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## **Introduction: Intentions and main results of the study**

### ***Heiner Barz and Dirk Randoll***

To a great extent Waldorf education is considered to be a valuable alternative to regular state school education. To date its concept and methods have been documented broadly and also scientifically studied. However, studies on the actual school reality as well as research on the effectiveness of the Steiner education are still unavailable. And it is exactly this characteristic of the Waldorf education: It claims to be sustainable with regards to a successful life-shaping. The expected effects range from enjoying vocational commitment, to a sense of responsibility for society and the environment and up to positive effects on lifestyle and health in old age (see Rittersbacher 1975). This research report tries to answer the question about how much evidence can be found to prove that such expectations are actually fulfilled. Furthermore it attempts to help develop the Rudolf Steiner Schools by investigating the strengths and weaknesses of this reform-educational model from the perspective of the former students. By doing so it is inevitable that sometimes also those wishes and expectations will be mentioned that contradict each other and perhaps even mutually exclude themselves. As a matter of course the consequences of the findings reported here still have to be considered thoroughly and discussed openly among teaching staff and school association organisations. It would be a premature misunderstanding of the research results to interpret them as recommendations for action in reality.

### **1 Intentions**

Although research has undoubtedly further developed over the past years (see e.g. Wischer 2003, Ullrich 2004), until today there are hardly any founded scientific findings on the effects of the attendance of schools with a special pedagogic orientation. However, the Rudolf Steiner Schools can look back on an impressive success story indeed: With regards to the

number of schools and students the Waldorf education has been expanding in Germany and world-wide over the past decades. There is no lack of mostly positive opinions from the perspective of the parents and the "takers" (employers) as well as of non-standard individual observations. The "scientific" community also issues a good testimony to the Rudolf Steiner School in many aspects and emphasizes its fertilizing, energizing role for the national regular educational system. However, so far there hasn't been concrete empirical research, in which the effects of attending a Rudolf Steiner School are reconstructed in detail and analysed with regards to its causes. With the exception of a study on school leavers over 25 years ago (Hofmann et al. 1981, summary in Leber 1981), and a qualitative survey of four former Waldorf pupils in the years 1980-83 (Gessler 1988), there are no other results in this respect. This is all the more unfortunate, as there is an increasing demand for empirically secured knowledge on the effects of the attendance of divergent school models. For „the operators“ of schools (of Rudolf Steiner Schools, but in the course of the deregulation strategy increasingly of state schools as well) scientifically founded information on the personal strengths and long-term consequences are becoming more and more important in view of the schools' positioning in a competitive environment, their profiling and their public acceptance. Furthermore, the educational politics - not only under pressure due to PISA - depend on reliable criteria for setting the structural course. And finally - with an increasingly reflected school choice - the evaluation of the specific achievements of a school type is becoming ever more important for parents and pupils.

Thus the study of each educational reality in its actual empirical shape, but also with a view of intended - and possibly intention-adverse - late consequences, post and side effects represents an unexplored field especially with regards to reform-educational models. Today it is true that the attempts to energise the discussions between the Rudolf Steiner education and the educational sciences (Oppolzer, Schrey, Ullrich, Barz, Prange; see the summaries of the former discussions in Barz 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998) can no longer be counted on the fingers of one hand. A voluminous theoretical discussion was documented in the volumes "Dialog zwischen Erziehungswissenschaftlern und Waldorfpädagogen" (Discussion between educational scientists and Waldorf pedagogues) (Bohnsack/Kranich 1990, Buck/Kranich 1995, Bohnsack/liver 1996) published by Beltz in the nineties. However, apart from a few exceptions, systematic empirical research is still missing. Here - in addition to the graduate study by Hofmann et al. (1981) - the comparison between attitudes and judgements of Rudolf Steiner School and high school students in

Randoll (1999) have to be mentioned and in recent times a global DFG study on the empirical reconstruction of the form teacher-pupil relationship at Rudolf Steiner Schools (Idel 2004, Helsper/Ullrich and others, n.d., 2007).

The aim of the study “Bildung und Lebensgestaltung ehemaliger Waldorfschüler” (Education and life-shaping of former Waldorf pupils) was to obtain findings - that are both content-wise accurate and secured on a broad empirical base - about the kind of marks that the attendance of the free Waldorf School left on the school leavers and how they see their time at the Waldorf School in retrospective. In order to find relevant dimensions, at first two qualitative research procedures were used: The often reliable problem-centred interview (Witzel 2000) and the group discussion (Fiedler 2002). As a second approach the use of a quantifying survey technique, the written questionnaire was used to obtain specifications concerning the magnitude and distribution of the dimensions, categories and aspects explored by means of the qualitative surveys. The discussion whether verbal face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews or written questionnaires represent the best way of quantitative research designs, is still open. Each of these procedures has its advantages and disadvantages. During direct contact between interviewer and the interviewee, for example, possible misunderstandings can be sorted out immediately, and this adds to accuracy. On the other hand the factor of certain answers being socially more favourable is stronger with a more direct contact – even if anonymity is assured. In the non-standard written questionnaire that has to be filled out there might be the biggest chance that people possibly just only concentrate on those things that are most important to them. In contrast to the detailed individual case interview, where the interviewer spends a lot of time and energy on creating an open, almost taboo-less discussion atmosphere, in short telephone or verbal surveys with mainly closed questions, the anticipating social-normative expectations represent a factor of distortion. Not only for research-economic reasons – written surveys are less expensive by comparison – the problem-centred individual case explorations and group discussions were therefore supplemented by a written questioning.

Thus the whole project was divided into two subprojects, which are both closely connected with regards to the content. Figure 1 shows the underlying study design.

**Figure 1: Study Design**

<b>Exploration 1</b>	<b>Exploration 2</b>	<b>Quantification</b>
24 qualitative individual case interviews	6 group discussions	Written questioning
Selection of test person: 8 interlocutors each of age groups	Selection of test person: 2 groups each with school leavers of age groups	Random sample: 1.124 School leavers <sup>1</sup> of age groups
1939-42	1939-42	1938-42 (n=253)
1946-49	1946-49	1945-54 (n=236)
1970-73	1970-73	1967-74 (n=542)

The one-to-one interviews and group discussions were carried out from mid-2003 to the beginning of 2004 and the written questioning was carried out from the end of 2004 to the beginning of 2005. The findings of the explorative sub-study constitute the basis of the contributions from Barz/Panry and Wiechert, partly also for Loebell. All other contributions essentially refer to the results of the written questioning. The instruments of the research project (interview guideline etc.) as well as other materials can be viewed at [www.waldorf-absolventen.de](http://www.waldorf-absolventen.de).

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between the total number of 1.124 questionnaires and the total of the questionnaires for the three age groups (1.031) can be explained by the fact that almost 100 questionnaires could not be allocated to the three specified classes.

## 2 Main results

The study presented here does not exactly give information about today's Waldorf education reality. Nevertheless data concerning the teaching method, school life, the organisation and the perception of the Rudolf Steiner School were collected by its pupils. Even if these mainly refer to long passed school experiences – the youngest birth cohort in this study left school in about 1994 at the latest – nevertheless it might show characteristics and tendencies, which still prevail even today. The reason is that the Waldorf education is based on an educational and teaching concept consistently founded on the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner and is almost proud to thereby possess a super-temporal valid reference system that is always independent from short-lived educational trends. Without denying the opening of the Waldorf education, that has mainly come about in the last decade, and the new readiness to verify old principles (like the form teacher period of eight years, the cooperative school management, the foreign language instruction), it is nevertheless possible to rely on continuities with regards to the understanding and the method of teaching in Waldorf Schools.

In the introduction Walter Hiller traces the Waldorf school movement since the post war era. After a period of awakening, when within only a few years 20 schools were (partially re-)opened, at the beginning of the fifties the “Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen” (Federation of the free Waldorf Schools) agreed on a founding moratorium because it was feared that further growth would result in a drop in quality standards. Then, in the seventies, an “establishment boom”, which still continues, began with the result that today (school year 2006/07) in the FRG there are 203 Waldorf Schools.

In a complex classification procedure the contribution from Anne Bonhoeffer and Michael Brater investigates the interviewed and their parents regarding job aspects. The profession most frequently referred to by both the parents of the former Waldorf pupils and the former pupils themselves is teacher – but mostly teachers at state schools! 15.5% of the mothers quote teacher as occupation (rank 2 after housewife: 16.8%), among them only 1.5% of Waldorf teachers. Within the youngest age group of those born 1967-74 the teachers even account for 20.1% of all mothers. Also the fathers quote teacher (14.2%) as the most frequent occupation ranking higher than engineers (12%). Doctors/pharmacists account for 7.7% of the fathers (and 3.5% of the mothers). 1.4% of the fathers were Waldorf teachers. With a proportion of university graduates well above 40% for the

fathers (Federal average 2004:12%) the well-known, although inadvertent entry selectivity of the Rudolf Steiner School is confirmed once again.

Of the former pupils themselves again 14.6% became teachers. Thus in our random sample teachers occur five times as often as in the remainder of the population; with doctors/pharmacists as well as humanistic and scientific professions the difference in each case is even larger. The occupation of engineer constitutes 9.8% in our random sample, humanistic and scientific professions 9.5%, doctors or pharmacists 7.7%. 7.2% become artists (with the fathers and mothers the artists account for 3.5% each) and 2% carpenters, just to mention a few of the professions chosen. While the occupation of teacher is somehow declining in the course of time, the professional group “other professions in the health sector” (masseur, physiotherapist, nurse etc.) have increased strongly. The university graduate ratio is considerable: 46.8% had an academic education, 68.7% acquired the university-level graduation.

Apparently the gender roles are interpreted rather traditionally by the former Waldorf pupils, at least the professional choices suggest this. Teachers and artists, for example, are clearly female dominated occupations, engineers and e.g. also carpenters are completely male domains - despite knitting lessons for boys and woodwork and metalwork for girls. The former pupils' job satisfaction strongly depends on the possibility of being able to fulfil personal inclinations and interests and to identify with the job. In contrast to this extrinsic incentives such as prestige, spare time or income are clearly less significant.

The Rudolf Steiner School competes with the regular school. The fact that almost a fifth of the younger Waldorf pupils comes from teacher households shows that many of those who know the state schools best don't necessarily trust them for their offspring. The “accumulation of the teacher environment” at Rudolf Steiner Schools though certainly implies for the Waldorf education itself the challenge to know that its work is critically accompanied by well-informed parents. Due to the data presented here the Rudolf Steiner School can be called a school of the well-educated middle class indeed. However, to a certain extent it also represents a protected hideaway – e.g. it is not yet challenged by a high percentage of migrants.

The central life orientations of the former Waldorf pupils are analysed by Thomas Gensicke. The scale concerning the aspects of life, which were classified as important, shows - besides a rather insignificant emphasis on inter-human-emotional aspects compared to the total population - a strongly artistic and culturally ambitious basic attitude, which is often even stronger than what can be realised in everyday life. The same applies e.g. to

voluntary-work commitment and to meditative and contemplative needs. Among the aspects of life, that are subjectively seen as rather less important by the former pupils but nevertheless realised more strongly in their everyday life, rank “to drive a fast car” or “to go to sports events”. Especially the formerly almost demonised “television” shows the tendency of “over fulfilment” most clearly.

In a multivariate method of analysis Thomas Gensicke divided the former Waldorf pupils into three contrasting types. The “culture-oriented” (31%) stand out by fastidious cultural and educational activities (museum, opera, theatre, reading) and at the same time are the most likely to be interested in anthroposophy topics, 22% even classify themselves as practising or committed anthroposophists. For the “relationship-oriented” (33%) the emphatic, emotional aspect, e.g. “to be there for others” is predominant. With them - interestingly enough - an orientation towards manual work and domestic “do-it-yourself” can be found. For the third type, the “hedonists” (36%), physicality, sports and attitudes emphasizing sexuality are characteristic, as well as in general an attitude favouring the enjoyments of life – e.g. also with regards to television. The hedonistic type had the least affinity to Waldorf education and anthroposophy: Only 1% comes out of the closet on anthroposophy. It is not surprising that the culture-oriented type occurs more often in older age groups, and the hedonistic more often in younger ones. The relationship-oriented type, too, is, although not to the same extent, rather young. Also the distribution of the sexes match the expectations: The group of the hedonists consists of significantly more male interviewed (64%) whereas the two other types each show a slight female predominance. It is interesting that the three groups only vary slightly in the assessment of the Waldorf education and that also the percentage of those who quoted having enjoyed being at the Rudolf Steiner School only differs slightly (87% to 92%). However, the differences become more substantial concerning the question about whether the former students favour the Waldorf education for their own children. Here 37% of the culture-oriented, but definitely more hedonists, i.e. 62%, say that they do not want to send their child to a Rudolf Steiner School. The hedonists are also the ones that pronounce most fiercely the usual points of criticism against the Waldorf education, as for example the deficits regarding orientation on physical performance and achievement or the neglect of the natural sciences. This could be interpreted as proof that the Rudolf Steiner School succeeds to emotionally integrate even those people whose basic orientations are rather contrary to the central elements of the concept.

The ability to withstand pressure and to overcome crises as well as a positive relationship towards achievement and job is considered as being very important among all former pupils. In these areas, however, the effect of the Rudolf Steiner School is estimated as relatively small (again smallest among the hedonists). On the other hand this is completely different with regards to anthroposophy and spirituality. Here the importance for the personal life is seen rather moderately - however the degree of influence by the Rudolf Steiner School is higher. Thus, while for achievement and stress resistance the level of influence by the Rudolf Steiner School lies *under* the degree of personal importance, i.e. here it is situated rather below the balance, in terms of anthroposophy and spirituality the reverse picture applies: The demand obviously is - again most strongly pronounced by the hedonists - even over-fulfilled.

Michael N. Ebertz deals with the religious orientations of the former Waldorf pupils. The fact that anthroposophy has got a stronger inner affinity to the working ethos of the Protestants (Barz 1994) and that the proportion of Waldorf pupils being Protestants outweighs by large the number of Catholics, already became obvious in earlier studies. Hofmann et al. (1981, p. 65f.) report for age groups of 1946 and 1947 a percentage of 54% Protestants, 9% Catholics and a high proportion of non-denominationals, who for the women amounted to 21%, and for the men to as high as 30%. In principle this tendency is confirmed by the latest study – however the proportion of Catholics among the younger former students is rising significantly, whereas the total number of Protestants, Christian Community members and religiously bound people each decrease in significance: 31.3% Protestants, 9.4% members of the Christian Community and likewise 9.4% Catholics were counted in our random sample. Nevertheless in the youngest age group the Catholics already represent a proportion of 14.6%. The most remarkable number in connection with religious affiliation, however, might be the large group of non-denominationals with 42.9%. In comparison: According to current numbers concerning church membership (see Federal Statistical Office 2006, p. 173) the proportion of non-denominationals, of Catholics and of Protestants represent approximately a third of the German population each; if one takes into consideration that the Waldorf pupils interviewed come from West Germany - in the GDR Rudolf Steiner Schools were prohibited - and that in West Germany church membership is higher than in the Federal average, then here the characteristic of our random sample becomes even more obvious. Although to be non-denominational does not mean indifference in relation to spirituality and non-standard faith practice. Thus for instance the item “Der Gedanke an eine höhere kosmische



Ordnung gibt mir Sinn und Orientierung in meinem Leben” (Believing in a higher cosmic order provides my life with sense and orientation) is agreed to by more than half of the interviewed.

The constantly repeated reproach the Rudolf Steiner School raises children as anthroposophist (see e.g. Prange 2000), is clearly contested by the data: The majority of the school leavers are indifferent or sceptical in this respect. The proportion of those who quote that they are practicing or committed anthroposophist decreases significantly over the three age groups (17%, 12%, 7%). Likewise, the former pupils hardly certify the Rudolf Steiner School as playing an active role in teaching anthroposophist convictions, but rather a big openness with regards to religious and philosophical matters.

Arndt Büssing, Thomas Ostermann, Frank Jacobi and Peter F. Matthiesen verify the information on health and disease. Although the comparability of the data coming from the study on former Waldorf School pupils with general health surveys is seen as problematic, with the help of a test person pairing (based on socio-demographic characteristics, e.g. age, sex) that are taken from the Waldorf students' random sample and a representative random sample by the Robert-Koch-Institute, reference points for a comparative assessment of the illness frequencies can nevertheless be found. According to these findings former Waldorf pupils suffer definitely less from high blood pressure and arthritis than the comparison random sample. Asthma, hay fever and other allergies are reported somewhat less often than in the comparison random sample. For cardiac infarct and cancer illnesses no significant differences can be obtained. The data mentioned - and this is urgently recommended by the authors - must be further verified.

Dirk Randoll first presents basic data of the written questioning and at the same time also deals with the motives for school choice of the school leavers' parents. This shows the central position of the educational motives in a narrower sense. A conscious decision for the specific educational concept - no marks, clear focus on music and arts, non-standard personal development, etc. - is remembered by approximately half of the interviewed as being their parents' main motive. In addition to that for almost 20% the discontent with the regular state school plays a rather important role and the conscious decision for the anthroposophy with 11% a rather subordinated one.

The contributions from Dirk Randoll, Heiner Barz and Sylva Panyr trace the school memories and judgements of the Rudolf Steiner School school leavers. Former Waldorf pupils often feel rather disadvantaged compared to the school leavers of regular state schools with regards to the procurement of specialized knowledge, knowledge of orthography and foreign languages. On the other hand they learned to analyze things and to think in context. For most of them the criterion of social responsibility has got a very high priority – this is confirmed both by the results of the qualitative exploration study and by the questionnaire survey. A very high identification with their former school, that most of them had liked a lot, is another central result. Therefore education and learning have got very positive connotations and the former pupils often underline that it provided them with very good basic equipment for life. This also implies everyday life-relevant key competencies such as a positive attitude towards life, a basic confidence in the own personal abilities, independence and adaptability. A strong feeling of belonging together due to the long mutual time spent together, and supported by the many performances, celebrations and parties and a strong feeling for the social interaction, which was not undermined by competitive feelings with regards to achievement, become obvious. Most of them also issue a very good testimony to the hands-on crafts, cultural and artistic “dowry” of their school. As weak points of the Waldorf School education a certain un-worldliness, an inefficient transfer of knowledge and the complete exclusion of aspects of achievement are always quoted. Almost 60% of the school leavers agree that “Rudolf Steiner Schools do not favour the achievement aspect enough”.

The experiences with Waldorf teachers are described divergently. While the special human function of the form teacher providing support, security and orientation is almost always underlined, and the incessant commitment and the inspiring instruction are praised, very often there are doubts with regards to the technical qualities. Likewise there are negative experiences with some dogmatic, with strict or with bigoted Waldorf pedagogues – but most of the memories are nevertheless seen in a positive light. Many school leavers are often lenient towards the technical deficits of their partly precious teachers. Obviously also in the memory the missing working off of certain curricula is considered as secondary - which apparently corresponds to the self-concept of the Waldorf pedagogues. Another study on the “teacher-student-relationships at Rudolf Steiner Schools” under the direction of Professor Ullrich, Universität Mainz, and Professor Helsper, Universität Halle-Wittenberg, also comes to the conclusion that “aspects of a systematic knowledge transfer and the guarantee of achievement” seems less urgent against the background of a specific standard that certain

Waldorf teachers set for themselves (n.d., p. 183). The fact that the school subject eurhythm is hardly ever judged positively, and mostly stirs up rather unpleasant memories, is hardly surprising. Other special characteristics of the Waldorf education such as for instance the epoch instruction, the common 12-year school time, the renouncement to marks specified in numbers, the big forms, and the epoch booklets instead of school books are mostly endorsed.

The relationship between the results of the surveys and the educational aims of the Waldorf education is made explicitly by Peter Loebell. He recapitulates on the basic assumptions of the Waldorf education with regards to deeper cause-effect relationships. In this context also the term of metamorphosis has a central meaning. Hereby the Waldorf education postulates a development theory, which counts on internal transformations of mental-spiritual forces and energies. Thus it is assumed that the kind of teaching – e.g. oriented on “living terms” vs. “intellectualistic” - later in life not only influences the thinking and the view of the world, but has got effects on the whole human being, up to certain disease predispositions. In the results of the questionnaire survey Loebell finds evidence for these conclusions that he finally summarises to perspectives for the future training of Waldorf teachers.

From the research report of the qualitative sub-study Christof Wiechert singles out the statements of a coincidentally selected Waldorf pupil and with reference to this example of her experiences and assessments important ideas and intents of the Waldorf education. Thus this book ends with an inventive individual case analysis with surprising turns where, briefly and exemplary, the ideas and the actual reality of these schools “with a special educational character” are viewed instructively.

A meeting of former Waldorf pupils was probably the context for some nasty comments, which could be read some years ago at the Advent bazaar of a Rudolf Steiner School in the corridors between the classrooms. “This has to be mentioned - Rudolf Steiner School was...” former pupils, or others pretending to be former students had written with a felt-tip pen on a flip chart comments such as: “Bedruckte Pullover auf links drehen (Snoopy)” (printed sweaters to be turned inside out (Snoopy)), “Rauchen auf dem Klo” (smoking on the toilet), “Kiffen am Stück” (forever smoking hash), “Den Mund mit Seife auswaschen” (wash your mouth out with soap), “Scheisse” (sic!) (shit), “lila Halstuch” (purple scarf). On a second pin wall there was: “Die Waldorfschule hat mich vorbereitet auf ...” (The Rudolf Steiner

School prepared me for...) Underneath could be read: “Widerstand” (sic!) (resistance), “offenes soziales Verhalten” (open social attitude). And finally there was a third possibility of leaving feedback: “Waldis verfügen mit Sicherheit über ...” (Waldis dispose certainly of ...) “gesicherte Rächtschreibkentniße” (sic!), (secured orthography) “sie dürfen kein Top anziehen” (they are not allowed to wear skimpy tops).

It is not clear whether this was written in cheerful irony or rather seriously. One thing is obvious: these few words describe the “cliché Waldorf” very accurately. The only thing missing is hints to making music, playing with plasticine and handicraft; this would be the ultimate keyword list for the image of the Rudolf Steiner School. - To what extent does this cliché correspond to reality? The contributions of this book want to help find an answer to this question.

By the way: At the Advent bazaar of the Rudolf Steiner School mentioned above in 2006 the visitors were surprised by a football café where male and female pupils of the eighth form served Rübli cake, spelt wheat muffins and whole grain cake wearing Ballack and Ronaldinho T-Shirts. In response to our interested questions we were told that there had been long and controversial discussions in the class concerning this subject, but the majority had actually voted for the football theme. The teachers had not really liked it - however they finally accepted the decision. Even Rudolf Steiner Schools can change. The prohibition of wearing skimpy tops probably no longer applies today, well at least not everywhere.

### **3Thanks**

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and the analysis of the qualitative sub-study. She also coordinated the field work, the data collection as well as the analysis. Jutta Reich, M.A., LMU München, too, did part of the group discussions, interviews and reporting. A team of the Alanus University dealt with the dispatch and return check of the questionnaires as well as the data collection and coding of the open questions. The settled data record, the statistical analyses and the volumes of tables were compiled by Dr. Marco Lalli, Sociotrend, Leimen near Heidelberg. Irmgard Hestermann at the secretariat of the Erziehungswissenschaftliches Institut der HHU Duesseldorf, carefully prepared the manuscript for print. At this point I would like to thank all these people for a most professional co-operation. Financially this project was generously promoted in particular by the Software AG Stiftung, Darmstadt, but also by the Mahle Stiftung, Stuttgart, and the Pädagogische Forschungsstelle beim Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen, Stuttgart. For this we would like to thank you sincerely. But we also thank the authors of the contributions here for their constructive co-operation as well as the former pupils, who were most committed to answer conscientiously the extensive questionnaire or to explain their points of view in personal interviews. Last but not least we have to thank Monika Mühlhausen, VS Verlag, for the professional lecturing and Anke Vogel, Satzbüro, for the patient realisation of countless correction notes, some of them last-minute.

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