



ANTHROPOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, & ADMINISTRATION

IN WALDORF SCHOOLS

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July 2025

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ABSTRACT

This research report, initiated by the Waldorf School Leadership and Governance Foundations Research Team of AWSNA, seeks to dispel confusion related to the application of anthroposophy in Waldorf school leadership and governance. Drawing from primary sources, most specifically Steiner’s translated lectures, the team addresses six core questions: the role of threefolding in school governance; the intent behind teacher-run or self-administered institutions; republican self-management in schools; the genesis of the College of Teachers; the importance of staying relevant; and the origins of consensus decision-making.

The findings highlight the scarcity of direct statements made by Steiner pertaining to leadership and school governance, the complexity of applying his principles in contemporary settings, and the importance of understanding historical context and assumptions of the time. Essential Points, Practical Considerations, Foundational Tenets, and Guiding Thoughts are offered as a path forward, aiming to integrate anthroposophical perspectives with contemporary thinking. Ultimately, the report advocates for a dynamic and adaptable approach to leadership that honors the original impulse of Waldorf education while responding to present-day needs.

INTRODUCTION

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE DEFINED

School Governance is defined as the structures, principles, policies, and practices by which a school meets its legal, fiduciary, and mission-related functions. School governance includes providing strategic direction, making strategic decisions, and overseeing and monitoring organizational performance and accountability.

School Leadership is defined as the individual or groups responsible for influencing, inspiring, or directing personnel, teams, or an entire organization in accordance with vision, mission, goals, and strategies, within organizational agreements, and in accordance with established policies, while also coordinating and balancing interests of all constituents.

School Administration involves the day-to-day management and operation of a school, including pedagogical administration; operations and finances; human resources and personnel; and advancement related activities. Administration focuses on policy implementation and resource management, while ensuring the smooth functioning of all aspects of the institution.

Governance, leadership, and school administration each carry distinct meanings, yet they are interdependent and integrated in ways that support the overall functioning of a school. In the translated lectures of Rudolf Steiner, the term “administration” appears frequently. Based on contextual analysis, the research group interprets this term as referring primarily to pedagogical administration—an intentional distinction aimed at preserving the autonomy of education from external governmental control.

BACKGROUND

A Waldorf School Leadership Research and Design Team was formed by AWSNA in December 2021 to facilitate a collaborative stakeholder process aimed at uncovering barriers to effective leadership and governance in Waldorf schools. Ultimately, the purpose of the project was to pilot initiatives that would positively impact organizational culture and leadership in AWSNA member schools.

In the spring of 2022, the team completed the research phase which included interviews with more than 50 individuals and diverse constituent groups. The goal of the interviews was to get to the root causes of leadership challenges in member schools as well as develop a better understanding of attributes that exist within organizations that demonstrate effective leadership in accordance with recognized metrics.

Upon completion of the research phase¹ the team reached agreement relative to common barriers, translated as priorities, that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability and growth of Waldorf education in the United States and Canada. Of the priorities identified, dispelling confusion related to the application of anthroposophy in school governance and leadership was identified as a top priority. In response, an Anthroposophical Foundations in Leadership and Governance Research Team was formed. Their task was to analyze primary sources (Rudolf Steiner lectures), taking into consideration the factual, historical and cultural context of the sources, and establish guiding thoughts in the form of a research report.

REVIEWERS

Thank you to the following individuals who offered their time and expertise to review the content of this paper. Their review does not serve as an endorsement of the contents of this paper, and any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the chair, Melanie Reiser, and facilitator, Beverly Amico.

Reviewers: David Barham, Vernon Dewey, Jessica Heffernan-Ziegler, Trevor Mephram, Joachim Ziegler, Jan Baudendistel.

FOREWORD

This report aims to address what Rudolf Steiner said relative to the application of governance, leadership, and administration in Waldorf schools. It also aims to dispel confusion relative to his indications so that schools are freed from perceived doctrine. The research team recognizes that by relying on primary resources, we run the risk of perpetuating static interpretations and applications of Steiner's works rather than promoting the examination and potential validation of approaches through one's lived experiences. To that end, we begin with excerpts from Owen Barfield's *Romanticism Comes of Age*, "The Consciousness Soul," below:

"What is anthroposophy? Believing (some would answer) without a shred of evidence, everything that Steiner chose to say. And this is exactly what it is not. Anthroposophy is knowledge, as it is expressed and grasped by the Consciousness Soul;

.. and the Consciousness Soul (if it really is the Consciousness Soul and not the Intellectual Soul dressed up to look like it) knows first and foremost that anybody's thought, once it is conceived in ideas and expressed in words, must be alloyed with error."

"Think these thoughts without believing them," Steiner once said; and in nearly all his utterances he employed the mode, not of discursive argument, but of pure assertion — though he could syllogize as well as anyone if he chose to, as he showed in *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. And this reluctance, and these phrases and habits of his, and the essential nature of anthroposophy, place — so it seems to me — rather a heavy responsibility upon its adherents. I cannot think it is unduly paradoxical to say that it is really a kind of betrayal of the founder of anthroposophy to believe what he

¹ 2022_06_Waldorf_School_Leadership_Research_Project_Report.pdf is located in AWSNA's community hub library

said. He poured out his assertions because he trusted his hearers not to believe. Belief is something which can only be applied to systems of abstract ideas.””

“To become an anthroposophist is not to believe, it is to decide to use the words of Rudolf Steiner (and any others which may become available) for the purpose of raising oneself, if possible, to a kind of thinking which is itself beyond words, which precedes them, in the sense that ideas, words, sentences, propositions, are only subsequently drawn out of it.”

“To be an anthroposophist, then, is to seek to unite oneself, not with any groups of words, but with this concrete thinking, whose existence can only be finally proved by experience.”

(Barfield 1966, pp 59-60)

With these words in mind, the team encourages schools and personnel to carefully study and examine source materials in light of their own experience, and in a manner that is applicable to your school and community. We also recommend Nana Goebel's "The History of Waldorf Education Worldwide" available at Waldorf Publications, and "The Story of Waldorf Education in the United States" by Stephen Sagarin, for a window into the evolving nature of Waldorf education over a 100 year period.

RESEARCH DESIGN

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In conducting research for this paper, the Anthroposophical Foundations in Leadership and Governance Research Team primarily focused on original source material and direct quotes attributed to Rudolf Steiner. Given the wide range of available translations of Steiner's work, the team made every effort to ensure accuracy and consistency in citation. Resources consulted include the Rudolf Steiner Archive search, a project of the Steiner Online Library, as well as other translated texts selected to best address the key questions outlined below:

Q1: What was the intention of Rudolf Steiner and/or Emil Molt² relative to threefolding and school governance or leadership?

Q2: What was Rudolf Steiner's intent concerning school independence, and teacher-run, self-administered, or hierarchical school governance?

Q3: What is republican self-management as described by Rudolf Steiner and how is it meant to inform school governance? What does it have to do with freedom of the teacher?

Q 4: What was the role of the full faculty in the first Waldorf School, and how did the College of Teachers come into being ?

Q 5: What did Rudolf Steiner say about staying relevant and changing for the times?

Q 6: How was consensus derived from as a model for decision making, and how was it meant to be applied in schools?

²Emil Molt was the director of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory and the co-founder and funder of the first Waldorf School.

The research team analyzed Rudolf Steiner’s lectures through both a historical and a contextual lens. Although we recognize that the very nature of translation and interpretation is largely influenced by culture, individual perspective, and unconscious bias. The aim was to be thoroughly objective, basing report content on factual sources and direct quotes versus speculative claims. The process included the following:

- Historical and Contextual Analysis – Who was Rudolf Steiner’s audience and what was the historical and cultural intent and significance of the text?
- Essential Points – Based on the text and context of the time/culture, what essential points can be derived in relation to the key research questions?
- Practical Considerations – Based on the essential points, what are the practical considerations for Waldorf schools in North America today?

Following this analysis, the team considered anthroposophical perspectives and shared guiding thoughts, both intended to support schools in their exploration of leadership and governance practices.

KEY QUESTIONS ANALYSIS

Q1: WHAT WAS THE INTENTION OF RUDOLF STEINER AND/OR EMIL MOLT RELATIVE TO THREEFOLDING AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE OR LEADERSHIP?

The Threefold Social Organism³, a Proposed Social Structure

With the backdrop of World War I, and the subsequent search for blame and solutions amidst the suffering caused by the war, Rudolf Steiner proposed the threefold social organism as a pathway to a better future. The goal was to reform Germany's social structure to foster peace and cooperation. According to translated lectures that appear in *Basic Issues of the Social Question*, this proposal recognized three independent, yet interdependent and integrated, realms within society, versus within organizations, such as schools. These include the economic, legal, and cultural/spirit realm. Steiner’s ideas aimed to achieve equilibrium among these realms, with neither industry nor government overpowering culture (Steiner 1920). The political leadership did not embrace Steiner's proposal, and the subsequent punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles contributed to a sense of disillusionment and crisis in Germany.

Funding at the Inception of the First Waldorf School

While the immediate political context of World War I may have hindered the realization of Steiner's vision on a larger scale, its influence persisted within anthroposophical circles. This included the establishment of a corporate structure (the economic realm) where profits were redirected to support anthroposophical initiatives, including education (the cultural realm).

The development of Waldorf education was an initiative of Emil Molt, the director of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette factory (Art of Educating 2018). Molt convinced the factory’s management council to establish the school. The firm initially put forth 100,000 marks to help launch the school, and agreed to pay teacher salaries for one year (Lead Together 2017, pp 27). However, this amount was not nearly enough, so Emil Molt personally donated an additional \$450,000 to the cause. This put Molt in the position of being the primary funder of the Waldorf school and the teachers’ employer (Lead Together 2017, pp 27).

³ The threefold social organism recognizes three independent realms of society: political, economic, and cultural.

The school grew rapidly, with an increasing number of non-Waldorf Astoria families enrolling their children. In the first year 191 students out of 256, were children with family members employed by the factory. In the second year, approximately 50% were tuition paying families from the broader community. This trajectory continued in subsequent years as the school became better known (Lead Together 2017, pp 27).

The Threefold Social Organism and Waldorf Education

In *The Spirit of the Waldorf School: Lectures Surrounding the Founding of the First Waldorf School* Rudolf Steiner opens with a direct reference to the Threefold Social Organism and the role Waldorf schools could play in furthering the threefold imagination of social life in schools, by retaining their cultural impulse independent from any governmental agency.

“You well know, from the announcements distributed about this school, that our intention is to take a first step along the path we would want the cultural life of the Threefold Social Organism to take. In establishing the Waldorf School, Mr. Molt has, to a large extent, felt motivated to do something to further the development of inner spirituality. He hopes to do something that will point the way for the present and future social tasks of the Threefold Social Organism (Steiner 1919, *The Spirit of the Waldorf School: Lectures Surrounding the Founding of the First Waldorf School*, Lecture 1: The Intent of the Waldorf School, para 1).”

“In the last three to four centuries, the educational system has become so completely dependent upon the state that we could say that it is, in a quite peculiar way, a part of the state. Now, we can say that to a certain extent—however, only to a very limited extent—the educational institutions to which people have become accustomed were at one time appropriate to the configuration of the states of the civilized world. But what we strive for here is a transformation of the present social configuration. The understanding that is to form the basis of future social life requires that the system of education not remain in the same relationship to the state that it has had until now. For if we strive for a social form of economic life, the need to remove cultural life from the influence of politics and economics will be all the more urgent. This applies in particular to the administration of the educational system. People have felt this need for a very long time. But all pedagogical aspirations in the most recent past, and particularly at present, have something oppressive about them, something that hardly considers the general point of view of cultural life. This has all come about through the peculiar way in which government officials in the most recent past, and especially at present, have publicly addressed such pedagogical aspirations (Steiner 1919, *The Spirit of the Waldorf School: Lecture 1, The Intent of the Waldorf School*, para 4).”

Tuition, Access and Financial Challenges

During Steiner’s lifetime, the school adhered to the ideal that no one would be turned away from the school for lack of financial means. As such, families whose tuition were not covered by the cigarette factory, paid a tuition amount in alignment with their financial ability (Lead Together 2017, pg 27).

In *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner*, he is quoted as saying, “We must maintain our principle of accepting children who cannot pay the tuition. The school suffers from the fact that, aside from the children of the Waldorf-Astoria Company, it is a capitalistic school (Steiner 2020, *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner: Fifteenth Meeting*, para 43)”

Later in the same lecture, he states, “It is one of our principles that we do not require every child to pay tuition. That is the reason for our difficulties, namely, that we accept children who cannot pay tuition (Steiner 2020. *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner: Fifteenth Meeting*, para 43)”

The school was under tremendous financial strain from the beginning, spurring Molt and Steiner to explore various funding sources, ranging from membership in the Waldorf School Association to contributions from wealthy supporters.

Transitioning to a Nonprofit Entity and Shareholder Participation in Cultural Enterprises

The school's transition from a subsidiary of a for-profit corporation to an independent non-profit became increasingly complex when ownership of the original cigarette company changed hands. Several independent ventures, including the Waldorf Astoria, were organized under a holding company known as Der Kommende Tag A.G. Amid the economic turmoil and rampant inflation that followed World War I, and under pressure from the teachers, Steiner successfully persuaded the shareholders of Der Kommende Tag A.G. to transfer the Waldorf School as an independent non-profit entity—bypassing the usual buyout process. The transcripts of these negotiations provide some insight into Steiner's thinking about management and leadership of the first school.

According to translated lectures by Walter Kluger in *Vom Einheitsstaat zum dreigliedrigen sozialen Organismus (The Unitary State to the Tripartite)*, when Rudolf Steiner was asked whether it would be possible for the shareholders to retain some form of ownership rights in the school after it became a non-profit, he responded in the negative and stated that he would only participate in a spiritual enterprise if it were detached from shareholder influence.

“..as far as the spiritual enterprises are concerned, I would like to say the following: If the experiences that have been made in recent years with regard to the economic management within the Anthroposophical Society are taken as a basis, then I can only say that I myself would not participate in the reorganization.. (Steiner 1924. Current Social and Economic Issues: The End of Futurum A.G., para 26).”

“So as far as the Waldorf School is concerned, I would not be able to participate in a reorganization if, in any way, an economic administration were to be associated with this reorganization; and that would be the case if, in some way, the current shareholders of the Waldorf school were to participate (Steiner 1924. Current Social and Economic Issues: The End of Futurum A.G., para 26).”

The implications of extracting the school from the holding company meant that the school would no longer be entitled to financial support from the corporation and its subsequent funding model would be donation and fees based. Shares were to be gifted in free will with no conditions.

After this shift to non-profit status, the factory simply paid tuition for the worker's children, and did not take part in managing the school.

Complying with Requirements of Public Education

In these lectures, Steiner also addresses the need to recognize the necessity of complying with the requirements of public education and in preparing students for higher education. He indicates that a certain level of compromise is necessary to balance the ideal with the reality of university preparedness.

“Naturally, the Waldorf School will have to reconcile itself with current institutions and public opinion concerning education and teaching. We will not immediately be able to achieve all that we wish to achieve—quite understandably we will, on the whole, find it necessary to comply with the present requirements of public education. We will find it necessary that the graduates of our school reach the level demanded for transfer to institutions of higher education, in particular, the universities. We will, therefore, be unable to organize our educational material so that it represents what we find to be the ideal of a truly humane education. In a manner

of speaking, we will be able to use only the holes that still remain in the tightly woven web that spreads over the educational system. In these holes we will work to instruct the children entrusted to the Waldorf School, in the sense of a completely free cultural life. We plan to take full advantage of every opportunity presented. We most certainly will not be able to create a model school. However, we can show to what degree inner strengthening and a truly inner education of the child is possible, when it is achieved solely out of the needs of the cultural life, and not through something imposed from outside (Steiner 1919. *The Spirit of the Waldorf School: The Intent of Waldorf Education*, para 4).”

ESSENTIAL POINTS

After a challenging start as an employee benefit subsidiary of a for-profit company, Steiner subsequently clarified that Waldorf schools should be envisioned as a cultural endeavor sustained entirely by financial donations and school fees, ensuring freedom from the influence of industry or government, and avoiding any conditions tied to gifts. Rudolf Steiner's ideals emphasized shielding cultural institutions from economic interference and divorcing schools from stakeholders to create freedom in the cultural and spiritual realm. Central to this vision was Steiner's concept of the threefold social organism, which provides a framework for understanding societal balance. His aim for Waldorf schools was to embody the threefold imagination of social life, maintaining their cultural impulse independent of governmental agencies. At the same time, Steiner acknowledged the need to balance educational ideals with the practical realities of public expectations.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The tuition model, which was adopted in year-one for the children of non-factory workers, was a departure from Molt's original threefold imagination of industry supporting culture.
- While Steiner's threefold social organism provides a valuable framework for balancing societal health, it may not directly translate into a structural context of individual institutions.
- Attempts to directly apply Steiner's threefold social order to organizational design, such as schools, was not Rudolf Steiner's intent.
- Rather than working to apply a siloed approach to threefolding into organizational structure, schools may benefit from fostering a more networked approach that encourages open dialogue and an interconnected, cross-departmental framework of individuals or teams to help ensure that decisions reflect an integrated understanding of the threefolding construct.
- The increasing reliance on tuition-paying models in Waldorf schools reflects a departure from Steiner's original vision of free cultural enterprises sustained by voluntary contributions. This shift highlights ongoing challenges in maintaining the ideals of social threefolding in a contemporary educational landscape.
- Considering today's economic pressures, how can Waldorf schools maintain their cultural and spiritual autonomy while relying on tuition fees?
- What are the implications of various governance models in schools and how can schools strike a balance between cultural and spiritual autonomy and economic sustainability through sound practices and effective decision making within the given structures?

SUMMARY THREEFOLDING:

Rudolf Steiner's aim was for Waldorf schools to further the threefold imagination of social life by retaining their cultural, spiritual impulse separate from any governmental or outside agency. Steiner's concept of the threefolding of economic, rights, and cultural spheres was not intended to serve as a structural governance model for schools.

Q2: WHAT WAS RUDOLF STEINER'S INTENT CONCERNING SCHOOL INDEPENDENCE, AND TEACHER-RUN, SELF-ADMINISTERED, OR HIERARCHICAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE?

Independent versus State-Mandated Curriculum

At the founding of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany (the first independent school in the country), one of Rudolf Steiner's main concerns was the rising dominance of state-mandated curriculum, which Steiner viewed as harmful to intellectual and spiritual life. He believed that human intellectual and spiritual development should be autonomous, wholly influenced by educators, and not mandated by bureaucratic systems imposed outside of the school. This radical idea, of promoting independent curriculum development, challenged the prevailing autocratic systems of his time, which according to Steiner were said to be specifying curriculum "down to the last detail."

"Now, esteemed attendee, I can still remember - though it was a long time ago when I was in school myself or interacted with teachers - that everything in the school program was something printed on one page; now it has become thick books and everything is specified down to the last detail (Steiner 1920. *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism: The Current Economic Crisis and the Recovery of Economic Life through the Threefold Social Order*, Chapter 8, para 51)."

"Then there is the bureaucratic aspect, which comes from the state. This is much more important than one might think! There is no justification for anything other than the factually specialized to have a say in the administration of intellectual life (Steiner 1920. *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism: The Current Economic Crisis and the Recovery of Economic Life through the Threefold Social Order*, Chapter 8, para 51)."

"No one should make decisions who is not directly engaged in the educational process. No parliament or congress, nor any individual who was perhaps once an educator, is to have anything to say. What is experienced in the teaching process would then flow naturally into the administration. By its very nature such a system would engender competence and objectivity (Steiner 2020. *Basic Issues of the Social Question*. Preface to the Fourth German Edition, para 12)."

"Rules and regulations must not be imposed from outside the school. In spiritual life, autonomy, self-administration, is essential.... (Steiner 1921. *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy: Education and Practical Life from the Perspective of Spiritual Science*, para 48)."

Orienting to State Curricula

Yet, as noted in *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism*, despite the impulse for a fully independent curricula, Steiner recognized that there was a need to orient himself to the state curricula in order to do justice to public teaching objectives.

"I was also obliged, you see, to recognize the slippery slope on which spiritual life finds itself in its most important area, the school system. Of course, I also had to develop curricula and, in order to orient myself, I had to see what was there in order to do justice to the current school teaching goals and curricula (Steiner 1920. *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism, The Current Economic Crisis and the Recovery of Economic Life through the Threefold Social Order*, para 50)."

Teacher Influence on Educational Policy

To extract the school from bureaucratic control, Rudolf Steiner advocated for self-governance, meaning freedom from the state. In Steiner's ideal social structure, within the self-administered cultural realm, teachers themselves (and not politicians) would make the laws pertaining to educational policy. In *The Spirit of the Waldorf School, Lecture 1*, Steiner seems to be saying that educators should be engaged in the development of broad social educational policy.

“The influence of the faculty on educational legislation will quite certainly be the greatest when the teachers themselves make the laws concerning education in the self-administered cultural realm of the Threefold Social Organism (Steiner 1919. *The Spirit of the Waldorf School: Lecture 1*, para 33).”

Self-Governing Schools: Retaining Independence as Cultural Institutions

In this dissociation of cultural institutions from government and industry, Steiner advocated for teachers, and those otherwise productively engaged in cultural life, to have sole authority for education, including the organization of instruction, administration, and the establishment of goals. The following quotes from *The Renewal of the Social Organism, Lecture 4* speak to this sentiment.

“...the movement for the threefold social order strives for the complete dissociation of the educational system from government and industry. The place and function of educators within society should depend solely upon the authority of those engaged in this activity. The administration of the educational institutions, the organization of courses of instruction and their goals should be entirely in the hands of persons who themselves are *simultaneously* either teaching or otherwise productively engaged in cultural life (Steiner, 1919/1920. *The Renewal of the Social Organism: The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom*, para 8).”

“In each case, such persons would divide their time between actual teaching (or some other form of cultural productivity) and the administrative control of the educational system.⁴ It will be evident to anyone who can bring himself to an unbiased examination of cultural life that the peculiar vitality and energy of soul required for organizing and directing educational institutions will be called forth only in someone actively engaged in teaching or in some sort of cultural creativity (Steiner 1919/1920. *The Renewal of the Social Organism: The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom*, para 8).”

Rudolf Steiner indicated that this disassociation from the economic and government sectors, enables the administration of education and teaching to remain connected to the spirit of the social organism, by allowing spiritual life to administer itself freely.

“The spiritual life must be placed on its own ground. It must be placed so firmly on its own ground that those who teach, for example, from the lowest school to the highest levels of education, are at the same time the administrators of the education and teaching system, and that the administration of the education and teaching system is connected with the entire spiritual life of a social organism, whatever it may be (Steiner 1920. *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism: Threefolding and the Present World Situation*, para 10).”

“How differently people would be educated and introduced to economic life if spiritual life were completely free to govern itself only on the basis of its own foundations! This can only be appreciated by someone who has really formed a sound judgment about the connection between free spiritual life, the development of human abilities out of free spiritual experience, and its significance for economic and state life (Steiner 1920. *From the Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism: The Current Economic Crisis and the Recovery of Economic Life through the Threefold Social Order*, para 50).”

“One of the demands that must be made for spiritual life—something that is not at all utopian, that may be begun any day—is that those actively engaged in spiritual life (and this means, above all, those involved in its most important public domain; namely, education) should also be entrusted with all administrative matters,

⁴ The educational system refers to the educational system at large within Germany, versus an individual school

and this in a broad and comprehensive way (Steiner 1921. *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 1: Education and Practical Life from the Perspective of Spiritual Science*, para 47).”

Teaching and Administration

Steiner emphasizes the importance of teacher autonomy—not only to foster pedagogical creativity, but also to ensure that school administration arises from the shared intentions of teachers working within a learning community. In 1921, he also indicated that there was adequate time in the current schedule for practicing teachers to teach and, also, take responsibility for administrative matters at meetings. Through this administrative form, orders from a state mandated headmaster would not dictate schooling.

When speaking of the need for each teacher to be free to apply pedagogical creativity, he states that, “This is only possible if the entire administration of the school system is autonomous, if the practicing teacher only has to deal with practicing teachers in relation to the administration. A non-performing teacher is a foreign body in the school administration, just like a non-artistic teacher who would be responsible for setting the direction for artistic teachers. The nature of the pedagogical art demands that teachers divide themselves between educating and teaching and the administration of the school system. In this way, the overall spirit, which is formed from the spiritual attitude of all individual teachers united in a teaching and educational community, will fully prevail in the administration (Steiner 1919. *Additional Documents on the Threefold Social Organism: The Educational objective of the Waldorf School in Stuttgart*, para 15) ”

“The maximum number of lessons to be taught—plus the hours spent on other educational commitments—should allow teachers sufficient time for regular meetings, in both smaller and larger groups, to deal with administrative matters. However, only practicing teachers—not former teachers now holding state positions or retired teachers—should be called on to care for this side of education (Steiner 1921. *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 1: Education and Practical Life from the Perspective of Spiritual Science*, para 48).”

School Management and Leadership

According to meeting minutes transcribed in the book *From The Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism*, Rudolf Steiner’s task was to give the school its spiritual foundation, a foundation tied to the acquisition of sound judgment in the context of a free spiritual life. He took responsibility for the actual management and leadership of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart. As he explained to the shareholders of the company that owned the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette factory, which at that point still owned the Waldorf School:

“Emil Molt, the local manufacturer of the Waldorf-Astoria factory, set up this Waldorf School. It was up to me to give the Waldorf School its spiritual foundation, and to this day I am still responsible for the actual management, the actual leadership of the school - even if this is sometimes not recognizable from the outside (Steiner 1920, *From The Unitary State to the Tripartite Social Organism, Lectures*).”

Similar statements regarding his leadership can be found elsewhere:

“At our Freie Waldorf School in Stuttgart, whose top management I am in charge of and which I have to inspect from time to time.. (Steiner 1920. *The Idea and Practice of Waldorf Education: The Art of Teaching and the Waldorf School*, para 40).”

“This purpose could be realised through the fact that the direction and leadership of the school was entrusted to me (Steiner 2024. *Human Values in Education: The Teachers’ Conference in the Waldorf School*, para 2).”

ESSENTIAL POINTS

Rudolf Steiner's vision for independence and self-administration of education aimed to free schools, as cultural and spiritual entities, from state-bureaucratic control, particularly regarding the development and administration of curricula. He advocated for teachers, and those otherwise productively engaged in cultural life, to have sole authority over education, including the organization of instruction, related administration, and the establishment of goals. Steiner also implied that teachers should have a greater voice in educational legislation and enjoy more freedom in curriculum design and implementation, rather than adhering to state mandates. While teachers at all levels were intended to participate in self-administration and decision making, in a united learning community, the school itself was managed and guided by Steiner.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- There are challenges to the notion of independence in independent schools, highlighting their reliance on the community for support, particularly financial. As such, schools may have autonomy in curriculum decisions, yet they are economically dependent on the support of parents and the broader community.
- In the United States and parts of Canada, where Waldorf schools operate as independent entities, has self-administration, as described by Rudolf Steiner, already been achieved simply due to their independent status?
- What responsibilities do teachers in independent schools hold relative to influencing educational policy and how might this task be integrated into the life of a school without jeopardizing non-profit status?
- How did the impulse of flat organizations⁵ come into being? What are the implications of these governance models in schools, particularly as they relate to timely decision making?
- How can schools strike a balance among the goals of creativity in teaching tasks, creative autonomy, and pedagogical administration with accountability, organizational effectiveness, and a positive work-life balance?

SUMMARY SELF-ADMINISTRATION

Rudolf Steiner's primary intent relative to independence and self-administration was to free schools from bureaucratic control, specifically from the state. While teachers, at all levels, and others engaged in cultural life, were meant to be wholly involved in self-governance, as described by Steiner, the first school was hierarchical in nature, with Steiner himself managing it, and Molt acting as a de facto business manager.

Q3: WHAT IS REPUBLICAN⁶ SELF-MANAGEMENT AS DESCRIBED BY RUDOLF STEINER AND HOW IS IT MEANT TO INFORM SCHOOL GOVERNANCE? WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH FREEDOM OF THE TEACHER?

Historical Context of Republican Self-Management

It is important to understand words in the historical context they were originally employed. Austria and Germany had recently transitioned from monarchies to republics. In the prior monarchical system, all power and authority was derived from the ruler, and delegated down through the government. The republican systems that replaced them involved democratically elected legislatures with representatives who served on behalf of the common good, in the name of the republic. So when Steiner argues for republican management, he wants collective debate and decision making on behalf of the common good, rather than a top-down hierarchy. But he also may be intentionally avoiding the term "democratic" in that he is not envisioning every stakeholder voting.

⁵ A decentralized decision making model with no or few levels of middle management

⁶ Republican refers to not be administered by a head-master of the state, but independently administered

In working to understand the various interpretations and merits of 'republican self-management,' the research team turned to Chris Schaefer's, *Partnerships of Hope: Building Waldorf School Communities, Chapter 3*. Schaefer begins by making the connection to the opening of the first Waldorf school with the Threefold Social Organism and republican self-management, noting the importance of the teachers being tasked with responsibility, quoting Steiner as follows:

"The school, therefore, will have its own administration run on a republican basis and will not be administered from above. We must not lean back and rest securely on the orders of a headmaster*; we must be a republic of teachers and kindle in ourselves the strength that will enable us to do what we have to do with full responsibility (Steiner 1919) (Schaefer. 2013, 53 - 54)."

* In Germany in 1919, headmasters were appointed by the State, and were government officials (Grindel 2018). Many had no background in teaching. In this case, Steiner was not referring to leaders of independent cultural institutions. This distinction has been lost over time and across cultures, since the "headmaster" role in the Anglo-Saxon tradition evolved out of the "Head Teacher" position, and the institutions were historically independent.

An alternate translation from the German text is as follows:

"That is why we will not set up the school in accordance with the government, but in accordance with its own administrative needs and manage it in a republican way. In a true teachers' republic, we will not be able to repose on regulations that come from the superintendent's office, but we must [bring in] what gives us the opportunity, what gives each of us full responsibility for what we have to do. Each of us must be ourselves fully responsible. We will be able to create a replacement for the superintendent's office by setting up this preparatory course and working on what makes the school a unified whole. We will achieve unity through this course if we work seriously (Hindes 2025)."

In this case, in Steiner's original German lecture, his guidance does not appear to reject leadership at the institutional level. Instead, he wanted the Government to extract itself from the business of educating, so as to mirror something more similar to what was in place in England. While a statement of individual responsibility for the school was evident, there was nothing that specifically precluded appointed leaders of different types.

Faculty Meetings in Republican Forms

The research team noted very few direct references to "republican" in the context of Waldorf education. Those identified were primarily in Rudolf Steiner's conferences with teachers, notes by Dr Karl Schubert, when Steiner referenced how teachers were to work with one another in faculty meetings, by sharing their achievements for the benefit of all.

A teacher: "We would like to meet every week to discuss pedagogical questions so that what each of us achieves, the others can take advantage of."

Dr. Steiner: "That would be very good and is something that I would joyfully greet, only you need to hold your meeting in a republican form."

(Steiner 1919. Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner, Second Meeting, para 105 and 106)

Sovereignty and Independent Spiritual Life

Rudolf Steiner also indicated that while working within republican forms, each person retains an independent spiritual life and controls over one's own affairs (republican), while also working as in a collective group form (republican-democratic).

"The meetings are free republican discussions. Each person is sovereign in them (Steiner 1919. Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner, First Meeting, para 34)."

"People already know about the school to a certain extent, but it must become much better known, particularly its basic principles. We also need to emphasize the independence of the faculty, the republican-democratic form of the faculty, to show that an independent spiritual life is thinkable even within our limited possibilities (Steiner 1921. Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner, Twenty-Second Meeting, para 115)."

Freedom to Carry Out Functions

Outside of the realm of education, when discussing the founding of national anthroposophical societies at the 1923 Christmas Conference for the General Anthroposophical Society, Rudolf Steiner emphasized the importance of maintaining the freedom to carry out functions in a manner that aligns with the needs of a cultural institution. This emphasis may also be applied to schools, suggesting that educational institutions should operate with the same principle of autonomy in fulfilling their purpose, regardless of what procedural processes for decision-making and authorities are employed.

"I can well imagine, for example, that there are national societies who will most certainly want to employ democratic procedures. I can also imagine that there will be others who will want to be thoroughly aristocratic in their approach (Steiner 2023. The Christmas Conference: Meeting of the Vorstand and the General Secretaries, para 26)."

"In a general way, however, I do not find this question to be of paramount importance as a matter of principle... [In] practice, there will be little difference between democracy and aristocracy (Steiner 2023. The Christmas Conference: Meeting of the Vorstand and the General Secretaries, para 26)."

"Anyone who is expected to carry out a function [whether elected or appointed] must have freedom above all else... Whether democracy or aristocracy is the method, the society will not look much different (Steiner 2023. The Christmas Conference: Meeting of the Vorstand and the General Secretaries, para 27)."

Relative to schooling and equipping teachers to educate youth, in the preface to *Towards Social Renewal*, Steiner stresses the importance of teachers determining their functions as opposed to 'so-called experts.'

"It is assumed that all organization must be carried out by those who are engaged in practical matters, and educators should act according to the terms of reference determined for them.

"This assumption ignores the fact that it is just when teachers are not permitted to determine their own functions that they tend to become impractical and remote from reality. As long as the so-called experts determine the terms of reference according to which they must function, they will never be in a position to turn out practical individuals who are equipped for life by their education (Steiner 1920. Basic Issues of the Social Question: Preface to the fourth German Edition, para 15)."

“It is anti-social to allow youth to be educated by people who themselves have become strangers to reality because the conduct and content of their work has been dictated to them from without (Steiner 1920. Basic Issues of the Social Question: Preface to the fourth German Edition, para 15).”

The Decisive Factor is the People

In *The Child’s Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education*, Rudolf Steiner states the decisive factor in any system is the people working and living within it.

“You can set up any institutions you like, be they monarchist or republican, democratic or socialist; the decisive factor will always be the kind of people who live and work under any of these systems (Steiner 1923. *The Child’s Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education: Lecture VI*, para 38).”

In *Republican–Not Democratic*, an essay by Ernst Lehrs, Lehrs notes that Steiner intended Waldorf schools to develop new social forms embodying three different and at times competing principles: aristocratic leadership, aristocratic meaning “the best”; delegated responsibilities to groups and individuals by the res publica, the common body of teachers; and democratic selection of such individuals and groups based on competence and skill (Schaefer 2013. pp 54-55).”

ESSENTIAL POINTS

While some claims suggest that Rudolf Steiner advocated for “republican academies,” there is no concrete evidence supporting this assertion. Steiner used the term “republican” primarily in relation to the Anthroposophical Society’s functioning and pedagogical meetings, without explicitly tying it to school administration or governance.

The republican concept emphasized self-administration within faculties, fostering ongoing teacher education, improved classroom instruction, and pedagogical administration rather than being dictated by external or internal governance. Faculty meetings in this form provided teachers the opportunity to share achievements, learn from one another and tend to administrative tasks.

For groups or individuals tasked with a function, it is essential that they have the freedom and the skill to perform it effectively. Ultimately, regardless of the structure, the decisive factor lies in the individuals involved.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Schools are encouraged to structure ‘republican’ style faculty meetings that foster inspiration in teaching by learning from one another’s achievements.
- The Waldorf movement is undergoing generational shifts, highlighting the potential need to recognize and adapt to changing perspectives and decision-making practices.
- There is often tension between freedom and accountability within the Waldorf movement. While teachers value the autonomy to innovate and adapt their teaching methods to suit their students’ needs, how can these principles be balanced with a commitment to individual and collective responsibility, shared goals, and accountability structures to ensure the quality of the educational experience?

SUMMARY REPUBLICAN SELF-MANAGEMENT

Rudolf Steiner used the term "republican" in discussions relating to pedagogical meetings. In this case, the concept of "republican" was seen as promoting self-administration within a faculty for the purpose of ongoing teacher education and pedagogical administration. While some claims suggest Steiner advocated for "republican academies," there is a lack of concrete evidence supporting such assertions in the source material. It is important to avoid projecting contemporary ideals onto his teachings.

Q 4: WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE FULL FACULTY IN THE FIRST WALDORF SCHOOL AND HOW DID THE COLLEGE OF TEACHERS COME INTO BEING?

The Role of the 'Full Faculty' in the First Waldorf School

As part of Steiner's broader vision for Waldorf education, the full faculty served as the core cultural and intellectual life of the school. Faculty meetings were a place for all teachers to share practical experiences and insights and learn from one another, with the primary intention being to sustain the soul-spiritual and pedagogical vitality of both the school and the faculty.

According to the introduction of *A Modern Art of Education*, Rudolf Steiner lectured in 1923 in Yorkshire, England, on the topic of 'The Union for the Realization of Spiritual Values in Education.' Many experienced Waldorf teachers were present (Anthroposophic Press 2004)." According to these lectures, translated by Jesse Darrell, Steiner emphasized that teaching should be a continuous process of self-education, with teachers gaining profound psychological and practical insights from their classroom experiences.

"I have said that a school ought to be an organism in which each single feature is an integral part of the whole. The threads of the different activities which must be as it were. They are so indeed, and for the reason that every practical experience gained by the teacher in school becomes, in turn, part of his own education."

"And he who derives such self-education for himself from his teaching work, gaining on the one hand a profound psychological insight into the practical side of education and, on the other, into the different qualities, characters and temperaments of the children, will always be finding something new for himself and for the whole College of Teachers."

(Steiner 1923. *A Modern Art of Education*. Accessed November 2024. <http://www.bobnancy.com>, organizing menu, 1997)

Steiner shared that these individual insights were then to be shared within 'das Lehrerkollegium', the full faculty. The intention was to create a dynamic, living educational organism where each member contributed to the growth of the whole.

"All the experience and knowledge acquired from the teaching should be "put into a pool" at these meetings. In this way the full faculty in spirit and soul becomes a whole where each member knows what the other is doing, what experience has taught him and what progress he has made as the result of his work with the children in the classroom (Steiner 1923. *A Modern Art of Education*. Accessed 2024. <http://www.bobnancy.com>, organizing menu, 1997)."

"I have said that a school ought to be an organism in which each single feature is an integral part of the whole. The threads of the different activities which must be carried on in order that the whole organism of the Waldorf School may live, are drawn together in the very frequent teachers' meetings. . . Every practical experience gained by the teacher in school becomes, in turn, part of his own education (Steiner 2023. *A Modern Art of Education*, 1972 Rudolf Steiner Press edition, pp. 207 - 208)."

Coming together as faculty and working in this manner was meant to mitigate the risk of teachers becoming stale or disconnected from their inner vitality, ensuring their continued growth and connection to the educational mission, to help each teacher to maintain “freshness and vitality,” and to retain “a youthful freshness of soul and spirit.”

“The full faculty becomes, in effect, a central organ whence the whole life-blood of the practical teaching flows and helps the teacher to maintain his freshness and vitality.”

“Probably the best effect of all is that these meetings enable the teachers to maintain their inner vitality instead of actually growing old in soul and spirit. It must be the teacher's constant aim to maintain a youthful freshness of soul and spirit, but this can only be done if true life-blood flows to a central organ, just as human blood flows to the heart, and out of it again. That is concentrated as a system of soul-spiritual forces in the life that is striven for in the teachers' meetings at the Waldorf School.”

(Steiner 2023, *Modern Art of Education*. Accessed November 2024. <http://www.bobnancy.com>, organizing menu, 1997)

Steiner proposed that regular meetings of the full faculty would function as a “High School” or “permanent training academy,” where teachers could continuously rejuvenate their educational approach. Steiner used the word Hochschule (for example Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft) as an indication for university level education. In German Hochschule meant a university-like entity. He wanted the meetings of the teachers to embody this same, functioning like an academy or college (Weichert and Goebel 2025).

“In the course of the year, I myself am present at the majority of these meetings. They are not held merely for the purpose, should we say, of preparing school reports, conferring about administrative details of the punishments which are to be meted out to the children when they have broken rules and the like. These meetings are really the living “High School” for the full faculty - a permanent training academy, as it were.”

(Steiner 2023, *Modern Art of Education*. Accessed November, 2024. <http://www.bobnancy.com>, organizing menu, 1997)

According to Bob Lathe and Nancy Parsons Whittaker (1997), the translation of terms such as “College of Teachers” and “High School” in *Rudolf Steiner Speaks to the British: Lectures and Addresses in England and Wales*, may be flawed. They point out that Ute Taylor-Weaver, former teacher in Stuttgart and past German teacher at Highland Hall Waldorf School, clarifies that “College of Teachers” or *das Lehrerkollegium* refers to all the teachers at a Waldorf school, rather than a select group. Additionally, the term “Living High School” is a translation of *Lebendige Hochschule* in the German edition. *Hochschule*, however, does not refer to a “High School” (*Oberschule*), but rather to a university, a place of study and research (Whittaker and Lathe 1997).

Genesis of an Inner Circle of Faculty and College of Teachers

Betty Staley, in the introduction of “Between Form and Freedom: A Practical Guide to the Teenage Years” shares the following: “The faculty meetings from July 1920 on appear to be inner faculty meetings. They discussed personnel issues and made decisions relating to the daily life of the school. In other schools these decisions would have been made by a principal. Sometimes Steiner came to the meetings with a proposal, but the teachers modified it or rejected it. Steiner was able to be flexible because he was clear that the faculty had to make the decisions they would live by. When the faculty had difficulty coming to a decision, Steiner used secret ballot and parliamentary procedure. In principle the teachers had complete freedom in how they taught, but not in things connected with administration of the school (Staley 1988, introduction)”

In exploring the idea of an inner circle of faculty with Christof Weichert, former leader of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland and Nana Goebel, historian and author, the following perspective was shared: In a meeting of July 30, 1920, challenges arose in the faculty related to the quality of an individual's work and interested anthroposophists, who were not faculty members, began to attend meetings. This prompted Rudolf Steiner to suggest having an inner circle of teachers (and possibly staff), and an outer circle of others interested in attending meetings, but this form was not established during his lifetime (Weichert and Goebel 2025).

School Management Team

By 1923 the first Waldorf school had grown to 400 children and students. The management of the school was in the hands of Karl Stockmeyer, who was also teaching. In order to meet the needs of a growing school, Steiner began to develop, out of the full faculty, a management team, consisting of three teachers and Karl Stockmeyer. That process started on January 23, 1923 with a nomination process. Mistrust ensued and selection became difficult. Nonetheless, a management team was eventually selected with a very limited mandate (GA 300b, pages, edition 2019, Dornach, pp 346-350). The first new leader of this "Verwaltungsrat", was teacher Paul Baumann, but due to challenges arising between teachers, he left his job shortly thereafter (GA300b. 2023. Konferenz nr. 60).

Eventually, a second body within the full faculty was formed. This body consisted of core teachers, who were most involved, most active, most responsible and most known. After Steiner's death, this management team expanded in size and scope, taking on more administrative tasks such as overseeing hiring and firing, and caring for the anthroposophical identity of the school. This is the genesis of the College of Teachers (Weichert 2025).

There was not, in Steiner's time, a separate group of teachers, called the College of Teachers or "*Internekonferenz*." As such, you will not find the College, as we refer to it today, mentioned in the primary literature. The College of Teachers was established slowly, having its fullest form after World War II. Today most but not all schools on the European Continent have abandoned this form (Weichert 2025).

In the English-speaking world, the College of Teachers, is often a smaller body within the greater faculty which takes responsibility for the school's adherence to Waldorf principles and the anthroposophical image of the human being on which they are based. Many are also tasked with decision making and pedagogical administration.

ESSENTIAL POINTS

At the founding of the Waldorf school in Stuttgart, and for several years following, the full faculty, with leadership from Rudolf Steiner and Emil Molt were the guiding force behind the school. Their primary role was to sustain the soul-spiritual and pedagogical vitality of both the school and its teachers.

Although leadership structures evolved during Steiner's lifetime in response to emerging needs, the formation of the College of Teachers occurred only after his death. This development was prompted by increased enrollment and a growing faculty, which called for a new administrative model and a core group to support the school's evolving needs. It is difficult to ascertain from the text exactly what was being led and managed, as documents do not indicate or clarify pedagogical leadership versus business management.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- There was an implicit understanding that most of the teachers at the first school in Stuttgart had a connection to anthroposophy—a shared framework of understanding. How do schools, in the present day, retain a connection to anthroposophy, while at the time cultivate a free cultural space and sense of belonging, avoiding the dynamic of those that know and those that don't?

- When designing faculty meetings, schools might consider how best to achieve an inspired adult, inquiry-based, learning community, by incorporating opportunities that promote continuous pedagogical relevance, inspiration, research, and learning.
- The concept of regular, soul-nourishing meetings of the faculty may be an effective antidote to teacher burnout. In modern education, where many teachers face overwhelming administrative tasks, the idea of creating space for professional rejuvenation, collaboration, and spiritual reflection is particularly pertinent.
- The first Waldorf school's organizational form was changing and adapting based on needs and enrollment growth. What are the factors that are important to consider in contemporary, independent school settings that AWSNA member schools might consider when designing organizational structure?

SUMMARY FULL FACULTY AND COLLEGE OF TEACHERS

During Rudolf Steiner's time, the College of Teachers was not a separate leadership body. Full faculty meetings were a time for all teachers to come together to share practical experiences and learn from one another. Leadership forms adapted over time. The later intention behind the creation of the College of Teachers was central to maintaining the spiritual and pedagogical vitality of the school, and the teachers within.

Q 5: WHAT DID RUDOLF STEINER SAY ABOUT STAYING RELEVANT AND CHANGING FOR THE TIMES?

As noted throughout this report, the financial model and organizational structure of the first Waldorf school evolved in response to changing needs, enrollment growth, and the capacities of those involved. This reflects an adaptive approach—one that invites each generation to interpret and shape governance in alignment with the evolving context of each school, the mission of Waldorf education, and society at large.

Reading the reports of the early teachers' meetings reveals the many challenges they faced in bringing to life the imaginative picture of the human being and child development introduced in the first teachers' course. They worked with these transformative ideas while teaching children who had lived through the devastation of war and were still grappling with ongoing economic hardship, social upheaval, and trauma.

An Interest in the World

The following quotes are taken from Steiner's opening address in Stuttgart on August 20, 1919, the evening before the first teachers' course began. Steiner was speaking to teachers and friends, including Emil and Bertha Molt. Steiner gave a broad overview of the task of the school as one born out of the spirit to address the social needs of the time, a time fraught with the desolation, chaos, and uncertainty, where the tendency to look at human beings materialistically, "as cogs in a wheel," was rife and gaining ground.

There were three primary questions posed in his address. The first was the challenge to reshape and revolutionize the educational system as a step to cultural renewal. In addressing this question, Steiner points to the importance of not being siloed, with enthusiasm only for a specific task, but of taking an interest in everything in the world, in humankind, and a devotion to meeting the tremendous needs of the time.

"We must be conscious of the great tasks before us. We dare not simply be educators: we must be people of our culture in the highest sense of the word. We must have a living interest in everything happening today, otherwise we will be bad teachers for this school (Steiner 2019. The Foundations of Human Experience, Opening Address, para 13)."

“Through that interest in the world we must obtain the enthusiasm that we need for the school and for our tasks. Flexibility of spirit and devotion to our tasks are necessary. Only from that can we draw out what can be achieved today when we devote our interest to the great needs and tasks of the times, both of which are unimaginably large (Steiner 2019. The Foundations of Human Experience, Opening Address, para 13).”

Harmonizing Contradictory Forces in Our Times

The second question posed was in the context of bringing spiritual ideals into a setting that had a very different view of the task of education and the human being experiencing it. An understanding of the times in which they lived was essential if the impulse was to be given a chance to grow, deepen, and strengthen. Those involved in the school had to be able to make compromises, without losing sight of the original ideals.

“It is necessary that we make compromises, because we are not so far developed that we can accomplish a truly free deed.. we must bring two contradictory forces into harmony. On the one hand, we must know what our ideals are, and, on the other hand, we must have the flexibility to ‘conform’ to what lies far from our ideals (Steiner 2019, The Foundations of Human Experience, Opening Address, para 3/4).”

Avoiding the Propagation of a Specific Point of View

Thirdly, Steiner addressed the question of anthroposophy and anthroposophical dogma in the school. He was clear that the Waldorf school was not a school for promulgating Anthroposophy among the children and was adamant about this, restating it three times.

“The Waldorf School will not propagate a particular point of view by filling the children with anthroposophical dogma; anthroposophy is not the content of the instruction.” “What we want is a practical utilisation of anthroposophy. We want to transform what we can gain through anthroposophy into truly practical instruction (Steiner 2019. The Foundations of Human Experience, Opening Address, para 10).”

Teaching Must Never Be Pedantic

At the end of the First Teacher’s Course, August 1919, Lecture 14, Steiner speaks to the need for teachers to never sour, and to transform what was once given to students into a new form, so as not to become “intellectually frozen.”

“It is a fact that when we present things one time filled with imagination and continue to repeat them, they become frozen in the intellect. We must continue to keep imagination alive, otherwise, what it produces becomes petrified (Steiner 2019, The Foundations of Human Experience, Lecture 14, para 13).”

“This, however, sheds some light on how teachers themselves must be. They must never, at any time in their lives, be bitter. There are two concepts that never fit together if life is to be fertile: pedantry and the vocation of teaching. If teaching and pedantry come together in life, the result will be an extremely unhealthy marriage, more so than anything else life could offer. I do not believe we need accept the absurdity that there has ever been a union of pedantry and the vocation of teaching (Steiner 2019. The Foundations of Human Experience, Lecture 14, para 14).”

ESSENTIAL POINTS

Rudolf Steiner emphasized that educational methods must arise from a life imbued with spirit, continually reimagined to adapt to evolving realities and inspirations. He acknowledged the necessity of compromises, aiming to harmonize seemingly contradictory forces. For teachers to be effective, Steiner stressed the importance of maintaining enthusiasm and a deep interest in the world around them, as only then could they truly meet the needs of students in contemporary society. While the Waldorf school was not intended to promulgate Anthroposophy, Steiner saw Anthroposophy as a source of inspiration for both instruction and the practical aspects of teaching.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Schools might consider how they hold faculty to the ideal of being students of culture, taking part in ongoing self-education and practical experiences.
- Teachers must stay attuned to the world outside their classroom while managing rising expectations within it. Continual learning, study, and professional development opportunities can support this balance.
- Schools can offer training and reflection spaces, encouraging teachers to explore new methodologies and engage with contemporary cultural issues.
- Schools can encourage both spiritual study (based on what each is conceiving at the current time), keeping anthroposophy alive to inform practice, and participation in societal issues to help teachers maintain a well-rounded engagement with the world.

SUMMARY CHANGING FOR THE TIMES

Rudolf Steiner stressed that educational methods must be freshly imagined over time to adapt to current realities. He emphasized that for teachers to be effective, they must retain an enthusiasm and interest in the world around them; only in doing so would they be able to meet the students of the current society.

Q6: HOW WAS CONSENSUS DERIVED AS A MODEL FOR DECISION-MAKING, AND HOW WAS IT MEANT TO BE APPLIED IN SCHOOLS?

Consensus is often viewed as a central approach in Waldorf education, perceived as the default method for decision-making. This process, however, has sometimes been criticized for slowing decision-making. The widespread belief that consensus is rooted in Waldorf education is a misconception.

Consensus in North America in the Late 20th Century

Consensus decision-making in Waldorf schools was not derived from Rudolf Steiner’s direct teachings. Instead, it evolved as a practice adopted in the 1960s, influenced by the social movements of the time. This method has roots in the Friends (Quaker) model of consensus, which places emphasis on spiritual engagement and deep listening. The practice spread beyond the United States to Europe where it was later incorporated into Waldorf settings (AWSNA Consensus MOU, accessed 2024).

The Establishment of Consensus in AWSNA

In the 1990s, the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America consulted with Caroline Estes from the Alpha Farm Quaker community and her colleague Lysbeth Borie, to aid in establishing a process to improve the effectiveness of decision making within the association delegates circle. This model of consensus, unique to AWSNA, was fully implemented in January 2001 as the primary vehicle for association decision-making, and remains so today (June 2025) (Stokes, Connie. 2025).”

In many cases, the adoption of consensus decision making by schools has been expanded to a belief that many and all decisions need to be made by consensus. Furthermore, the consensus decision model adopted by AWSNA requires training in facilitation, an understanding of the consensus process, and substantial preparation, much of which has gotten lost over time in school settings.

Today, AWSNA’s consensus decision making process takes inspiration from Herbert Hahn’s recollection of what was spoken by Rudolf Steiner to the first College of Teachers (full faculty) in Stuttgart, often referred to as “The College Imagination” (AWSNA Consensus MOU, accessed 2024). However, this spiritual imagination was not intended to be applied literally to the practical decision-making realm, but to guide educators in their collective work.

ESSENTIAL POINTS

Consensus decision-making is a practice adopted by AWSNA to help support effective decision making by the association delegates circle. Consensus decision-making, in various forms and effectiveness, has been adopted by

many Waldorf schools. Consensus is not derived specifically from Waldorf education or Rudolf Steiner's teachings. When appropriate, Steiner's concept of "The College Imagination" may serve as a source of inspiration for collective decision-making processes.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Schools and organizations may benefit from evaluating where consensus, if utilized, is most effective, aiming to strike a balance between democratic input and practical, timely decision-making.
- Schools that do utilize consensus might consider training in consensus decision-making.
- The underlying (practice) of consensus in the Waldorf movement is that no one person holds all of the wisdom. Instead, the collective effort and spiritual engagement of the group support the path forward. This approach emphasizes respect for the contributions of all members. What is perhaps more important than the decision-making process itself is holding these ideals in mind.

SUMMARY CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

Consensus, as a decision-making model, was adopted by AWSNA to help support effective decision making by the association delegates circle. It is a practice adopted, in varied forms, by many Waldorf schools, but is not derived specifically from Waldorf education or Rudolf Steiner.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research report seeks to dispel confusion related to the application of anthroposophy in school governance with a specific focus on the following themes: The role of threefolding in school governance; the intent behind teacher-run or self-administered institutions, and the relationship to hierarchical governance; republican self-management in schools; the genesis of the College of Teachers; the importance of staying relevant; and the origins of consensus decision-making. In all cases the research team worked to analyze Steiner's indications from primary sources, aiming to avoid making speculative claims regarding his intentions.

The findings on all themes highlight the scarcity of direct statements made by Steiner pertaining to leadership and governance, the complexity of applying his principles in contemporary settings, and the importance of understanding historical context and assumptions of the time. As such, interpreting his views on leadership and governance often require nuanced analysis with a focus on principles over explicit prescriptions.

Adding to the complexity, Steiner's use of terminology, such as "republican," in the context of school administration, may not translate accurately from German to English and may differ from modern interpretations. Steiner employed these terms with specific meanings rooted in his context.

FOUNDATIONAL TENETS - SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL POINTS

Threefolding: Rudolf Steiner's aim was for Waldorf schools to further the threefold imagination of social life by retaining their cultural, spiritual impulse separate from any governmental or outside agency. Steiner's concept of the threefolding of economic, rights, and cultural spheres was not intended to serve as a structural governance model for schools.

Self-Administration: Rudolf Steiner's primary intent relative to independence and self-administration was to free schools from bureaucratic control, specifically from the state. While teachers, at all levels, and others engaged in

cultural life, were meant to be wholly involved in self-governance, as described by Steiner, the first school was hierarchical in nature, with Steiner himself managing it, and Molt acting as a de facto business manager.

Republican Self-management: Rudolf Steiner used the term "republican" in discussions relating to pedagogical meetings. In this case, the concept of "republican" was seen as promoting self-administration within a faculty for the purpose of ongoing teacher education and pedagogical administration. While some claims suggest Steiner advocated for "republican academies," there is a lack of concrete evidence supporting such assertions in the source material. It is important to avoid projecting contemporary ideals onto his teachings.

Full Faculty and College of Teachers: During Rudolf Steiner's time, the College of Teachers was not a separate leadership body. Full faculty meetings were a time for all teachers to come together to share practical experiences and learn from one another. Leadership forms adapted over time. The later intention behind the creation of the College of Teachers was central to maintaining the spiritual and pedagogical vitality of the school, and the teachers within.

Changing for the Times: Rudolf Steiner stressed that educational methods must be freshly imagined over time to adapt to current realities. He emphasized that for teachers to be effective, they must retain an enthusiasm and interest in the world around them; only in doing so would they be able to meet the students of the current society.

Consensus Decision Making: Consensus, as a decision-making model, was adopted by AWSNA to help support effective decision making by the association delegates' circle. It is a practice adopted, in varied forms, by many Waldorf schools, but is not derived specifically from Waldorf education or Rudolf Steiner.

GUIDING THOUGHTS

According to the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI)⁷, school leadership is second only to teaching among in-school influences on student success. Decades of research, the authors suggest, support the notion that those who seek to improve schools should focus not only on teaching but also on leadership (Leithwood et al 2004).

Although Steiner made very few direct statements about leadership, the Waldorf School Leadership Research and Design Team suggests that Waldorf schools may be enriched by considering anthroposophical principles, particularly through the integration of social dynamics, individual responsibility, and the concept of freedom within a threefold framework (thinking, feeling, and willing), while also incorporating more commonly held leadership best practices.

THE THREEFOLD FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICE

Anthroposophy emphasizes that spiritual development is deeply connected to social interaction and harmony. As such, conflicts and disagreements in social interactions must be resolved to help individuals to progress spiritually. Self-knowledge, within this framework, is meaningful only in relation to others. To truly understand oneself, one should seek to understand their interactions within a social context. Freedom, then, is not an absolute state but is accompanied by responsibility—especially in social settings, where individuals remain conscious of their influence on others.

⁷ CAREI is an educational research center at the University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development

This threefold framework, versus the threefold organism, may be applied to organizational dynamics within schools. There's a recognition that while this principle is often discussed at an individual level, it is less commonly applied at an organizational or systemic level. There's optimism that by reframing governance and organizational practices through this lens, schools may better navigate complex dynamics and relationships and be more effective at making decisions and taking action.

The elements of thinking, feeling, and willing, as proposed by the research team:

- **Thinking (Learning Community):** Schools are encouraged to build active learning communities, which draw upon self-knowledge and group-knowledge, reflective thinking, practical world experiences, and engagement with and knowledge of the culture in which they currently live.
- **Feeling (Building Relationships):** Leadership within Waldorf schools must focus on creating strong, empathetic relationships, both within the staff and the broader community, helping to ensure that individuals feel valued and understood.
- **Willing (Taking Action):** In addition to reflection and relationship-building, schools require decisive action. By using the threefold framework, schools, through effective leadership and governance, can make informed decisions that respect the balance of freedom and responsibility within the school.

Within the threefold framework, it is important to understand the inner condition or consciousness of individuals in social interactions. The development of mutual agreements or understandings in social interactions helps to create a shared foundation for action.

KEY IDEAS

Consider New Models for Teaching and Leading: The association-wide teacher and leader shortage continues to be a real and growing threat. Generational differences in attitudes towards participation in governance structures exist. Considering new models for teaching and leading is paramount to the continuance of Waldorf schools.

Adopt an Organic Governance Mindset: Governance and administration in Waldorf schools should not be prescriptive, but be viewed as dynamic, evolving organisms. Just as schools grow and develop, their governance structures must adapt to changing needs, societal contexts, and stages of the school's development. Each school's governance will naturally differ based on factors such as its founding principles, cultural setting, and level of maturity.

Inspire Collaborative Work Forms: Engaging in dialogue and working in a spirit of collaboration among stakeholders may help to foster alignment. Recognizing and respecting the diverse perspectives within the school community can lead to more inclusive and effective decisions.

Consider Principles vs. Prescription: Emphasizing principles over prescription allows for flexibility and adaptation in governance structures, acknowledging the evolving needs and contexts of schools. While Steiner provided foundational principles, the application and interpretation may vary based on specific circumstances.

Commit to Continuous Learning: Effective governance requires continuous learning and openness to diverse perspectives, both within and outside the Waldorf community. Regular reflection, learning from experience, and adapting to new challenges are essential to ensure governance structures remain relevant, responsive, and effective as schools grow and evolve.

Look to Contemporary Leadership-Related Resources: Drawing insights from successful practices beyond the traditional Steiner framework can enrich governance discussions and decision-making processes. Contemporary, non-Waldorf perspectives on organizational management, economics, leadership and governance may help schools move from potentially rigid perspectives to a more interconnected and relational understanding of social organization, dynamics, and effective practices.

Understand the Influence of Culture Over Structure: Successful school leadership, regardless of structure, is only possible when positive school cultures exist. How leadership is practiced greatly influences culture. Adopting a "head of school" model, for example, represents a departure from what Waldorf schools have relied on for decades, yet may best serve a school for pragmatic reasons. This model should not automatically be dismissed, as it can be successful with the right people and culture in place.

Lead with an Equity Lens:

Equity in leadership requires actively examining how power, privilege, and bias shape participation and decision-making. Schools should work to foster inclusive practices that elevate underrepresented voices, ensure equitable access to leadership roles, and address structural barriers.

Support Leaders and Plan for Succession: There is a need to support current leaders and develop best practices relative to succession planning. This involves ongoing professional development.

Balance Autonomy with Accountability: The principle of teacher autonomy in Waldorf schools remains crucial for ensuring responsiveness to student needs, innovation within education, and an independent spiritual connection to their work. Forums that allow for the balance of autonomy and accountability improve work culture and education.

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By 1923 the first Waldorf school had grown to 400 children and students. The management of the school was in the hands of Karl Stockmeyer, who was also teaching. In order to meet the needs of a growing school, Steiner began to develop, out of the full faculty, a management team, consisting out of three teachers and Karl Stockmeyer. That process started on January 23, 1923 with a nomination process. Mistrust ensued and selection became difficult. Nonetheless, a management team was eventually selected with a very limited mandate