

# Core Principles of Public Waldorf<sup>SM</sup> Education in the U.S.

The **Alliance for Public Waldorf<sup>SM</sup> Education** holds as a central tenet of its membership process in development the belief that Public Waldorf Education must always be:

- Based on active research, not replication
- Founded in inquiry, not imitation
- Unfolding, never done

This being said, the purpose of the following chart is to provide a general working definition of Public Waldorf<sup>®</sup> Education by enumerating the ways in which the Alliance relates to the Core Principles of Waldorf Ed-

ucation developed by the Pedagogical Section Council of North American (January 2013). It should be noted that the chart is not set up as a comparison; rather, the commentary on the right hand side serves to clarify how the Pedagogical Section Council Core Principles embraced by the Alliance may manifest in our member schools.

These principles are reflected in our developing path to membership and it is our intention that each of our member schools manifests these principles in unique ways.

## ■ Pedagogical Section Council Core Principles

**Image of the human being.** The human being in its essence is a being of Spirit, soul, and body. Childhood and adolescence, from birth to twenty-one, are the periods during which the Spirit/soul gradually takes hold of the physical instrument that is our body. The Self is the irreducible spiritual individuality within each one of us, which continues its human journey through successive incarnations.

**Phases of child development.** This process of embodiment has an archetypal sequence of approximately seven-year phases, and each child's development is an individual expression of the archetype. Each phase has unique and characteristic physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

**Developmental curriculum.** The curriculum is created to meet and support the phase of development of the individual and the class. From birth to age 7 the guiding principle is that of imitation; from 7 to 14 the guiding principle is that of following the teacher's guidance; during the high school years the guiding principle is idealism and the development of independent judgment.

**Freedom in Teaching.** Rudolf Steiner gave curriculum indications with the expectation that "the teacher should invent the curriculum at every moment." Out of the understanding of child development and Waldorf pedagogy, the Waldorf teacher is expected to meet the needs of the children in the class out of his/her insights and the circumstances of the school. Interferences with the freedom of the teacher by the school, parents, standardized testing regimen, or the government, while they may be necessary in a specific circumstance (for safety or legal reasons, for example), are nonetheless compromises.

**Methodology of Teaching.** There are a few key methodological guidelines for the grade school and high school teachers. Early childhood teachers work with these principles appropriate to the way in which the child before the age of 7 learns, out of imitation rather than direct instruction:

- Artistic metamorphosis: the teacher should understand, internalize, and then present the topic in an artistic form.
- From experience to concept: the direction of the learning process should proceed from the students' soul activities of willing, through feeling to thinking. In the high school the context of the experience is provided at the outset.
- Holistic process: proceeding from the whole to the parts and back again, and addressing the whole human being.
- Use of rhythm and repetition

**Relationships.** The task of the teacher is to work with the developing individuality of each student and with the class as a whole. Healthy working relationships with parents and colleagues are also essential to the wellbeing of the class community and the school.

**Spiritual Orientation.** In order to cultivate the imaginations, inspirations, and intuitions needed for their work, Rudolf Steiner gave the teachers an abundance of guidance for developing an inner, meditative life. This guidance includes individual professional meditations and an imagination of the circle of teachers forming an organ of spiritual perception. Faculty and individual study, artistic activity, and research form additional facets of ongoing professional development.

## ■ Alliance for Public Waldorf Education Commentary

**Image of the human being.** Underlies the curriculum and pedagogy. The process of incarnation may be spoken of in child studies or faculty meetings (and possibly with parents) as part of the understanding of a child. In keeping with the spirit of Rudolf Steiner's approach, this image of the human is shared freely and worked with as a potentially useful idea, not presented as fact.

**Phases of child development.** Fundamental to the approach to teaching and to the curriculum.

**Developmental curriculum.** Kindergarten may introduce some academic skills based on district requirements or on the literacy or numeracy needs of the student population. Scope and sequence in grades may be adjusted for factors such as Common Core or state standard curriculum mandates, but these are worked with from a developmental perspective. There are currently very few public high schools; similar to most high schools, they are impacted by external demands regarding career or college readiness.

**Freedom in Teaching.** This core ideal lives strongly in the public schools, yet may be restricted in several ways, including:

- Source of financing (local, state, or federal funding) may impose restrictions or requirements
- Equal access requirements of public education may result in a wide range of student needs
- School culture may dictate expected curricular and co-curricular activities
- Pedagogical support and guidance for teachers may vary depending on funding available for professional development, mentoring, or, increasingly common, a pedagogical chair or coordinator position
- State or federal mandates for student assessment will be a factor throughout the school

**Methodology of Teaching.** In addition to these methodologies, Alliance member schools incorporate a variety of assessment strategies. Many of these are consistent with the teaching methodologies, including: child observation; portfolio assessment; formative assessment; and written narratives. Standardized testing is administered as required by the state.

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**Relationships.** Underlies both the curriculum and the organization of school.

"Looping" or retaining the teacher over several years helps support relationship-based learning. Schools develop a community life, often built around festivals, events, or volunteer activity.

**Spiritual Orientation.** In practice, Alliance member schools encourage all community members to work in active and ongoing ways to develop as human beings both through inner reflection and conscious social engagement. Each organization's deep commitment to this process is shared in as open and transparent manner as possible, and all who choose to participate in this collective act of societal renewal are respectfully welcomed.