

Future challenges in society and current potential of Waldorf schools

Perspectives from an empirical
viewpoint

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Overview

1. Future scenarios
2. Derived desirable competencies
3. Current results of German youth research
4. Empirical findings (Waldorf Alumni 2019)

Future Szenarios

S1: General breakdown (climate, social unrest)

S2: Solution by technology:

Global players rule the world (winners and losers)

S3: AI-controlled world (loss of privacy)

S4: Deceleration and de-globalization,
turning away from the growth paradigm

S5: Carry on as before - reactive problem solving

Bundesarbeitskreis für Arbeit und Leben

Future Skills – PISA Perspective

What do children need to learn today for the future?

- Ability to reflect, judgment, critical attitude
- Problem-solving skills, systems thinking
- Curiosity, also for research
- Love of experimentation, creativity, productivity
- Ability to concentrate
- Endurance, stamina

OECD based assessment

Teacher Perspective

- Experience of autonomy and self-determination
- Development of individual competences, especially self-efficacy
- Experience of social integration and belonging

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Socio-Cultural Perspective

“Without a goal, every path is wrong.”

(Confucius)

- There is no discussion about a common vision for the future in society –and therefore no long-term strategy for coherent action. (Harald Welzer)
- Learning from the future as it emerges. (Otto Scharmer)
- The transformation from caterpillar to butterfly - a decentralized process.

Interim Results

- There is a gap between OECD-related institutes (a), the view of educators (b) and the sociological perspective with regard to the skills required in the future (c).
 - a) Reflection, problem solving capacities, creativity, etc. (outside oriented)
 - b) Autonomy, self-Efficacy, social integration (inside oriented)
 - c) Confidence in dealing with uncertainty, situational networks, process-based learning (changing view of the whole)

Shell Study - “Pragmatic between disenchantment and lived diversity”

Sample: About 2,500 young people in Germany between the ages of 13 and 25

- 54% are “rather confident” about the future of our society (52% in 2019, but 71% in 1991)
- Fear of war in Europe (81%) and concern about the economic situation and rising poverty (67%)
- 57 % are of the opinion that the current standard of living in favor of the climate and environment should be restricted
- More than 90% stated the following as key goals: “Having good friends, a partner you can trust, and a good family life”

German Youth Study 2022

- The majority does not believe that Germany will “*have climate change under control*”, “*have a first-class education system*” or “*be more socially just*” by 2050.
- The statement “*People will live together more peacefully in Germany in 2050 than they do today*” was agreed with by 22% and disagreed with by 72%.
- The major psychological burdens are: Stress (41%), lack of drive (31%), exhaustion (29%), depression and self-doubt (with 26% each), a feeling of helplessness (16%) or suicidal thoughts (10%)

Counter Horizon

- Confidence
- Resilience
- Drive and initiative
- Self-confidence
- Being embedded in the community
- Joy of living, soulfulness

Rudolf Steiner on fear of the future

„He who looks anxiously and fearfully at what the future may bring him hinders his development, inhibits the free unfolding of his soul forces.

Nothing is actually so obstructive to this free unfolding of the soul's powers as the fear and anxiety of the unknown that enters the soul from the stream of the future. What devotion to the future can bring can only be judged by experience. What is devotion to future events?

In its ideal form, this devotion would be that mood of soul which could always say to itself: Whatever comes, whatever the next hour, the next morning may bring me, I cannot change it at first, if it is completely unknown to me, through any fear or anxiety. I await it with perfect inner peace of mind, with perfect calmness of spirit!“

GA 59, Metamorphosen des Seelenlebens, S. 113

Study of alumni in Germany 2019

(Randoll/Peters)

- Online questionnaire (N = 2931)
- Millennials (N = 1770)
- Opening Question:
“What was the most important thing you personally learned, experienced or witnessed at Waldorf School?”

Findings: Main Categories

1. The wide range of activities offered by the WS
2. When it comes to skills, that have been acquired, it becomes clear that the range of skills goes far beyond the usual school-based learning.
3. Values that have been taught or exemplified. These would be things like community or critical thinking
4. Deep and existential experiences that will stay for the rest of your life and that are connected to you as a person. (e.g. “That you can learn anything.”)

Examples Category I (range of activities)

- I have learned and experienced that I can acquire skills in a wide variety of areas. I have seen that you can experience great enthusiasm even in fields of work that don't seem so pleasant at first.
- Questioning opinions, examining facts, appreciating differences, gathering diverse knowledge, thinking outside the box, not considering academic professions higher than skilled trades, that school can provide a good foundation for life
- Trying everything out and giving everything a chance. Even though I was skeptical about some things at first (various things in art class and other craft subjects), I actually really enjoyed most of it and would probably never have tried it otherwise.
- The most important thing was working with all the materials you can imagine: from wool thread and clay to copper, wood, paper and stone/marble. [...]. It still fulfills me today that we once worked with all these materials.

Examples Category II (range of skills)

- To become independent and to learn communication and presentation skills, to be able to express oneself clearly and concisely and to appear self-confident.
- Only evaluate or make judgments after collecting a wide range of different perspectives or be able to stop evaluating altogether. Make decisions wisely.
- The most important thing I have learned is definitely that I have no problem presenting anything. The most important things I have experienced are definitely the various internships and plays as well as the many practical things
- The space to be allowed and able to design things myself - creative freedom; I think that has shaped me to this day and that I have learned to actively shape my life and environment and that it has encouraged a certain flexible, creative way of thinking.

Examples Category III (Values)

- Having compassion for others, but not turning into pity. You yourself are still the most important person in your life. And yet I was trained to always have an open eye/ear for the problems that may not affect me directly but are still related to me. I was taught that even a small act can set something bigger in motion.
- The most beautiful realization of this time is that it is possible to develop individual potential in a community.
- That you can see yourself as a valuable person despite your weaknesses and that you can be proud of your strengths.
- I have learned that teachers believe in me, even when I don't. They gave me so much encouragement and motivation to achieve goals that I didn't think I could achieve. I learned that a person is worth more than the result they deliver.

Examples Category IV (Existential experiences)

- Self-confidence, creative drive, the will was strengthened, skills trained (cognitive and manual), independence, responsibility for myself and my 40 fellow students, I feel connected to myself - I think the school has strengthened that.
- There are always the 3 Waldorf students in a large crowd of strangers.
- That I have the ability to learn everything I want to learn. The confidence in my abilities and the courage to go my own way, even if it doesn't follow the beaten track of the education system. Today, I see myself as an all-rounder. This is the perfect starting point in a changing world of work.
- The most important thing for me is that I have learned to take care of a fulfilled feeling in life myself.
- That I can do almost anything if I want to and that there are more skills than math, German and English, that the world is full of exciting things.

Hattie´s Postcard Study

In Hattie's Postcard Study 658 people in New Zealand were asked in 2018, to answer the following question on a postcard template:

“We think great teachers and educators are worth celebrating. Tell us about an educator who has inspired you, encouraged you or made a difference in your life.”

*The good teacher – Our best teachers are inspired, influential and passionate
(Janet Clinton, John Hattie and Hadeel Faisal Al-Nawab)*

Hattie's Postcard Study - results

- The typical **influential teacher** boosted confidence, was engaging, promoted the learning experience and enjoyment of learning, provided guidance and mentoring and opened up career paths.
- The **inspirational teacher** was amazing, encouraging, stimulating, patient, personable and supportive.
- The **passionate teacher** was dedicated, determined, enthusiastic, passionate and committed.

Hattie's graphic conclusion



Alumni comments - examples

- It was very important for me that I felt seen by all the teachers! That the teachers recognized me for who I was.
- The feeling of never being alone with my problems, as I always had a class teacher who was there for all my problems.
- I learned that teachers believe in me, even when I don't. My math teacher, however, didn't give up on me, but encouraged me and I graduated with a better math grade than ever before.

Alumni comments – examples II

- It was especially this personal connection between the teachers, who really seemed to have the willing intrinsic intention for us to succeed in school as well as in our personal development. There was room for crises, for flights of fancy, and in the end everything was resolved in the right way.
- For me, the most important experience was the teachers' struggle for truthfulness, even if it often, or perhaps even mostly, didn't work out, it was still important for my further development to have perceived the teachers in this attempt.

Conclusion

- Aspects of all categories mentioned above are important to cope with future challenges.
- It seems that the values of category IV are specific for Waldorf Education and correlate to the needs of young people today according to recent youth studies.
- In order to stimulate the existential changes of the fourth category, the teachers themselves must show the willingness for an encounter on an existential level (struggle for truthfulness...)