is not encouraged in a classroom setting at Waldorf schools in the US Midwest. Waldorf parents may or may not provide some activities of early literacy or technology use at home.

Waldorf ECE teachers do not use any commercial early childhood education curriculum books for their instruction from Waldorf School A, B, C, and D. The schools emphasize play and use a fine arts-based approach. For instance, the ECE teachers followed the various daily routine activities such as drawing or painting activity, daily cooking activity, knitting, puppetry, storytelling, free play inside and outside with natural hands-on manipulatives (in many cases, made of wood), singing or playing a recorder, Eurhythmy, nature walks, and so on. In the observations and interviews, the Waldorf teachers cared about weather changes and seasonal festivals in their instruction for the purpose of understanding nature and people's lives.

It is hard to say that Waldorf schools hold children back academically. For instance,

according to the Waldorf school curriculum, students start to learn foreign languages such as German, Spanish, and/or Chinese and play at least one musical instrument such as a recorder, a Lyre, and/or other instruments for the 1st grade level. Therefore, Waldorf schools with ECE are intellectual and do not hold children back; however, the schools encourage children to be imaginative and creative with critical thinking skills.

Waldorf Schools' Viewpoint of Religion

Waldorf schools with ECE are not truly religious, but they do introduce a variety of religious backgrounds to students for the purpose of students' spiritual development.

As Figure 2 shows, there is one special area called "Nature Table" in each Waldorf classroom. Normally, this table features a small doll as a figure of Mother Nature surrounded by seasonal decorations made by the classroom teacher and students. When I asked the Waldorf ECE teachers about whether or not students pray to the doll when they come to the classroom, the teachers said no. One explained:

Absolutely not! They do not pray for the doll. This table is for letting them know about the seasonal changes with the Mother Nature (i.e. the doll). Sometimes, students bring acorns or pebbles on the way to school and can decorate the table with their items from nature.

However, some people may consider this "Nature Table" to be a symbolic image of "natural religion," meaning the "religion of nature," in which God, the soul, spirits, and all objects of the supernatural are considered as part of nature and not separate from it (Ullrich, 1994).



Figure 2. "Nature Tables" from Waldorf School Classrooms

When asked about the school festivals based on Christianity (i.e. Easter and Christmas) and Saint's days such as Michaelmas for St. Michael or the festival of Light for St. Lucia or Lucy, the Waldorf teachers told me that the festivals came from Western culture and religion, but students also learn about various Eastern beliefs such as *Karma* as well as Eastern literature and language when they go to the grade level classrooms. In addition, the upper grade level students practice meditation and Eurhythmmy aligned with their understanding of different religions or spiritual development. One Waldorf teacher training educator said:

Some people may say that Waldorf schools are religious because of celebrating Christian events, but we do not ask students to worship God or pray God. We may study Christianity and other religions as a part of human beings' culture and history about spiritual development.

Therefore, it is safe to say that Waldorf Schools are not focusing on one religion like a Christian, Catholic, or Jewish school; however, teachers do introduce various religious backgrounds such as religious and cultural festivals and religious beliefs through the practical vehicles of meditation or Eurhythmmy.

The Curriculum of Waldorf Schools and Waldorf Teacher Training Program

The Waldorf curriculum is a Fine Arts-integrated curriculum. Waldorf children are expected to imitate something step by step and most Waldorf school educators believe that imitation is a pathway to becoming creative.

In *Goethean Science*, Steiner (1883/1988) stated that Goethe's art (e.g. poetry, drama, or drawing) is not separate from science. Art and science can be aligned with or supplement each other to help students interpret the mysteries of the world. Steiner was deeply inspired by Goethe's scientific and artistic components and applied especially Goethe's Color Theory to Waldorf Education. Steiner and his initial followers developed the unique fine-arts curriculum or methods inspired by Goethe's Color Theory. For instance, for the primary grade level's water color painting, students start to use one color on wet paper to see how a color (e.g. red) can be harmonized with the water and paper (see Figure 3). Later, they use two colors (e.g. blue and yellow) to see how two colors can be mixed and create another color, green. For the upper elementary grade level, students learn the importance of

light and darkness in coloring or painting. At that time, students imitate historically well-known drawings or paintings and then re-create them adding their ideas. Brightness and darkness of the art works are critical (see Figure 4).



Figure 3. One Color Painting on a Wet Paper



Figure 4. Brightness and Darkness of the Art Works by High School Students

Normally, the color blue stands for darkness and the color yellow stands for brightness. A teacher said:

Yes, I think that students will learn about the colors and how to draw or sketch something step by step through the structured art curriculum although I still think that the intuitive thinking process is important; however, learning how to draw or paint step by step is important. Especially, understanding previous wonderful art pieces would be a great asset toward students' creativity or innovation.

A parent said:

Is it too bad to imitate something? We always develop something better after studying something great in the past, don't we? I am so glad that Waldorf schools deeply value fine arts into their curriculum and my child's mind can be flexible and creative by teachers' careful approach of fine arts.

In the first grade classroom I observed, students participated in a knitting class. It did not look easy for them to knit something by themselves. The head knitting teacher and assistant were consistently showing them what to do. As they are working on the basic steps and the same goal, I saw them look at each other's work and help or communicate with each other.

Most in- and pre-service teachers talked about their joyful and creative experience of the structured art-work procedures (e.g. introducing colors one by one and teaching the harmony of colors and the brightness versus darkness step by step). For example, the teacher education instructor talked about the seasonal changes and events for each season and then divided participants into four different groups to create their own image of the theme "Four Seasons." Participants in each group individually worked on pastel coloring on a round piece of construction paper according to the assigned season. Next, the instructor provided each group a large paper and asked the group members to arrange the individual works on the large paper with students' creation of a meaningful background and storyline. Figure 5 shows the final product of the small group of five participants who were assigned to create the season "Autumn." Figure 6 shows the results for each group (i.e. four groups for four seasons) put on the large paper including five small images of each season connecting to each other. The teachers in training then talked about the sequence of the seasonal changes and events of spring, summer, autumn, and winter.



Figure 5. Pre-Service Teachers' Pastel Drawing Work Process for the Seasonal Theme "Autumn"
Created at a Waldorf Teacher Training Program



Figure 6. Combined Individual and Small Group Art Works for the Four Seasons
Created at a Waldorf Teacher Training Program

Waldorf teacher training programs are also hands-on and Fine Arts-integrated. The sessions started and ended with singing together and collaborative eurythmic movement based on the understanding of Anthroposophy and spiritual development. Figure 7 shows an example of eurythmic movement as a part of a theme, “Fall Festival.”



Figure 7. Eurythmic Movement

Discussion

Anthroposophical Foundations as Waldorf School Mission and Philosophy

According to Steiner’s and other scholars’ definition of *Anthroposophy*, it means not only the educational philosophy which influenced the first Waldorf schools and Waldorf teacher education but also broad ideas of human development (i.e. body, soul, and spirit). Steiner (1916/2011) addressed that the main ideas of *Anthroposophy* were developed through his life experience including his study of Goethe and his numerous publications and lectures. To coin his philosophy, Steiner adapted the term Anthroposophy from the

Greek (i.e. *Anthropos* = human, *Sophia* = wisdom) to refer to “spiritual knowledge gained by the conscious integration of three disciplines: thinking, feeling, and willing” (McDermott, 2009, p. 1). These disciplines are necessary to obtain individual intuition or keen insight to understand oneself, the world (especially nature), and one’s spiritual existence.

As for the first finding in this study, the school teachers and teacher educators stated that Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy is the influential element of Waldorf schools as Waldorf school mission and philosophy. Although some parents did not clearly explain to me about their understanding of Anthroposophy, they told me that they would like to learn more about it through the weekly parent-teacher study group meetings. I noticed that several school teachers applied Rudolf Steiner’s threefold such as willing, feeling, and thinking or body, soul, and spirit by age appropriately into class opening sessions. Waldorf schools with ECE were open to the public about their anthroposophical foundations for the school open house events. Thus, fully understanding Anthroposophy will be the first step to understand the Waldorf school movement clearly.

Waldorf Schools’ Roles in Students’ Intellectual Development

Two longitudinal studies (Baldwin, Gerwin, & Mitchell, 2005; Gerwin & Mitchell, 2007) show that Waldorf schools have provided intellectual education to their students. According to the research institute for Waldorf Education (Phase I), many Waldorf high school students were accepted to and attended a variety of private or public colleges and universities including many prestigious institutions during the nine-year period of 1995 and 2004 (Baldwin et al., 2005). As a Phase II, Gerwin and Mitchell (2007) found that 94% of the Waldorf high school graduates attended college and 88% had completed or were in the process of completing a college or university level degree at the time of the survey. About 90% of graduates are highly satisfied in their choice of occupation and are lifelong learners who value critical thinking skills and tolerance of others’ viewpoints.

According to the recent study of a Waldorf-inspired school including African, Latino, and socio-economically disadvantaged students, Friedlaender, Beckham, Zheng, and Darling-Hammond (2015) conducted one mixed methods study over the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. The researchers interviewed about 40 educators, students, and

parents and engaged in almost 40 observations of classrooms, out-of-classroom activities, school events, and teacher training at Alice Birney, a Waldorf-Inspired School, in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). They also examined of multiple years of student record data including student standardized test scores, attendance, behavioral data and graduation data. For the qualitative data, they found that Waldorf teachers were well-prepared for subject matters grounded in Steiner's theory of child development and parents were positively involved in supporting the school through the strong partnership between teachers and parents. For the quantitative data, they found that Waldorf approach is very potential for students' success in education such as (1) low transiency and suspension rates, (2) positive student-achievement outcomes, and (3) graduate from high school at high rates.

In addition, as the second findings of this study, there was a great deal of evidence of a Fine Arts-oriented curriculum with features such as hands-on learning activities or lessons such as knitting, movement (i.e. Eurhythm), playing musical instruments, conducting dramas collaboratively, drawing, painting, and so forth in the Waldorf schools. Therefore, Waldorf schools are intellectual and do not hold children back; however, the schools encourage children to be imaginative and creative with critical thinking skills (Melrose, 2015; Oppenheimer, 1999).

Waldorf Schools' Viewpoint of Religion

Many people believe that the core foundation of Waldorf School/EC Education is Steiner's Anthroposophy, which emphasizes spiritual development through the process of willing, feeling, and thinking. In a Waldorf teacher training program, pre-service teachers learn about Steiner (1972)'s original ideas of Anthroposophy, but it is not necessary for them to become Anthroposophists (i.e. who follow Anthroposophy and apply it into their life) in order to be a Waldorf school teacher. Many Waldorf school teachers do not directly teach the theoretical foundation or Steiner (1972)'s original ideas of Anthroposophy to their students because Anthroposophy itself is not a religion but guidance to the process of finding self, us, nature, and spiritual realm. Teachers may indirectly introduce students to various resources to find out about the individual spiritual realm using concepts from ancient mythology, Christianity, or *Karma* (i.e. from Buddhism or Hinduism) suited to the

age and understanding of their students (McDermott, 2009; Ullrich, 1994).

Steiner (1972) stated that human beings are threefold, having body, soul, and spirit, and that they need to use their free will to make an effort to intuitively understand the spirit. To facilitate spiritual development in Waldorf education, Steiner (1883/1988) adapted historical resources and religious practices and examples from both western and eastern cultures at that time such as literature including ancient mythology and poetry, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so forth. To maintain the body, soul, and spirit, Steiner (1916/2011) recommended various practices to reach high spiritual goals. Some exemplary practices for pre-and in-service Waldorf school teachers are (1) meditation, which can help teachers understand themselves and their students spiritually by making a connection between the inner world (i.e. a person's nature or self) and the outer world (i.e. the material world or nature) and between current life and previous life (i.e. reincarnation or *Karma*), (2) artistic activities that will help both teachers and students to re-gain intuitive and harmonious abilities (i.e. *Eurhythmy* or rhythmic and harmonious movement, performing plays or puppetry, drawing and painting, playing instruments, and singing songs), and (3) for both teachers and students, gardening, natural remedies and diet to heal the body through *Bio-dynamics* (Kienle et al., 2013).

As for the third findings of this study, Waldorf schools with ECE are not truly religious, but they do introduce a variety of religious backgrounds to students for the purpose of students' spiritual development. Through my observation and participation in the classrooms, school events or teacher training programs, I also observed some of the exemplary practices (above) by Waldorf school teachers and teacher educators. I thought that it was developmentally and culturally appropriate to me as the participant observer.

The Curriculum of Waldorf Schools

Steiner (1916/2011) believed that child development can be divided by 7 years through his intuitive thinking process of spiritual science. For instance, for the 0-7 age group, a Waldorf teacher does not provide any structured lessons (especially, early literacy and math) compared with the curriculum for the 8-14 age group. A Waldorf ECE teacher can indirectly teach basic concepts through activities like explaining seasonal changes, cooking and baking bread for the students' lunch, nature walks, painting and drawing, puppetry,

finger-plays with songs, or storytelling without a picture book. Thus, a Waldorf ECE teacher should be able to create developmentally appropriate lessons inspired by concepts from Steiner's Anthroposophy and his initial followers' instruction. Waldorf ECE (from birth to 7 years old) is quite different from current National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines about early literacy and math, which could be introduced to early ages such as preschoolers or kindergartners. NAEYC (2009) stated that the boundary of ECE would be from birth to 8 years old. It is recommended that kindergarten teachers use picture books in the classrooms and teach kindergartners (i.e. normally five year olds) phonics and simple addition or subtraction using numbers and manipulatives, even using both hands-on manipulatives and technology devices (Gullo, 2006). Many public school kindergartners (i.e. without Waldorf education) go to the school computer lab to play educational computer games which are aligned with their classroom instruction once a week.

However, according to Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1916/2011), when a child starts to have many new teeth around 8 years, this is when teachers can start his or her Waldorf curriculum. Thus, many primary grade Waldorf teachers start to introduce basic literacy and/or numeracy skills which normally can be early introduced to kindergartners or even preschoolers in a public school setting where is not following the Waldorf education curriculum. For example, in the Midwest, computers or technology are not normally used in Waldorf classrooms and instruction for the primary grade level. Waldorf schools recommend that parents do not provide or use any technology-based devices for their children at home and instead recommend more hands-on activities or outdoor plays. Middle or high school students or teachers may use limited technological devices in their curriculum. In addition, the primary Waldorf teachers continuously stay with the same students for about 7-8 years. Thus, the Waldorf teachers need to prepare for the next grade level instruction at the end of each school year. Therefore, there is the clear difference between Waldorf School education system and the typical public school system in the US Midwest.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, Waldorf or Waldorf-inspired approach has been introduced to ECE pre-and in-service teachers and their teacher educators as one of the most vibrant and popular ECE programs along with the Montessori, High/Scope, and Reggio Emilia approaches (Morrison, 2014). Several researchers have conducted research of the positive effectiveness of Waldorf or Waldorf-inspired approach even for the public or alternative school setting in USA and found out the evidence of it (Friedlaender et al., 2015; Larrison, Daly, & van Vooren, 2012).

For this case study, I found and described four major characteristics of the current Waldorf school movement in the US Midwest. The Waldorf school movement is not religious, anti-intellectual, or limited to creativity, but focuses on individual students' spiritual well-being and artistic practices with activities and curriculum inspired by Steiner's Anthroposophy. In other words, the Waldorf school pedagogy and teacher training programs were educational, collaborative, and artistic practices inspired by Anthroposophy (e.g. using the threefold method such as spirit, soul, and body or willing, feeling and thinking). Fine-Arts integrated pedagogy and practices for students at four different Waldorf schools and pre-service teachers of a Waldorf teacher training program highlight the significance of these aspects of Waldorf learning.

Limitation and Implication

This study is limited because it includes only four private Waldorf schools out of fourteen Waldorf schools and one out of three teacher training programs in the US Midwest. These findings may be different in the Waldorf schools which were not included in this study. Overall, in the US Midwest, it is necessary to investigate more about the Waldorf school movement to understand whether or not this movement is positive in the field of education. It implies that researchers need to conduct their research on the current Waldorf school movement in different states of USA or different countries such as South Korea, where the method has been becoming popular among alternative schools since 2000 (Cho, 2012; Ha, 2013; Korea Association of Waldorf Education, 2003; Park, 2012; StoryEnzin, 2012). Non-Waldorf school teachers and teacher educators may adopt various hands-on

Fine Arts integrated teaching strategies and practices (especially lessons through meditation, movement, and songs) if it is culturally and developmentally appropriate.

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