

# The specialized comprehensive school

## Upper school qualifications

10/30/24

1

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

Margareta Van Raemdonck

I have been working with the Waldorf curriculum and qualifications for 25 years by now. It started in Flanders, Belgium, when the government demanded that the Steiner schools would work with the same very detailed learning outcomes or attainment targets as all other schools, both state schools, as regional schools, as municipal schools or even the so called free catholic schools, which are about 60 to 70 % of all schools in Belgium. The steinerschools went to the constitutional court to demand their rights of freedom of education guaranteed by our constitution. We won the court case and were from then on allowed to write an alternative to the state attainment targets provided they were of so called “equal worth”. As a teacher I was involved in the working groups writing these attainments targets and subsequent curriculum plans in the late nineties. In 2004 I started working for the federation of steinerschools in Flanders and up to 2019 it was my responsibility to lead the process of subsequent changes in the attainment targets and the curricula for the secondary waldorf education, which in Belgium is from class 7 onwards.

The Waldorf curriculum wants to offer a comprehensive schooling for all. Up to class 8 or 9 that has been successful. But what about the Upper School? It differs around the world. In America or Brasil not many schools offer an upper school to class 12 or 13 but in Argentina a lot do. In some countries many stop after class 10 or 11 e.g. Columbia, India, Russia, Ukraine. In Belgium and the Netherlands the schools often offer kindergarten up to class 6 in one official school and then the secondary schools starts from 7-12, often on the same campus. In Scandinavia the elementary school stops after class 9 ( 10 in Norway), and there are far less gymnasia or upper schools. In Germany

often the schools go up to class 13, but pupils may leave after class 10. Some countries don't even have upper schools e.g. Ireland or hardly any such as Italy and Poland. So the mainstream educational systems and traditions influence what is possible.

**Waldorf curriculum vs.  
State requirements upper schools**

**State criteria:**

- State exams e.g. Baccalaureate, Matura, Abitur, Dutch national exams...

**Compatible with state expectations....**

- Acknowledged educational qualifications assessed by the teachers: Flanders, Norway, New Zealand...

10/30/24 2 INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS WALDORF

Necessary adaptations to the state requirements go in two directions: either direct adaptation to state criteria is used, or Waldorf curricula are written in such a way that they are more or less compatible with the state expectations at the end of the upper school. Especially for securing the university entrance this compromise is important. Both ways of dealing with this have consequences for the delivery of certain contents. Obviously, school qualification is important for the young adults to follow up on their life's journey.

The first 12th class of the Stuttgart Waldorf school, asked Rudolf Steiner whether a Waldorf university could be organized, because they wanted to have the same kind of schooling in tertiary education as in secondary. But only now, in the 21st century we are getting there in a couple of institutions and for a couple of subjects. So we still need to adapt to societies which have certain demands for the outcomes of the schooling of their youngsters. Both central exams and systems with steiner/waldorf schools offering their own qualifications have pros and cons. With central exams an extra year with totally different teaching can help, with qualifications of equal value one often must adapt earlier. It is also a question of whether a country is used to have private or semi-private schools or can operate with state funding. In some cases it is not even allowed to ask money for schooling. State funding comes with state interference and that plays out in the realm of qualifications.

Now let us look at the definition of a qualification.

## Definition qualification

An official record or document (such as a degree, certificate, or diploma) which shows that you have completed a course of study or training and are qualified to do something.

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

I want to stress the word “training”. University entrance is of course a big issue, but what about other routes towards the adult life ?

Traditionally Waldorf Upper Schools count on the training that can be offered for certain professions after at least class 10 or preferably after class 12. Vocational education, according to the Waldorf principles, is rare.

But first let us look at how Europe has influenced the thinking around qualifications. The idea behind it was to make it possible to acknowledge each other’s qualifications.

## European Qualification Framework (EU + 11)

LEVEL		Examples
1	Basic knowledge/simple tasks	
2	Factual knowledge	
3	Knowledge in certain field	BSO Flanders, GCSE...
4	Broad theoretical knowledge (university entrance qualifications)	Abitur, Baccalaureat, Matura, A-levels, VWO, Rudolf Steiner ASO Flanders, Norwegian studiekompetanse, New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education...
5	Comprehensive specialized knowledge	Tertiary Vocational qualifications
6	Advanced knowledge	Bachelor, Fachhochschule
7	Highly specialised academic knowledge	Master
8	Most advanced knowledge	PHD, Doctorate

This framework has also influenced frameworks outside of Europe. E.g. New Zealand.

When I think of curriculum I like the way Bo Dahlin uses the word in a wide sense, which means including everything the pupils experience in school: not only the contents of teaching and learning, but also the way teachers teach and even the aesthetics of the internal and external environment of the schools. This is also what Kath Bransby and Martyn Rawson had in mind when they made this distinction in macro, meso and micro curriculum. Although I didn't use this distinction consciously in the 15 years that I had to defend the Waldorf curriculum in Flanders, this is exactly what I had to deal with.

**Waldorf curriculum**

- Trigger development by doing things in certain ways at a certain age
  - The macro curriculum
- Adapt to national and regional culture and system
  - Meso level
- Art of teaching in the classroom
  - Micro level

( Rawson, M.& Bransby K.)

10/30/24 2 INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS WALDORF

I was involved in the European Portfolio Certificate project, the European Waldorf Diploma project and the introduction of the New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education in Europe. Moreover I followed the process of the Acknowledging Creative Thinking Skills Project ( ACTS), which lead to a qualification on the British framework. Although I was really hoping for an international Waldorf qualification with university entrance rights, I saw how big the national systems' influence is on the acceptance of these attempts.

Could we come to a macro curriculum for the upper school? I think it is at the very least possible to look at the big principles.

## Macro curriculum for upper school?

The threefold method of

- perceptive observation / conclusion
- judgement
- Concept

➔ get an understanding of the world

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

## Macro curriculum for upper school?

Idealism, a sense of purpose in life

Choice of a hero

Love for the task

- ➔ Connected to pre-birth life
- ➔ Connected to the future life path

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

In his lecture three years ago, Douglas Gerwin, talked about a footnote in a lecture by Rudolf Steiner in 1920 in the series called *Balance in Teaching* ( GA302 a). Steiner had showed three gestures and in the footnote of the lecture we can read what Caroline von Heydebrandt wrote in her notes:

“Caroline von Heydebrandt: the gesture for reverence, hands folded in prayer (in the stenographic record: two hands inclining upward with the fingertips toward each other); the gesture for enthusiasm, hand outstretched, pointing; the protective feeling, the right arm [encircling] as in the eurythmy gesture for “B.””

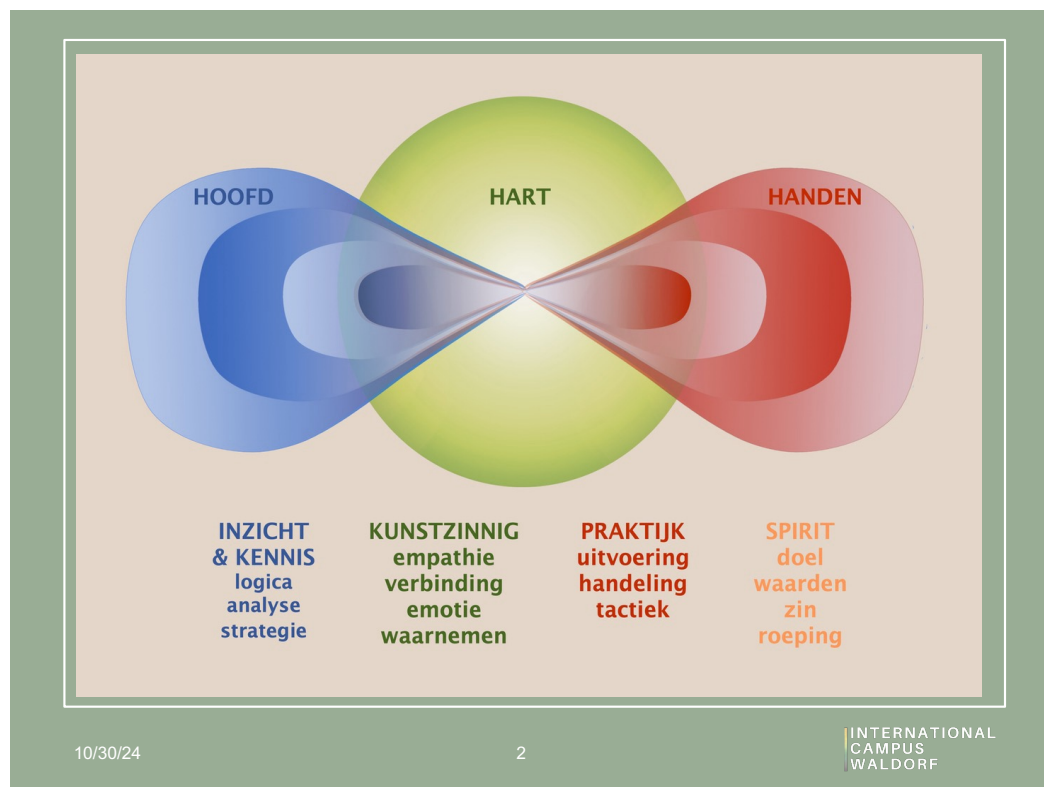
In the text of the lecture it says:

“Reverence for what precedes the child’s existence before birth;  
 Enthusiastic anticipation of what follows it, after death;  
 Protective gesture for what the child experiences during life”

Can we get a feeling for what the pre-birth existence has anchored in the child’s soul?  
 Can we get a sense of the future life path of the pupils in the Upper school?

Could we come to a macro curriculum for the upper school that takes this into account?  
 Let’s look at some other big principles.

When defending the Waldorf Upper school curriculum I used a blackboard drawing that one of my colleagues tried to replicate with electronic means:



Translation of the words on the lemniscate:

Head	Heart	Hands	Spirit
Insight & Knowledge	Art practice	Crafts & technical competences	purpose
Logic	empathy	execution	values
Analysis	connect	act	sense
Strategy...	emotion	tactics	higher calling
	Observation		

How to offer this balance to all pupils until they come of age? Many main stream educational systems go against this idea and start a kind of segregation based the cognitive capacities of the pupils. This is done with the best intentions, but what is the result?

Early vs.late educational tracking

Mainstream education:

Age 10: e.g. Austria, Germany  
Age 12: e.g. Netherlands, Belgium-Flanders  
Age 14: e.g. Belgium-Wallonia, Italy  
Age 16: majority of countries in Europe.

Waldorf:  
tradition = no tracking until age 18-19

10/30/24 2 INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS WALDORF

This is done with the best intentions, but what is the result?

In 2005 I started supporting an initiative group which wanted to find solutions for the fact that we often had to send pupils away from our schools because we only had one track: the rather academic Rudolf Steiner general secondary education. The obligation that our alternative attainment targets needed to be of equal value at the end of class 6, class 8, class 10 and class 12 meant that we had to send away pupils who did not meet the mainly cognitive standards. Although the teachers in Flanders can assess their pupils themselves without outside interferences, their assessments of the pupils are in their turn assessed by the national inspectors based on the steiner/waldorf attainment targets which are accepted in parliament. As the pressure on our schools tightened we felt the need to do something.

In 2006 we therefor started one class B, which can be compared with what in some German schools they call: “Kleinklassen” (small classes) with less pupils in a class and more support from the teachers.

## Flemish Early tracking system

	Academic track	Mixed track	Vocational track
Class 7-8	A-track: 85 %		B-track: 15 %
Class 9-10	47 % - certificate	29 % - certificate	21 % - certificate
Class 11-12	36 % - EQF 4 qualification	32 % - EQF 4 qualification	28 % - EQF 3 qualification
Class 13	(Mathematics-science)		
Aim:	Academic bachelor	Professional bachelor/work	work

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

You can see that this so-called B-track is only a solution for a small proportion of the children. The whole system makes it very difficult for Steiner/Waldorf education to thrive in the sense that all children can enter our schools and stay until the end of class 12. There are even problems with the academic track. Pupils especially interested in certain fields of subjects, such as natural sciences or languages or even art chose to leave the school and enter the specialized tracks for these subjects in mainstream schools. So if in a class 12, 1/3 of the pupils started in the Waldorf school in class 1, that is even a huge success.

Still we have been struggling to keep our broad Steiner Waldorf academic track with the input of both cognitive, technical practical and art subjects alive. The value of the arts and crafts as essential for the development of young people is hugely underestimated in our school system.

The Flemish government wanted to modernize and reform the secondary education by 2019 and in the years before that a lot of debate was conducted in our society in which direction it should go: more or less tracks, earlier or later? In our universities several research projects were conducted, sometimes with contradictory conclusions. Two researchers tried an international comparison of systems and came out with the following conclusions:



## Results early tracking before 15

Research by Ides Nicaise & Jeroen Lavrijsen ->

- Negative for disadvantaged & cognitively weaker pupils
- Stronger socio-economic segregation
- More aversion against life long learning
- No clear advantage for cognitively stronger pupils

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

Ok, but what about the upper school? Does tracking after puberty result in the same kind of problems as very early tracking? Can Waldorf education help to strengthen pupils with a weaker socio-economic background? Can it uphold the enthusiasm for learning even after school?

In 2007, an initiative group in Flanders, started to investigate what we could do to develop an alternative to the academic upper school track. Because we were part of the European Portfolio Certificate Comenius project, I took the opportunity of the partner meetings to travel to interesting initiatives in the Waldorf movement around Europe.

## Inspiration for vocational upper schools

- Klaus Fintelman and the Hibernia Schule
- Rüdiger Iwans portfolio initiative “Lernen durch Handeln”
- Aonghus Gordon and Ruskin Mill
- The Berufskollege such as Schloss Hamborn in Germany
- Upper school for bio-ecological building and biodynamic gardening in Fyresdalen Norway & the Järna gymnasium for farming
- **Dr. Michael Brater**

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

In our initiative group some people had already worked with the ideas on vocational education described by Michael Brater and his colleagues in the late eighties. In Antwerp we already had one secondary school, the Parcivalschool, which offered a kind of vocational education combined with curative pedagogy. Wim Foquet, who had been the headmaster of this special education school, had even translated a lot of Brater's work in Dutch for internal use. We studied the texts and decided to invite Michael Brater to Antwerp.

The workshops he held for us, became the basis of our curriculum work.

He challenged us: "What is the essence of what you want to teach the pupils in class 10 with the Nibelungenlied for instance? Is there a way to convey that essence in a practical subject? Or in any other way?"

We also tried to understand what Steiner had hinted at when the upper school was developed.

Rudolf Steiner does talk a lot about differentiating for boys and girls after puberty. But I wonder whether we still have to take that as seriously as he did. Society has changed, and so have the pupils. But I do see a need for differentiation in a different way: based on talents as well as on dispositions.

In some rare cases Rudolf Steiner hinted at this as well.

Rudolf Steiner GA 303,  
lecture 14

- Comprehensive world knowledge and art for everyone
- Differentiation according to possible future on the basis of their talents:
  - Will they work with their head or their hands in adult life? (realistic, humanistic, art)

10/30/24 2 INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS WALDORF

The Oslø Byskolen in Norway took these words of Steiner very seriously. This innovative upper school has by now a strong tradition of being a specialized comprehensive school. They have up to 6 classes for each year who all have a large part of the curriculum in common. Each class has 5 different groups of pupils who each deepen another field of subjects: the realistic strand (natural sciences) humanistic (languages, history, social studies...) media, art and music.

But the Norwegians experimented also with vocational upper schools. This was all a big inspiration for us in Flanders. As we have a mainstream system with a huge amount of

choice in educational tracks and educational qualifications, our pupils sometimes challenge us, especially around the age of 16. This does not come as a surprise to experienced upper school teachers. In class 10 the pupils move away from their inner puberty struggles and want to explore how they can stand on their own two feet in their connection to the other and the world. This is confirmed with recent research done by for instance Eveline Crone, a Dutch professor neurocognitive developmental psychology.

The 14-16 years' dip

Research by Eveline Crone & Renske van der Cruijssen:

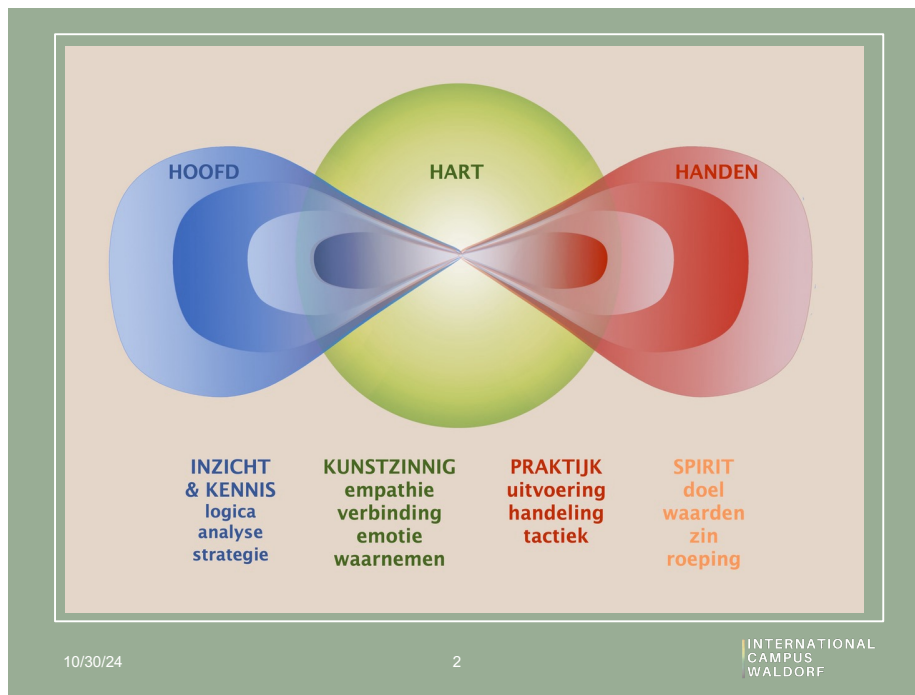
Uncertainty about self image

- Social skills
- Appearance
- Schoolcompetences !!!

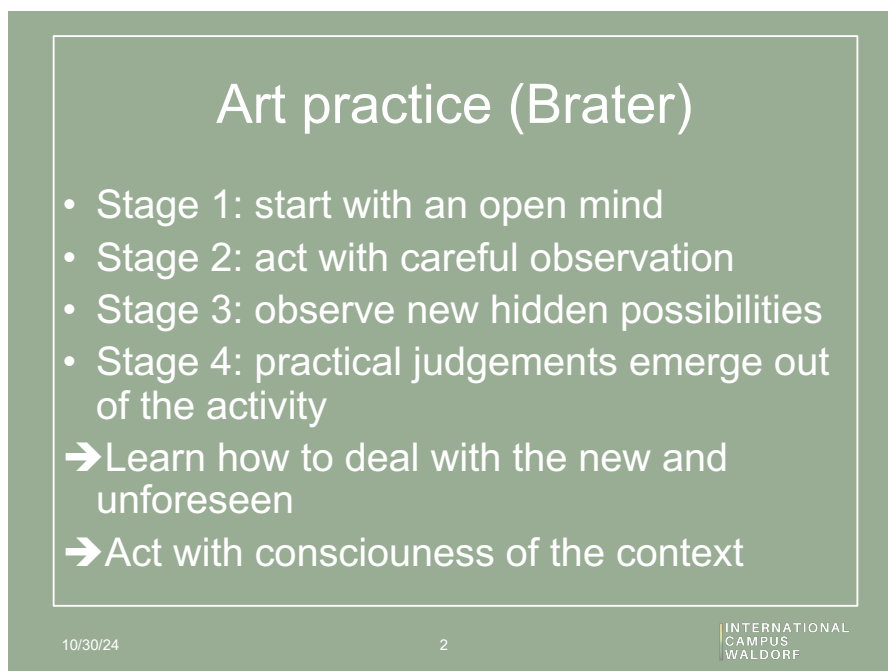
How to direct the attention towards their future life path away from brooding?

10/30/24 2 INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS WALDORF

As an upper school teacher I often came across pupils starting to talk to me consciously about their curriculum after this dip of self-doubt the research talks about. They longed for both a broad knowledge of the world and some individual choice of what to deepen more as a preparation for what they felt their future might bring. Working with the portfolio method helped somewhat. I divided the teaching time of my lessons in two: half of it was me offering what they all had to tackle, half was dedicated to research of their own. It was connected to what I had brought them in some way, but it was their own individual research question that led them. Out of necessity I have developed more methods of differentiation according to the different capacities of the pupils in one class. But our rigid educational system did not allow for a lot. My work in the federation opened more possible routes.



Coming back to Michael Brater's work: The essence of his ideas was that personal development needs all three fields and that it is not necessarily connected to content per se as long as the way the teaching and learning is designed in such a way that it is linked to the essentials of the steiner/waldorf curriculum in the broad sense. Art practice is necessary for all youngsters because it helps hugely to prepare them for the unforeseeable future. This is of extraordinary importance in our super-fast changing times.



Art practice is a very important method to:

- sharpen and refine the human observation skills;

- free people from fixed templates and to open up the mind for change and to act adequately in totally new situations;
- learn social skills if the artistic activity is done in a group e.g, singing in a choir or another performance.

## Phases 1 to 4 in the work process (Brater)

- 1. discovering the task
- (perception, setting oneself aside, integrity, commitment)
- 2. planning
- (being able to separate main issues from side issues, thinking in a goal-oriented and appropriate way, thinking through the whole procedure in your mind)
- 3. making decisions
- (concluding thinking/planning, overcoming resistances, being able to start, finding the transition from thinking to doing)
- 4. executing
- (competence, goal orientation, self-control, willpower, perseverance)

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

These are the 8 phases Brater describes for the more structured technical craft activities. It has to make sense in the real world, so it starts from the ideas of brotherhood in the economic life: we work for others. You have to think it through how you can give an answer to what is needed, how you have to plan and execute it. But it doesn't stop there...

## Phases 5 to 8 in the work process (Brater)

- 5. controlling
- (perception, self-criticism, critical ability)
- 6. correcting
- (being able to judge, adjust based on one's own judgement, saving something, making it usable)
- 7. concluding the process
- (finding something ready or finished = giving it away, e.g. to the client, in any case: renouncing its own use, being able to relinquish it)
- 8. looking back and evaluating
- (learning from the past work process)

10/30/24

2

INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

These steps prepare not only for the practical result of the work but also for future development. It becomes part of lifelong learning. We used these steps for every aspect of the training towards vocational competences. The result is that these steps are engrained into the behavior of the pupils to such an extent that it becomes a competence in totally new surroundings. The professionals who received our pupils for their internships in a real life work experience, compared the pupils to the pupils from the main stream vocational education. The difference was that although the Steiner /Waldorf pupils were less trained in one specific skill they had a much bigger capacity to discover what they needed to execute the work at hand. They saw what needed to be done and were quick to learn the skills they still missed.

## Flemish Steiner/Waldorf Upperschools

- 1969: Traditional Curriculum Waldorf Upperschools in Flemish system
- 2005: The specific alternative attainment targets for class 12 Rudolf Steiner education within the general (academic) secondary education EQF 4 were accepted by parliament
- 2006 B-classes in 7 & 8
- 2008 Vocational secondary education track Sustainable Bio-Ecological Building in Lier EQF 4
- 2016 Technical secondary education track Wood and Building EQF 4
- 2019 the reform of the secondary education opened other possibilities:
  - EQF 3 Logistics in care institutions
  - EQF 3 Painting and wallpapering
  - EQF 3 Care and welfare
  - EQF 3 Woodwork
  - EQF 4 Building techniques
  - EQF 4 Society and Welfare
  - EQF 4 Architectural and visual arts

10/30/24
2
INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPUS  
WALDORF

It is all still tiny, as there is no state funding for the startups and we rely on gifts for building up these new tracks. Only after the pioneer phase we get the normal state funding for the non-state schools in Flanders. The federation supports the development of the curriculum, but not the material necessities for the new tracks. Only the larger steiner/waldorf schools have the capacity to start these new educational tracks. So far 4 out of the existing 10 upper schools have diversified their upper schools. But slowly we in Flanders move away from being schools for the cultural elite and take steps on the road towards a specialized comprehensive school for all. Do we use the same traditional content in all tracks? Of course not. But the external demands of the standards for qualifications really made us think through what is really essential and belongs to the macro curriculum and what can be adapted to the way our national educational culture designs its system.

If you are interested in how the pupils react, you can watch a video of 10 minutes on vimeo, either in Flemish Dutch or with German or English subtitles. The links are in the references below.

## References:

- Film *Sustainable Living Vocational Upper School 2015*, Lier, Flanders :
  - (German subtitles) <https://vimeo.com/152975390>
  - (English subtitles): <https://vimeo.com/143461440>
  - Original Flemish-Dutch version: <https://vimeo.com/143463594>
- Bransby, K & Rawson, M. *Rethinking and Redesigning Waldorf curricula*. 2023 Art of Education (Erziehungskunst)
- Brater, M., Büchele, U., Fucke, E., & Herz, G. *Berufsbildung und Persönlichkeitsentwicklung*. 1988 Verlag Freies Geistesleben., München
- Brater, M., Büchele, U., Fucke, E., & Herz, G. *Künstlerisch handeln: Die Förderung beruflicher Handlungsfähigkeit durch künstlerische Prozesse* 1989 Verlag Freies Geistesleben, München
- Cox, L. & Gordon, A. *Place, Craft and Neurodiversity: Re-imagining Potential through Education at Ruskin Mill*. 2023 Routledge
- Crone, E. *Het Puberende Brein. Over de ontwikkeling van de hersenen in de unieke periode van de adolescentie*. 2009 Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, Amsterdam.
- Crone, E. & van der Crujssen, R. *Generatie Zelfvertrouwen. De ontwikkeling van een gezond zelfbeeld bij Jongeren*. 2024 Maven Publishing BV, Amsterdam.
- Dahlin, B. *Rudolf Steiner. The Relevance of Waldorf Education*. 2018, Springer Briefs in Education.
- Engelsman, R. *Die unvolendete Oberstufe*. 2012, internal publication of the Flemish Federation of Waldorf Schools
- Fintelmann, K. *Hibernia, Modell einer anderen Schule*. 1990, Ernst Klett Verlag, Stuttgart.
- Hirtt, N., Niçaise I., & De Zutter D. *De School van de ongelijkheid*. 2013, EPO, Berchem.
- Niçaise, I. & Lavrijsen, J. *Educational Tracking: Inequality and Performance* Research in Comparative & International Education 2016, Vol. 11(3) 334–349 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1745499916664818>
- Sigman, A. *Practically Minded. The benefits and Mechanisms Associated with a Practical Skills-Based Curriculum*. 2012, Ruskin Mill Trust.
- Steiner, R. *Die gesunde Entwicklung des Menschenwesens*. GA 303 13.-14, Vortrag
- Steiner, R. *Menschenerkenntnis und Unterrichtsgestaltung* GA 302.