



The following translation represents a synopsis of a survey involving Waldorf graduates from Switzerland and Germany. This study can be compared to the recently completed “Survey of Waldorf Graduates, Phase II” of North America students conducted by the Research Institute for Waldorf Education. Together these two studies offer a snapshot of a typical Waldorf graduate, as well as indicating areas where Waldorf education shows its strength, and areas where schools could be proactive in making changes.

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**Alumni of German and Swiss Waldorf Schools  
– An Empirical Study on Education and Creative Living –**

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**Methodology and Sample**

- 24 qualitative interviews were conducted with 8 persons in each of the following three age brackets: 62 to 66, 50 to 59, and 30 to 37 years of age
- 6 group discussions were held by two groups, each of them with the same three peer clusters: 62 to 66, 50 to 59, and 30 to 37 years of age
- 1,124 written surveys were completed by former Waldorf students from the three age brackets (48.5 female; 51.5% male, average age 46 years; return ratio of 32.9 %). The discussion topics included:
  - Professional biography and level of satisfaction with one’s profession (edited by Anne Bonhoeffer and Michael Brater, GAB Munich)

- Contextual orientation of personal life (edited by Thomas Gensicke, TNS Infratest Munich)
- Faith and religion (edited by Michael N. Ebertz, Katholische Fachhochschule Freiburg)
- Health (edited by Arndt Büssing, Thomas Ostermann, Frank Jacobi, and Peter F. Matthiessen; University of Witten/ Herdecke)
- Personal experience of the time in school (edited by Dirk Randoll, Alanus Hochschule, Alfter)
- Analysis of interviews and group discussion results (edited by Heiner Barz and Sylvia Panyr, University of Düsseldorf and Munich)

## Core Results

### Completed School Level

- 61% of former Waldorf students have graduated with the *Abitur* (German full academic track graduation diploma), including
- 67% of the 30 to 37 year-olds (which is more than double the rate of students in public schools), 7.7% graduated in the restricted academic track (Fachschulreife), allowing them to attend Specialized, Technical, and Arts Colleges.
- 21.2 % passed the graduation for intermediate vocational tracks (Realschule)
- 2% finished on the basic vocational track level (Hauptschule)

[Comment – these levels are intrinsic to the multi-layered German school system.]

### Profession/ Career

A comparison of the profession one learned and the profession one actually works in with the Microcensus [Note: general population statistics] yields the following results (taking into account the comparability of graduation levels):

- There is a significantly higher number of teachers, engineers, medical doctors/pharmacists, and artists among the former Waldorf students. On the other hand, there are significantly fewer business people and office administrators among them.
- Former Waldorf students show a high degree of satisfaction regarding their profession; they place less importance on making money and on ambitious career goals than on personal fulfillment in their profession and doing work that is meaningful to them.
- Only 2.4% of the alumni have chosen a typical anthroposophical profession (e.g. eurythmy specialist or class teacher at a Waldorf School)

### Contextual orientation in life

- The profiles of former Waldorf students and of the general population are similar in regard to their values and orientations. The goal of life consists in cultivating one's personal well being within the context and network of family and a circle of friends.
- Sophistication of culture and creative aspects of life play a more significant role for Waldorf alumni than for the general population, while the usage of electronic devices and other media is of lesser significance – especially with regard to entertainment.
- Former Waldorf students show a higher spiritual orientation over and above the conventional-parochial forms of organized religion.
- Furthermore, they show comparatively more social engagement and have a higher rate of volunteers.

## Religion

- Former Waldorf students do not gravitate towards institutional forms of religion; a high ratio do not belong to a formalized church or adhere to the Protestant faith; the percentage of Catholics distinctly increases with older age brackets.
- The number of members in the Christian Community is shrinking.
- The majority has an indifferent, sceptical to negative attitude towards Anthroposophy.
- The Waldorf school is not seen as an active propagator of anthroposophical concepts, but is perceived to promote a high degree openness in regard to religion and world views.
- The Waldorf school enriches the soul and spiritual life in such a way that the majority of the respondents find they are able to be open towards different questions of faith and to develop their own “spiritual path.”

## Health

- The hypothesis, that former Waldorf students are healthier than the general population because of the particular pedagogical concepts guiding their education, can only be validated with certain restrictions. We need further specific research, especially in regard to health behavior, which was not a topic of this study.

## School

- Former Waldorf students show a high degree of identification with their school: 87% felt a sense of belonging and 80% felt very well [comfortable] there. Also, the majority of them would elect to go to a Waldorf school again. 47% of those who have children enrolled them too in a Waldorf school. Reasons for choosing a non-Waldorf school for their child were: “No Waldorf schools close-by,” “Other schools are also offering good pedagogical approaches,” “Too expensive/I couldn’t afford it.”
- The instruction was assessed to be interesting and diversified as well as meaningful, but the content was not necessarily thought to be reflecting current social issues. (The latter assessment was particularly prevalent among the 30 to 37 year-olds). Every second respondent indicated that Waldorf schools are not very open to newer pedagogical developments.
- The assessment of the methodological-didactic competence of the teachers tended to be critical, whereas the evaluation of the relationship between students and teachers was positive. That means: the relationship between student and teacher is not defined by grades and points, but rather by the quality of human encounters. Most respondents experienced their teachers as permanently overwhelmed, a result which should be taken very seriously in connection with the aspect of “psychological hygiene in the teaching profession.”
- 74.1% are in favor of the class teacher concept with a decreasing tendency across the age brackets.
- The Waldorf school is seen to exert a favorable influence on the development of the personality (e.g. personal sense of worth, self-assurance, creativity, flexibility) and of social competency (e.g. empathic faculties, consideration, ability to cooperate) as well as the development of the ability to form one’s own opinion and become self reliant.
- By contrast, Waldorf schools are credited with having only a small, yet personally relevant, influence in regard to the following aspects: assessment of one’s own achievement abilities and their boundaries; learning to learn; developing practical skills; and conveying general knowledge.

***Further problem areas:***

- Most respondents indicate that there was too little demand on [academic] achievement in their school and that the feedback concerning their achievement level was frequently not commensurate with their actual individual performance. Correspondingly, many alumni later, after their school years, had trouble adjusting to the demands of a society geared towards achievement. Not a few of them think that they could have accomplished more if the demand on their accomplishments and efforts had been higher.
- Boys seem to have more problems socializing in school than girls. A similar phenomenon can be observed in state elementary schools. The artistic and musical focus of instruction and the fact that competition plays a subordinate role in Waldorf schools, together with the fact that Waldorf teachers are mostly female, may account for this result.
- The alumni clearly see the instruction in foreign languages in Waldorf schools as unsatisfactory and inadequate. With some reservations, this is also true for classes in natural sciences and in physical education.
- 38% indicate that they had tutors or obtained additional instruction. This is a significantly higher percentage than is to be found among students who attended public schools [2004/05: Full Academic track (Gymnasium) attendees – 30%; higher vocational track attendees (Realschule) – 29%; Vocational Track (Hauptschule) attendees – 14%]. Therefore the question arises: Can the Waldorf school of today fulfill its mandate only with the support of the outside (e.g., parents and tutors)?

**Conclusion**

Waldorf schools are, in the assessment of their alumni, on the whole good schools. However, they have to more fully meet the demands of today's society and have to overhaul their own curriculum, especially pertaining to foreign languages and natural sciences. Furthermore, the qualifications of the teachers urgently need to be improved, in particular their professional qualifications and didactic-methodological abilities.