

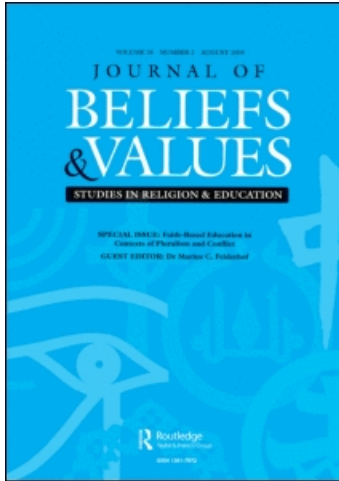
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### A state-independent education for citizenship? Comparing beliefs and values related to civic and moral issues among students in Swedish mainstream and Steiner Waldorf schools

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## **A state-independent education for citizenship? Comparing beliefs and values related to civic and moral issues among students in Swedish mainstream and Steiner Waldorf schools**

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In the wake of globalisation, multiculturalism, and the ‘marketisation’ of schools the education-for-citizenship question in relation to state and independent schools seems increasingly relevant. This paper is based on a comparison of beliefs and values related to civic and moral issues among students in Swedish mainstream and Steiner Waldorf schools. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative analyses of survey data from a strategic sampling of schools. The student sample was a cohort of students aged 15–16 and 18–19 years. In the survey students were confronted with problems to which there were no given or correct answers. Responses were analysed inductively and thematically. The most striking result of the comparisons concerned the differences between the younger and the older students in their attitudes to social and moral questions. In mainstream schools, the interest and engagement in social and moral questions were approximately the same in both age groups, but in Steiner Waldorf schools the older students more frequently expressed interest and engagement in social and moral questions. The Steiner Waldorf students also more frequently showed positive attitudes already in grade 9. This result raises the question whether the pedagogical approach of Steiner Waldorf schools has more positive effects on moral and civic engagement.

**Keywords:** Steiner Waldorf education; civic and moral education; state and independent schools

### **Introduction**

Education for citizenship has become an area of increasing interest for educational researchers and policy-makers during latter decades. The issues inherent in globalisation and multiculturalism, as well as perceived threats towards democracy and its values, evoke many questions that need to be clarified. Some researchers now argue for the inclusion of cosmopolitan aspects in the concept of citizenship education (Banks 2008; Appiah 2008; Nussbaum 1998). Voices claiming that the secondary and tertiary levels of education need a greater emphasis on democratic education, focusing on values such as conscience, tolerance, civility, and social responsibility, have also been raised (Mayhew and King 2008).

In parallel to the growth of such educational concerns, an intense ‘marketisation’ of education and schools has taken place in Europe and other parts of the world (cf. Ball 1993). In 1990, Sweden introduced new policies for the control of the compulsory school system, which replaced the earlier more centralised rule and detailed

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control system (Roth 2003). The reform paved the way for a new (for Sweden at least) freedom of choice on the part of parents and their children, and for the growth of the diversity of publicly funded independent schools. However, it is difficult to find an appropriate terminology for the difference between state or municipal schools, and 'independent' schools in Sweden; since the latter are still within the jurisdiction of the state and the municipality. The only difference is that independent schools do not have the municipality as mandator. At present in Sweden there are ethnic, linguistic and religious independent schools, and schools with more theoretical educational grounds such as Montessori and Steiner Waldorf. There are also independent schools with mathematics, art, music, or sports as their special 'profile'. Around 50,000 students attend independent schools, which is only about 5% of the total number.

The Swedish government still has the power to specify national objectives and formulate the guidelines for all compulsory schooling. Objectives are evaluated on a regular, nationwide basis. In agreement with recent EU educational policy (see for instance Hoskins 2006), part of the national objectives is the bringing up of active and democratic citizens.

In the wake of the above mentioned issues of globalisation, multiculturalism, and the 'marketisation' of schools, the question of education for citizenship in state-run, as compared to independent schools seems to become increasingly relevant for educational research. The study reported here was part of a more extensive evaluation of Steiner Waldorf schools in Sweden (Dahlin 2007). The purpose of the present study is to compare students in Swedish comprehensive and Steiner Waldorf schools regarding certain beliefs and values related to social and moral issues. The issues (further described below) were chosen for their relevance to citizenship education. They had been used already 1998, in a national evaluation of the civic-moral aspect of Social Studies in comprehensive schools (Dahlin, Kåräng, and Osbeck 1999). Thus, the present study intends to compare and evaluate the possible differences between Steiner Waldorf and mainstream schools regarding beliefs and values related to students' civic and moral stances.

Since Steiner Waldorf education is not very well known in educational research, the next section introduces the basic principles of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and pedagogy.

### **Basic principles of the Steiner Waldorf school curriculum**

The first Steiner Waldorf school started in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany. It was a 'whole child' educational impulse based on the ideas of the Austrian philosopher and educator Rudolf Steiner. It was Emil Molt, director of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory, who asked Rudolf Steiner to help with the creation of a school for the children of his employees. This was the beginning of the worldwide Steiner Waldorf school movement, at present based on about a thousand schools in all parts of the world. Even though Steiner Waldorf schools are sometimes assumed to be Euro-centric because of their European origin, the curriculum seems to have a universal appeal. It appears to be able to adapt to cultures as diverse as the *favelas* of Brazil; the black shantytowns of South Africa; Muslim Egypt and Hebrew Israel; India; China; Japan and the Philippines.

Steiner Waldorf education is based on a spiritual understanding of human nature and the development from infancy to adulthood (and beyond). The different

developmental stages are described in detail on basically three levels: body, soul, and spirit (Rawson and Richter 2000). The characterisation of the cognitive psychological development has certain parallels with that of Piaget (Ginsburg 1982). One major similarity is the view that the cognitive life of young children predominantly have a sense-perceptual and feeling or imaginative character and that they are not really able to do abstract, formal intellectual work before puberty. Another similarity is that each developmental level is seen as equally important and must be met with the appropriate educational method and environment. Each stage contributes something essential to the development of the individuality and unless treated according to its needs the child's development may be more or less lopsided.

Children are considered to be ready for formal schooling in their seventh year. In the early grades there is often one class teacher that teaches all subjects and accompanies the class from the first grade through eighth grade. Spending so many years together with one teacher and (more or less) the same classmates gives the opportunity for intimate relations to grow between the children themselves and between each child and the teacher. However, the particular needs of an individual child are as far as possible not addressed directly through turning to him or her alone, but indirectly through working with the whole class. (This is a major difference from for instance the Montessori approach.) This is part of the striving for a balance between the individual and the group: a feeling of community and solidarity should permeate the whole class. At the same time each and every child should be appreciated for his/her particular gifts and abilities. This is an important social and moral aspect of Steiner Waldorf pedagogy.

In the early grades all instruction turns towards the feeling, will, and imagination of the child. The purely mental, cognitive, or intellectual aspects of learning are not particularly stressed. The idea is not to hurry the intellectual development in childhood, an approach supported also by some developmental psychologists, for instance Elkind (1981). All instruction is therefore presented artistically through storytelling, play, and imaginative pictures. The children are encouraged to express their knowledge in artistic ways, as a complement to their written work. Teaching is addressed to the 'head, heart and hand' (Easton 1997), but less to the head in the early years. The emphasis in the early grades on the use and development of imagination (cf. Nielsen 2006) contributes to the capacity to empathise with other people and other life forms; another social and moral aspect of the curriculum. Imagination is thought to be especially strengthened through listening to the teacher reading or, best of all, storytelling. Using audio-visual media rob the children of the opportunity to create their own inner pictures and hence counteract the development of imaginative life (cf. Healy 1998).

Children are not considered ready for independent thinking and judgment until the eighth grade (12–13 years). Abilities of exact observation, comparison, reflection, analysis, and synthesis are then cultivated. Subjects like mathematics, science, social studies, and humanities also become more important, but the arts and crafts continue alongside. In science, the biographies of influential researchers are often studied with an emphasis on their moral deeds and sufferings; contributing yet another social and moral aspect of the curriculum. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum is based on 12 years of schooling and children are encouraged to focus broadly across a wide range of subjects and interests in an integrative, interdisciplinary manner.

Although there are Steiner Waldorf teacher-training seminars in all countries where there are Steiner Waldorf schools, teachers in Steiner Waldorf schools

sometimes lack such training, especially in the higher grades where subject knowledge is of great importance. The Steiner Waldorf teacher education is to a large extent based on Steiner's transcribed pedagogical lectures. One part of these lectures contains basic ideas about human nature (a kind of philosophical or spiritual anthropology) and principles of human development from child to adult (Steiner 2004). Another part contains methodical-didactical recommendations and advice for the teaching of various subjects (Steiner 2000). A problem facing Steiner Waldorf schools in Sweden today is the increasing pressure of educational policies that require all teachers to have a state-accredited professional status, while simultaneously withdrawing economical and legal support for 'alternative', state-independent teacher training institutes (for a social philosophical critique of this situation, see Dahlin 2010).

### *Previous research on Steiner Waldorf education*

Investigating how far Steiner education is successful in what it aims to achieve is not an easy task, as pointed out by Woods, Ashley, and Woods (2005) in their national evaluation of Steiner Waldorf schools in the UK. Aims such as to encourage a balanced growth towards physical, behavioural, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual maturation and to contribute to the process whereby someone is able to express his or her 'spiritual core' may take many years to unfold in a person's life. Some of the research reviewed by Woods, Ashley, and Woods (2005) point however to some distinctive educational benefits of Steiner Waldorf schools. One study by Rivers and Soutter (1996) provided evidence supportive of the view that Steiner Waldorf education encourages ethical and social development. The results highlighted the integration of moral learning, the real life contextualisation of learning and the effectiveness of the school ethos, and teacher/pupil relationships. Another study by Payne, River-Bento, and Skillings (2002) indicated that Steiner Waldorf education had benefits both for academic development and social abilities (cf. Woods, Ashley, and Woods 2005, 31).

Gidley (1998) reports a study of particular interest here, focusing on visions of the future among upper secondary students in Steiner Waldorf schools in Australia. These students were as conscious as other young people about the grave future expectations concerning the environment, social justice, and world peace. In spite of this they demonstrated a strong activist will to create more positive futures. They saw the quality of humaneness as a major factor in the global challenges and considered human development, responsibility, and action as issues of central significance. About three-quarters of the 128 students gave clear pictures of how human beings must change for instance their abilities to relate to each other and to communicate, if a positive future is to be realised.

Another recent investigation worth mentioning is that of Mitchell and Gerwin (2007), who made a follow up study of former Steiner Waldorf students in North America. They found that many of these people saw their Steiner Waldorf schooling as important for their awareness of social issues, as well as their striving to live balanced lives in a hectic society.

### **Method**

In order to study Steiner Waldorf students' beliefs and values related to civic and moral issues a questionnaire was used that had already been devised for a sub-

project in The Swedish National Agency for Education's national evaluation in 1998. This sub-project dealt with the civic-moral aspect of teaching and learning in Social Studies. It used a so called responsive evaluation model that focused on students' own more or less creative solutions to some real life problems presented to them (see below). The idea of a responsive evaluation approach was introduced by Stake (1975) in order assess abilities in practical and aesthetic fields, in which there is generally a lack of one-and-only correct answers. The model focuses on creative, unforeseen solutions to specified problems. In this case, the intent was to examine how students:

- (1) *identified and explained* some current social and moral problems,
- (2) *suggested solutions* for these problems, and
- (3) *gave reasons* for their suggestions.

In the process of working out answers to such tasks, students' explicit or implicit beliefs and values would unavoidably come to expression. The three aspects described have some affinity with three of the four aspects of morality described by Mayhew and King (2008, 18):

- (1) moral *sensitivity*, i.e. to be aware of the moral dimension of situations,
- (2) moral *reasoning*, i.e. to determine which alternative line of action is morally justified,
- (3) moral *motivation*, i.e. to prioritise among moral values, and
- (4) moral *character*, i.e. to follow through on one's convictions.

To identify and explain a social problem have to do with moral sensitivity; to propose solutions have to do with moral reasoning, and to give reasons for the proposed solution is to prioritise among moral values. Only the fourth aspect, moral character, is not captured by the questions in the questionnaire. It is also the aspect notoriously difficult to 'measure'.

The questionnaire consisted of two main tasks that dealt with current social and moral problems of a dilemmatic character. Thus, the dilemmas presented were not of the imagined type, like those used by Colby and Kohlberg (1987) in studies of moral development, but *real events* reported in the daily press. There was a picture with each task that related to the problem. The pictures were deliberately ambiguous, so that the students were able to make their own interpretations of the real problem, and to pose their own questions around it.

The first task was related to the problem of hostility towards immigrants. The picture had been published in one of the Swedish evening papers, and showed a demonstration of Neo-Nazi youths in a small Swedish city, at which an elderly lady was physically attacking a demonstrating 'skinhead' by hitting him over the head with her umbrella. The caption under the picture said 'She hounded out the Neo-Nazis'. The intention of the task was to highlight two general moral problems: (a) the dilemma of democracy and (b) are some forms of violence justifiable?

The second task was connected to an issue that is of growing social relevance as the result of the development of biotechnology. The picture showed a foetus in the womb. The caption said:

A group of researchers at Huddinge Hospital outside Stockholm applied in spring 1997 for permission to do medical experiments on a living fetus in the womb. This would however only be performed on fetuses that were to be aborted.

This task was also intended to highlight two moral dilemmas: (a) where is the limit for experiment and research 'for the benefit of humanity' and (b) the advantages and risks of biotechnology.

These two tasks formed the main part of the questionnaire. According to King and Kitchener's (1994) view of the development of critical and reflective thinking, students should learn to handle and discuss 'ill-structured problems', i.e. problems that cannot be solved by the mechanical application of a general rule and about which 'reasonable people reasonably disagree'. It could be argued that it is a vital ingredient in the formation of democratic civic competence to learn to relate to such problems in a rational and open way, as well as with interest and engagement.

Besides these two problem-solving tasks the questionnaire contained a number of complementary questions with fixed answers on graded scales. The purpose of these questions were to gather data on how the students reacted to the two assessment tasks, as well as about ethical or moral issues, such as feelings of responsibility and how often moral, social, or political questions were discussed at home.

All in all, 325 Steiner Waldorf and 407 mainstream school students participated in the study. The sample of Steiner Waldorf schools came from different parts of Sweden, representing schools in large cities as well as in small towns. The sample of mainstream schools was of the same character. Further, the sample of mainstream upper secondary students was based on the structure of the different study programmes these students can choose. These programmes are either vocational or theoretical in character. The corresponding grades of the Steiner Waldorf schools have both theoretical and practical study contents. The sample as a whole was a cohort of pupils from grade 9 (15–16 years old; mainstream and Steiner Waldorf) and from the last grade of the Swedish three-year upper secondary school and grade 12 in the Steiner Waldorf schools (18–19 years old). This made it possible to make comparisons both across ages and across types of schools. Unfortunately, the absentee frequency was higher in the Steiner Waldorf schools, 23%, as compared to 11% in the mainstream schools. With respect to gender distribution there were no great differences between the two groups.

Data from the questionnaire were analysed both qualitatively and statistically. Responses to the two dilemmatic problems were subjected to an extensive qualitative analysis. This resulted in a number of different categories for each task. The reliability of the coding into categories was tested by a co-judge procedure with the help of two research assistants. The average percentage of agreement was 78%, with a variation between 69% and 92%. The percentage of answers in the various categories was analysed for statistically significant differences using the Chi-square test.

## Results

Students' *identification and explanation of the problem* in the first assessment task, dealing with the rise of Neo-Nazism, were categorised in the following way:

- *Opinions and emotions*: the problem is that people have different opinions or emotional reactions to things, for instance to immigrants or to those who express hostility towards immigrants.
- *Lack of knowledge*: the demonstrating skinheads reveal their lack of knowledge about Nazism and its history. If they really knew what happened during the Second World War they would not act as they do.
- *Psychological problems*: psychological factors lie behind the actions of the Neo-Nazis, for instance group pressure, fear of the unknown, lack of security and identity, bad influence during childhood etc.
- *Social problems*: social factors such as an increased reception of immigrants which the country cannot handle, unemployment, or times of economic recession.
- *Civil courage*: the event in the picture happens because one person (the old lady) has enough civil courage to dare to try to stop the demonstrating Neo-Nazis.
- *Hitler and/or Nazism*: the problem is simply explained by the existence of Hitler or of Nazism as an ideology.
- *Not categorised*: these answers did not fit in any of the previous categories and were rather vague; for instance that the Neo-Nazis are 'stupid' or 'flipped in their heads'.
- *Don't know/no answer*: those who explicitly said they did not know or who gave no answer at all.

The view that the event on the picture was caused by differences of opinion and emotions was the most common among both student groups. However, among Steiner Waldorf students the category *Civil courage* was the next most common one (23% in grade 12), whereas in the mainstream school it was *Social problems* (21% in grade 12). The differences between the two student groups regarding these two categories were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). For further details, see Table 1. (Since most students gave answers belonging to more than one category, column sums add up to more than 100%.)

Table 1. Identification of the problem in the first assessment task.

Category*	Grade 9			Grade 12		
	SW	M	Δ %	SW	M	Δ %
Opinions and/or emotions	82	81	1	79	72	7
Lack of knowledge	9	4	5	8	11	3
Psychological problem	12	11	1	22	14	8
Social problem	5	12	-7	8	21	-13**
Civil courage	11	5	6	23	8	15**
Hitler and/or Nazism	1	6	-5	0	4	-4
Not categorised	9	14	-5	9	11	-2
Don't know/no answer	6	5	1	13	6	7

\*Percent within each grade. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students; Δ % = percent difference. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Students' suggested solutions to the problem in this first assessment task were categorised in the following way:

- *Stricter laws, more police and/or harder punishments*: laws that forbid Nazi-demonstrations ought to be established; police forces should be increased in order to uphold such laws and/or Nazi-demonstrators should be imprisoned.
- *Spreading of information*: inform people in general and school students in particular about Nazism and the Holocaust.
- *Social solutions*: change social structures and policies, for instance cut down on immigration or create more effective actions for the integration of immigrants so that increased understanding between native Swedes and immigrants can develop.
- *Solidarity and civil courage*: the public ought to engage themselves more than they do; solidarity and civil courage ought to increase.
- *More love and care in social life*: answers in this category express intense emotional concerns about a perceived lack of love and care in social life.
- *Nothing can or needs to be done*: the reasons for this referred for instance to the freedom of speech or that human beings have always hated each other and nothing has so far been able to change that.
- *Unspecified*: it is clear that something ought to be done but nothing specific is suggested.
- *Don't know/no answer*.

The categories *Stricter laws etc.* and *Spreading of information* were the two most common in both student groups. In grade 9, however, a significantly smaller number of Steiner Waldorf students suggested such solutions (25% and 21% respectively,  $p < .01$  and  $p < .001$ ; see Table 2 below). In grade 12 the category *Spreading of information* was most common among both student groups. However, in this age group there were significantly more Steiner Waldorf students who suggested solutions referring to *Solidarity and civil courage*, and *More love and care in social life* ( $p < .001$ ). These categories were also more prevalent among Steiner Waldorf students in grade 9. Table 2 gives more specific details about the differences observed.

Table 2. Suggestions how to solve the problem identified in the first assessment task.

Category*	Grade 9			Grade 12		
	SW	M	$\Delta$ %	SW	M	$\Delta$ %
Stricter laws, more police and/or harder punishments	25	45	-20***	21	28	-7
Spreading of information	21	36	-15**	33	32	1
Social solutions	6	6	0	13	10	3
Solidarity and civil courage	11	3	8	12	2	10***
More love and care in social life	6	0	6	13	0	13***
Nothing can or needs to be done	2	6	-4	3	8	-5
Unspecified	14	3	11***	1	2	-1
Don't know/no answer	21	14	7	24	18	6

\*Percent within each grade. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students;  $\Delta$  % = percent difference. \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Since Nazism and racism are topical social phenomena it is interesting to see to what extent students disassociated themselves from these ideologies. In fact, the majority of students in both school forms disassociated themselves from Nazism and racism. However, the number of students that suggested anti-Nazi and anti-racist solutions, i.e. solutions that aimed to counteract or stop Nazism/racism, were larger among Steiner Waldorf students; 16% more in grade 9 and 23% more in grade 12 ( $p < .01$ ).

Students' identifications of the problem in the second assessment task were categorised in the following way:

- *Right or not right*: the problem is moral, that is, it is a question of whether it is right to such experiments on living beings, or not.
- *Hurts and suffering*: that the intra-uterine experiments could hurt the mother or cause suffering for her and/or the embryo.
- *Research goes too far*: scientific medical research goes too far in its strivings for bio-technical development. Some students even thought the researchers must be idiots to even come up with the idea for such experiments.
- *No problem*: it is natural to do these experiments, at least as long as they are not done against the will of the mother or the parents. Many answers in this category said that since the embryo was going to be aborted it did not matter what one did to it.
- *Not categorised*: answers that did not fit into any of the above.
- *Don't know/no answer*.

In both student groups and in both age groups, the moral perspective dominated, i.e. the problem was most commonly seen as a principally moral problem (Table 3). However, the category *Hurts and suffering* were more common among Steiner Waldorf students, being the second most common answer in both age groups. In grade 12, answers saying that 'research goes too far' were also significantly more common among Steiner Waldorf students ( $p < .001$ ), indicating a more critical stance to this kind of medical research.

The following categories describe the solutions students suggested concerning intra-uterine experiments:

- *Forbid the experiment and/or make laws stricter*: intra-uterine experiments should be forbidden by law or stronger juridical restrictions should be established.
- *Ask permission from the mother*: only the mother (or both parents) should have the right to decide whether experiments could be carried out.
- *Find alternative experiments*: researchers should find alternative ways to find answers to their questions.
- *Get more facts*: one must find out more about for instance whether embryos feel pain or what it actually is that the researchers hope to find out.
- *Debate and demonstrate*: the solution is to create a public debate where all opinions can be heard so that an informed judgment can be made.
- *Nothing needs to be done*: as long as the mother gives her permission there is really no problem.
- *Unspecified*: something needs to be done but it is unclear what.
- *Not categorised*: suggestions that do not fit into any of the above.
- *Don't know/no answer*.

Table 3. Identification of the problem in the second assessment task.

Category	Grade 9			Grade 12		
	SW	M	$\Delta$ %	SW	M	$\Delta$ %
Right or not right	46	46	0	60	53	7
Hurts and suffering	29	11	18***	22	11	11**
Research is going too far	3	1	2	17	4	13***
No problem	15	21	-6	13	11	2
Not categorised	5	4	1	0	3	-3
Don't know/no answer	16	10	6	18	12	6

\*Percent within each grade. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students;  $\Delta$  % = percent difference. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Among municipal school students the most common solution suggested was based on laws and legislation. In grade 12, 32% of municipal students responded according to this category, compared to 12% of Steiner Waldorf students ( $p < .001$ ). Prevalent suggestions from the Steiner Waldorf students were more distributed, including also asking permission from the mother and, in grade 12, 'debating and demonstrating'. The percentage of Steiner Waldorf students asking for more information ('Get more facts') was slightly greater, although of minor magnitude in both school forms. This could be taken as a general lack of judgment considering the very limited information given in the task. Table 4 gives more details about the distribution on different categories.

It may be of interest to compare the two student groups regarding their stand for or against the intra-uterine experiments; that is, whether they themselves would give permission for such experiments or not. In both grade 9 and grade 12 mainstream school students to a larger extent approved of the experiments; however, especially in grade 12 they also to a larger extent opposed them. This was because Steiner Waldorf students were more often hesitating or undecided (see Table 5).

Looking at all the results of these two assessment tasks, some general and consistent tendencies appear. Steiner Waldorf students, to a somewhat greater extent than mainstream students, were inclined to refer to moral qualities like love, fellow feeling, solidarity, and courage to stand up for what you think is right. Their answers seemed also to be characterised by greater confidence in inherent human goodness, and less

Table 4. Suggestions how to solve the problem identified in the second assessment task.

Category	Grade 9			Grade 12		
	SW	M	$\Delta$ %	SW	M	$\Delta$ %
Forbid the experiment and/or make laws stricter	13	21	-8	12	32	-20**
Ask permission from the mother	13	7	6	13	5	8
Find alternative experiments	6	5	1	2	5	3
Get more facts	6	2	4	5	2	3
Debate and demonstrate	3	3	0	10	3	7
Nothing needs to be done	19	18	1	13	15	2
Unspecified	6	1	5	6	1	5
Not categorised	11	6	5	9	10	1
Don't know/no answer	27	33	6	37	33	4

\*Percent within each grade. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students;  $\Delta$  % = percent difference. \*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 5. Students' answer to the question whether intra-uterine experiments should be permitted or not.

Permission?	Grade 9			Grade 12		
	SW	M	Δ %	SW	M	Δ %
Yes	35	43	8	23	34	11
No	33	37	4	33	48	15**
Hesitating	17	11	6	18	10	8
Don't know/no answer	14	9	5	25	8	17**

\*Percent within each grade. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students; Δ % = percent difference. \*\*  $p < .05$ .

trust in that recruiting more policemen or establishing stricter laws could solve moral problems at a social level. The Steiner Waldorf students stressed instead individual responsibility.

Results also indicated that Steiner Waldorf students *felt a greater responsibility for social and moral issues*, compared to the students in municipal schools. More Steiner Waldorf students agreed to the statement 'I feel responsible for the future moral development of society'. They also to a larger extent felt that they would be responsible as adults to do something about the problems presented in the two assessment tasks. Tables 6–7 below describe these results.

Table 6. Students' responses to the statement: 'I feel responsible for the future moral development of society'.

	Grade 9		Grade 12	
	SW	M	SW	M
Totally disagree	5	5	10	3
Mostly disagree	24	35	17	28
Mostly agree	47	43	38	52
Totally agree	24	17	35	17
<i>p</i> -value	$p < .05$		<i>ns</i>	

\*Percent within each grade and school form. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students.

Table 7. Students' answers to the question how much responsibility they as adults would feel to do something about the problems related to the two evaluations tasks.

	Grade 9		Grade 12	
	SW	M	SW	M
Not responsible	1	5	6	5
Somewhat responsible	28	34	22	35
Rather much responsible	49	46	39	44
Very much responsible	22	15	33	16
<i>p</i> -value	$p < .05$		$p < .01$	

\*Percent within each grade and school form. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students.

Table 8. Comparison of the frequency of positive answers to a number of questions.

Question	SW9	SW12	Δ%	M9	M12	Δ%
Thought the tasks were easy to understand	15	26	11	13	13	0
Thought the tasks were important	34	58	24	25	22	-3
Thought the tasks were interesting	23	41	18	12	16	4
Considered themselves good at Social Studies	31	39	8	35	19	-16
Thought Social Studies was interesting	45	66	21	44	36	-8
Thought the school's teaching of Social Studies was good	27	50	23	46	22	-24
Would feel responsible as an adult for the problems presented in the two assessment tasks	22	33	11	15	16	1
Felt responsible for the moral development of society	24	35	11	17	17	0
Discussed moral issues at home	14	20	6	15	10	-5

\*Percent within each grade and school form. SW = Steiner Waldorf students; M = mainstream school students; Δ % = percent difference.

Finally, results from this first survey indicated that *Steiner Waldorf students' involvement in social and moral issues increased with age*. When comparing the two grades it was evident that the number of Steiner Waldorf students who thought the two assessment tasks were definitely important, interesting, and easy to understand increased considerably between grades 9 and 12. However, among the students in the mainstream schools, the difference between the grades was only marginal (see Table 8). The opinions about Social Studies were also more positive amongst the Steiner Waldorf students, while it actually became increasingly negative among the students in mainstream schools. Furthermore, involvement in moral issues seemed to increase with age among Steiner Waldorf students, but was rather constant among the students in mainstream schools. Finally, in all these respects the proportion of 'positive' Steiner Waldorf students tended to be greater already in grade 9.

Since this was not a longitudinal study, we cannot definitely say that Steiner Waldorf students generally develop in a positive way between grades 9 (age 14–15) and 12 (age 18–19). The results, however, indicate that such a development may take place. This would mean that Steiner Waldorf students to a greater extent experience a positive development regarding interest and engagement in social and moral issues.

### Discussion: a non-state education for active citizens?

That Steiner Waldorf students' social and moral engagement seemed to increase from grade 9 to grade 12 may form the basis for the future civil and political engagement of these students. As Haste and Hogan (2006) remark, political engagement often has its roots in moral engagement and the experience that something is not in accord with justice. The indication of different patterns of development, i.e. increasing versus constant or decreasing social and moral engagement, has a parallel in the tendency to what Ashley (2005) calls 'early closure' among mainstream school students with regard to interest in environmental issues. 'Early closure' means that already in the early teens there is a loss of interest in knowing more about these issues; a feeling that one knows enough already. From his work with the evaluation of Steiner Waldorf schools in Britain (Woods, Ashley, and Woods 2005), Ashley got the impression that this tendency was not as strong among Steiner Waldorf students; on the contrary older

students were often very interested and eager to know more. Could it be that mainstream schools start too early with these difficult questions? Could it be that youngsters get tired of hearing about, let alone studying, the problematic issues confronting humankind today, whether they are social/moral or natural/environmental in character, because they feel that they have learnt enough about these things already in primary school? Could it be that the *waiting* with the cognitive aspects of such issues to the higher grades in Steiner Waldorf schools contributes to a higher degree of interest and engagement among their older students? Does the tendency in public schools to start already at the primary level with training in cognition and discussion lead to something like a ‘paralysis of analysis’ among young people (cf. Gates 2006)?

Gidley’s (1998) study implies a yes to these questions. The strong focus on imagination and the arts, especially in the early grades in Steiner Waldorf schools could be one factor contributing to the sophisticated visions of the future that the students in Gidley’s study expressed (see above). The prevalence of notions of *human* and social, as opposed to those of mere technological development commonly observed in future studies (cf. Gidley 2002) has a slight parallel in the findings reported here, where Steiner Waldorf students were seen to a larger extent to emphasise love, civil courage and individual responsibility; and to a lesser extent to trust in the possibility that new laws and/or more policemen could solve social and moral problems. In both cases, it is the *human being* with her developmental potentials that is focused on, rather than impersonal, external factors. According to Burch, democratic dispositions must include ‘a passionate engagement with the world: a feeling of intense responsibility for the present and future quality of social life and public affairs’ (2000, 183). If this is true, perhaps Steiner Waldorf schools stand a better chance to educate for democracy than mainstream schools?

Perhaps Steiner Waldorf schools are also better equipped for what Banks calls transformative citizenship education; an education which ‘helps students to acquire the cosmopolitan perspectives and values needed to work for equality and social justice around the world’ (2008, 129). Banks’ transformative citizenship education corresponds to the fourth and highest level of a model of progressive levels of citizenship:

- (1) The *legal* citizen, which has rights and responsibilities but does not participate actively in the political process;
- (2) The *minimal* citizen, which votes in local and national elections on conventional candidates and conventional alternatives;
- (3) The *active* citizen, which goes beyond mere voting in order to ‘actualize existing laws and conventions’ (Banks 2008, 137); and
- (4) The *transformative* citizen, which ‘takes action to actualize values and moral principles beyond those of conventional authority’ (Banks 2008, 137).

One could probably assume that schools generally succeed in developing legal and minimal citizens, since this does not entail more than a kind of socialisation in the norms and values of the existing political system. However, if schools want to educate active or even transformative citizens, they probably have to change their present forms of curriculum and pedagogy, and they may be able to learn something from Steiner Waldorf schools. One indication of this is a Norwegian study recently reported by Solhaug (2007). Solhaug compared Steiner Waldorf and state school students at the upper secondary level. The Steiner Waldorf students scored significantly higher on tolerance and *social engagement*, as well as on *interest* in social issues and participation

in future *non-parliamentary* political activity. The state school students, on the other hand, scored higher on factual *knowledge* and on participation in future *parliamentary* elections. These differences reflect (at least partly) the differences between what Banks calls active and transformative citizenship on the one hand, and his minimal citizenship on the other.

Taking the argument one step further one could even assume on logical grounds that state-independent schools are *needed* in order to create a transformative education for citizenship, simply because teachers in state schools are likely to feel themselves more restricted by conventional norms and values, as expected by the 'street level bureaucrats' or 'servants of the state' that they are often (consciously or subconsciously) taken to be, by themselves and by others. Thus, in a doctoral study by Bernmark-Ottosson (2005) it was found that conceptions of democracy among a group of Swedish teacher students were all within the conventional views, whereas among students in political science there were some conceptions of radical democracy and a greater receptivity for critical and non-conventional views.

### *The pedagogy or the family background, or both?*

All in all, the results of this study confirm those of previous studies, suggesting that Steiner Waldorf schools foster active citizens with a strong democratic ethos, even if not always in accord with formal, parliamentary democratic procedures. These educational results could follow from the schools' special teaching methods, but the students' social and cultural background in the form of parents' values and social involvement is probably also a significant factor. Swedish Steiner Waldorf parents' attitudes and values were actually investigated in another part of the project of which this study is a part. It was found that parents of Steiner Waldorf students to a larger extent than Swedish people in general adhered to values of solidarity, equality, and human dignity (Dahlin 2007). Which of the two factors, Steiner Waldorf pedagogy or students' home environment, plays the most important role is hard to say, but the schools' teaching methods are probably not unimportant. This is also indicated by the above-mentioned study by Solhaug (2007). In an analysis of regression Solhaug found that although the home environment of the students accounted for most of the statistical variance, the schools themselves also had a small but significant influence on the results. Furthermore, if one imagines a situation where no Steiner Waldorf schools (or schools with a similar ethos) existed, present Steiner Waldorf parents would have to send their children to other schools, where they would be subject to influences not so strongly in accord with the beliefs and values of their parents. This would presumably mean that their children would not develop beliefs and values so clearly different from those of mainstream school students.

It must be admitted that the study reported here has some methodological shortcomings. The first is that the data of the survey do not permit a thorough statistical analysis of regression to find out the impact of social background factors such as family values and socio-economic standard. The second shortcoming is that the data from the two age groups are not longitudinal. However, the observed differences between the two age groups in mainstream and Steiner Waldorf schools respectively, together with results from earlier studies, give strong reasons for a follow up study with a more careful design, to see whether these differences can be confirmed and to what extent they can be attributed to the different pedagogical systems informing mainstream and Steiner Waldorf education. Of particular interest would be to investigate whether the

tendency to ‘early closure’ (Ashley 2005) is significantly less prevalent among Steiner Waldorf students regarding issues of sustainable development, such as ecology and global social justice.

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