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Steiner Language Education in the Middle Grades

Nozomu Adachi

**Graduate School of Education,
Hiroshima University**

Waldorf Schools, well known all over the world, have a very efficient 12-year curriculum. Their main educational principles in foreign language education are developmental theory, artistic education, authority, and moral education. Writing, reading and grammar are taught starting from the 4th grade, always taking the above four principles into consideration. Writing is started with copying a text, which has been practiced in the lower grades. Writing is introduced before reading because writing is less intellectual than reading. In reading classes the teacher as a natural authority tries to teach morality emotionally through describing

images of the heroes or heroines in literary works. In grammar lessons, the teacher allows students to find the grammatical rules and describe them in images. In Waldorf Schools, such artistic methods, which use images and rhythm based on the developmental theory, allow the students to develop their selves and intellects in strong and healthy ways.

世界的に有名なシュタイナー学校は極めて効率的なカリキュラムを有している。その外国語教育における主要な教育原理は、発達理論、芸術的教育、権威者、道徳教育である。書くこと、読むことそして文法は4学年で導入されるが、上記の原則が常に考慮される。書くことは低学年で練習されたテキストを写すことから始められる。書くことは読むことよりも先に始められるが、それは書くことよりも読むことの方が知的な活動であるからである。読む授業において、教師は自然な権威として、文学作品中における主人公の諸イメージを描くことにより道徳を感情的に伝える。文法の授業では、教師は生徒に規則を発見させ、イメージ的にそれを表現せよとする。発達段階に基づいて、リズムやイメージを用いるシュタイナー学校における芸術的授業方法によって生徒の自我や知性は力強く健全に育まれる。

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) founded the Waldorf Schools in 1919. They are well known for the Waldorf approach to education, being based on 12 grades like most other school systems in developed countries (i.e., equivalent also to the total length of Japanese primary, junior high and senior high schools). Waldorf education has been praised worldwide and the total number of Waldorf Schools in the year 2000 amounted to 877 in 57 countries. Waldorf education is based on Rudolf Steiner's deep insights into human beings and lifetime human development.

It considers a seven-year life cycle (Steiner, 1987) and is a pioneer of developmental psychology. It is, however, more than a theory, since it has been put into practice in Waldorf Schools for over 80 years now. Waldorf education has attracted attention as a savior from school desolation in Europe (Hirose, 2002, p. v), so there are hopes that the Waldorf School system will positively affect Japan's school system context, which is ailing from school collapse, school-phobic pupils and the decline in pupils' scholastic abilities.

Previous research by other scholars was conducted mainly in Germany and Switzerland (Dahl, 1999; Denjean, 1995, 2000; Jaffke, 1994; Templeton, 1997). Nonetheless, theoretical studies remain insufficient in the research for foreign language education in Waldorf Schools for the middle grades (grades 4- 8). In Japan, only one research paper (Adachi, 2003) on Waldorf English education exists, which focuses on the lower grades (grades 1- 3). This paper concentrates mainly on the area that has not been sufficiently explained, that is, the middle grades (grades 4-8) and the learning of writing, reading, and grammar in those grades as well as focuses on four main points about Waldorf education: developmental theory, artistic education, authority, and moral education. These points are very basic yet significant principles in Waldorf education, which have not been clarified enough in the preceding studies (Dahl, 1999; Templeton, 1997).

Developmental theory

According to Steiner, children in the first 7 years are imitators and their basic learning principle is imitation. This imitative power of children remains until children become 9 years old (Steiner, 1987). Children between 7 and 14 years old have a strong desire for pictures and images (Steiner, 1919a/1973, 1919b/1990, 1919c/1969). However, they also need a strong

authority they can respect. They learn many things, including moral thinking through the words and deeds of such an authority. Only once they become 9 or 10 years old, do they gain the ability to differentiate themselves from the outside world. Self-consciousness is deepened and strengthened in this developmental period. In addition their comprehension also becomes significantly greater. At the age of 12, intellectual concepts can be introduced to the children. When they become 14 or 15 years old, they begin to disobey authority, and independent thinking and the ability to judge appear (Steiner, 1921a/1986). During this phase of development, teachers should allow children to express personal feelings and let them try to judge themselves. It is necessary to show them an ideal life and the beauty of the world.

Artistic education

One of the most outstanding characteristics of Waldorf education is its artistic principle of education. Between 7 and 14 years old, children develop a strong desire for art. What children do during this stage should be filled with pictures and images. Moreover, rhythm, tact, and melody should be of principal importance in their education, keeping in mind the fact that the images can only be conveyed from adults to children.

Authority

Children have a desire to learn from an authority they can respect. Children come into possession of concepts such as truth, beauty, and morality, through this authority and with the help of artistic images developed by the teachers. The need for an authority declines gradually from around the age of 12 onwards and it disappears more or less completely around the

age of 15. Considering this desire for authority, children should be directly taught by authority figures and media (for example, TV, computers, CD players, etc.) should be avoided.

Moral education

In Waldorf education the teaching of morality is implied in every subject. When an authority teaches something about the richness of the world or gives a lively image of a great historical person, children will accept the rich image of what is good, beautiful, or true, and they will acquire the ability to judge intellectually later.

Steiner's view on language

Steiner acknowledged the amazing power in language and he believed that one's ethnic character or worldview appears in one's language. Language is acquired not only through cognitive faculties but also through the whole body; non-verbal elements are believed to be particularly prominent in this context. In short, it is believed that gestures are changed into language and that to learn a foreign language means to learn the spirit of the people who speak that language.

Purpose of foreign language education

The purposes of foreign language education in Waldorf Schools are:

1. To teach various worldviews through language education
2. To deepen mutual understanding among peoples and, thus, promote social attitudes and peace
3. To develop communication ability in the foreign language

The following are the principles in foreign language education for grades 1-8 in Waldorf Schools:

1. Two foreign languages are taught (each foreign language is usually taught three times a week), starting from the 1st grade, because the earlier a child starts to study a foreign language, the easier he or she will acquire it and the better the pronunciation will become. The ability to learn a foreign language declines steadily after the age of 7 (Steiner, 1921b/1975).
2. Because the desire for art is very strong in the lower grades, songs, pictures, and storytelling are often used to teach foreign languages. Poems are frequently used, because they are rich in rhythm.
3. Translation is basically avoided in the lower grades. The foreign language is used most of the time and the sense for the foreign language is thereby developed.
4. Media, like computers, CD players, and videos are avoided, because language is a living process between real persons.
5. Normally textbooks are not used. Instead students make their own textbook.

From the 1st grade to the 3rd grade, all foreign languages are taught through imitation. Therefore children learn English etc. by listening and speaking. As for activities, singing, games, recitation, storytelling, "Reigen" (i.e., singing and dancing in circles), plays, everyday conversation, and so on, are conducted. These activities convey sounds and rhythms of the English language. The main grammatical points practiced during the lower grades for three years are personal and demonstrative pronouns, the simple present tense, the present progressive tense, the past tense, and singular and plural nouns.

Foreign language education in the middle grades

Steiner's view on human life and development has been summarized in the introduction. The following are practical ways of applying this theory (Dahl, 1999; Denjean, 1995, 2000; Jaffke, 1994; Templeton, 1997).

Introducing writing in the fourth grade

Writing is usually introduced at the beginning of the 4th grade before reading. Reading is a more intellectual activity than writing. At the age of nine or ten, children become conscious enough to study foreign letters and have the strong desire to do so at that time. Through writing they can approach the foreign language's grammar. They want to write foreign words and letters beautifully in their booklets using the memory of what they have already studied (in the lower grades). Because they know the texts very well, the task of copying the texts is easy and fun. Illustrations are also added to satisfy their desire for art. Parts of the text are then changed and copied again for stimulation. In this instance, some words are changed or omitted. This activity becomes exciting because students must challenge their own memory. Then, the alphabet is studied through singing a song or reading rhythmically or simple dictation of letters. Various texts are copied which introduce some changes. Next, new texts, which children do not yet know, are copied. Dictation is also conducted for the new texts. Finally, printed books are introduced. Therefore, writing is based on the children's former experience of speaking and listening.

Introducing reading in the fourth grade

Reading is based on listening, speaking, and writing. Reading is

a great way of immersing oneself in a foreign culture. Not only does reading expand vocabulary, it gives the reader joy, widens his or her worldview and also enables him or her to learn from history. An original literary work is usually used as a reading text. A desirable text is one that was already studied in the lower grades. Through reading, it is also expected that children will gain an understanding of what is good and what is bad. They will sometimes encounter the theme in which intellect beats violence or the strong helps the weak. Such experiences should positively affect students' moral development.

In Waldorf education, oral introduction before reading is very important. Oral introduction makes it very easy for students to understand the text. To read what was told is a basic principle in Waldorf language education. First of all, the content of the text is explained orally. Then, chorus reading is practiced, through which children can quickly grasp proper intonation. Chorus reading can satisfy the children's desire for music. Students are also asked to read alone. After reading aloud, questions are asked, and conversation may also follow. After the 4th grade, students are expected to read fluently with proper rhythm, and they are also expected to understand the general idea of the text.

As the students grow older, the questions directed to students after reading the text become more complicated. Students are sometimes supposed to read between the lines, and they also face questions about themselves. From the 6th grade, reasons for certain encountered relationships are sometimes demanded, because at approximately the age of 12 children come to understand causal relationships. Of course, vocabulary learning is also conducted at school. In the upper grades students mainly read contemporary literary works. The emphasis then is on appreciating the text rather than on understanding the text

correctly. Through discussion they share their impressions of the text. The teacher and students, together, as it were, communicate with the author and learn his or her lifestyle or ideal.

Introducing grammar in the fourth grade

From the 4th grade, children can differentiate themselves from the outside world and become self-conscious. The purpose of grammar instruction in Waldorf Schools is to strengthen this newly awakened self-consciousness. Children in the 4th grade can already use a lot of grammatical forms, which they learned in the lower grades. They should now also become conscious of the corresponding grammatical rules. Connected with the knowledge of the language structure, speaking ability is promoted, and grammar knowledge also serves to stabilize the children. Therefore it is very important to introduce grammar in the 4th grade.

The first part of the grammar learning process involves collecting example sentences. After some of the examples are written on the blackboard, the children try to find the rule. The teacher tries to let students express the rule in their own words. In the next class, the rule is recalled from memory and then reviewed. Then children make their own examples and they acquire or confirm the rule through exercises. Writing tasks are included in the exercises. At the end of the exercises, the children write only the rule in their notebook. This notebook becomes their textbook in the middle grades. As children cannot yet understand concepts, the rule is formulated pictorially. For example, an adjective is described as “a feeling word.” The grammar exercises are reviewed again and again, and the way a rule is formulated also becomes more and more abstract each time a certain rule is reformulated. From the 8th grade on, grammatical terms can be used. Syntax is started after the 6th grade because it often contains causal relationships. Students

develop their own ideas when they strive to find rules and they learn to solve problems on their own. This process strengthens self-consciousness and also helps to develop their self.

In the 9th grade the grammar content, which has been learned so far, is reviewed systematically, and stylistic grammar begins. With stylistic grammar, individual styles are examined. Now students arrive at the stage where they are in a way free from grammatical rules, and they can examine various styles of writing. This process corresponds to the developmental stage when students are gradually separated from their authority, develop their own self-consciousness and finally judge themselves in their own style.

Conclusion

Based on Steiner’s developmental theory, foreign language education in Waldorf Schools can be called moral and artistic education. The treasure from the lower grades (i.e., listening, speaking, and vocabulary) is fully utilized so that writing, reading and grammar can be introduced very smoothly in the middle grades. Respectable teachers nurture students’ intellect through the use of music, rhythm, and images, until the students reach puberty. Through this process, the teacher helps the students to develop their morality so that they can judge themselves properly in later life.

Two ideas for future studies can be suggested:

1. A comparison of Waldorf English education with Japanese English education.
2. An examination of how elements in Waldorf English education can be utilized in the Japanese context.

One of the most significant questions is whether English writing, reading, and grammar, should be started in the 4th grade in Japanese schools as it is in Waldorf Schools. However, in order to do that, it is necessary that children first become well acquainted with basic conversation in English.

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