To our dear little one,
Who came but did not arrive.

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Reclaim Early Childhood

The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Steiner-Waldorf Early Years Education

Sebastian Suggate
and
Tamara Suggate

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Foreword for the United Kingdom

This book is just what is needed. I recommend it wholeheartedly to those wishing to learn about and answer the important question, 'What is Steiner education all about?'.

The Waldorf-Steiner approach to early childhood education is widely embedded internationally. The book gives reflective illustrations through the descriptions and analysis of practical work in schools located in different parts of the world. This demonstrates the importance placed on developing a culture of openness and reflection. The authors emphasize that the Steiner approach is pedagogical and not evangelical.

The book addresses and critiques issues relating to the dangers of Steinerians adhering to a dogmatic way of working. This is undertaken in a thoroughly modern and rigorous way. So that readers who are not familiar with the Waldorf-Steiner approach are equipped to engage with the arguments offered by the authors, the first part of the book takes them on a journey through the philosophical aspects that are relevant. This, very helpfully, includes the contribution of Plato, Goethe and Kant to the thinking of Steiner. It uses this to unpick what Steiner meant by Anthroposophy. The authors then tease out the meaning of the phenomenological-integrative approach which is central to Steiner's work, and there is a fascinating discussion of the terms Quanta and Qualia in relation to this. A useful distinction is made between quantitative and qualitative approaches which sheds light on Steiner's thinking.

The journey continues with the clarification of 'threefoldness' and a 'whole approach' to education. Young children are seen to seek out and experience the world in its entirety. Words which can be difficult and might be viewed as old fashioned and narrow in this day and age are explained, such as 'spirit', 'soul', 'body' and 'will'. Steiner sees these as different sides of the same phenomenon, and not to be viewed in isolation. Throughout the book the traditional terminology is lifted out of any possibility of ossification and scrutinized in the context of current science, psychology and other disciplines.

The authors emphasize that the focus of Steiner's approach was to bring about 'sharpening of the mind'. It certainly does that, linking the reader with Steiner's connection not just to education, but also to medicine and agriculture in ways which have current relevance. There is a strong and steady message that education should remove fixed judgements or a static and stuck view of the child or adult learner. Instead, Steiner education is about a state of 'becoming'.

There is also discussion of the fact that the phenomenological-empirical and integrative view of the child held by Steiner has not made its way into mainstream education in an embedded way.

A large part of the book then takes the reader into the regular practices of the Steiner approach. Freehood is considered and linked to current thinking about executive functioning and autonomy. There is considerable space devoted to the Steiner approach to play and imagination. The importance of imitation and the adult as a powerful role model is introduced, and rhythm, structure and safety are given attention. Language that involves over-explanation or which restricts children by outer compulsion is critiqued. When it is 'dry, abstract, relentless', it is seen to work in 'a parching way'.

The Steiner approach is, throughout the book, discussed by the authors in ways which connect it to current research in education. This is used both to support Steiner and to critique other approaches. But there is respect for the pioneering work of educators such as Froebel and Montessori, and Steiner is located in relation to them, just as in the earlier part of the book there is consideration of other philosophical approaches to educating young children. The points raised are not judgemental or pursued with a silo mentality.

The authors do not avoid taking a serious look at some of the recent criticisms of Steiner's work. They push back at most of these and give evidence for doing so. They also see where there is a need to be pragmatic in ways which keep the authenticity of Steiner's voice without departing from his principles. For this reason there is a full section investigating the digital aspects, and the approach to early literacy.

This is a brave book, not afraid to examine with integrity and a scholarly determination and practical expertise the work of one of the most respected pioneer educators in the Western world, whose approach has also spread to other parts of the world. The authors make the point that 'To understand children one has to understand oneself and the effects we have on children in our care'. They demonstrate in this book how the Steiner approach to the education of children in the first seven years needs to be about developing a culture of openness and reflection, so that it can find a place in any ethnic community or culture if there are willing parents and educators.

I could not put this book down.

Professor Tina Bruce, CBE
Honorary Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Roehampton, 2019

Foreword for North America

This year, 2019, marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of Waldorf education based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). The first school was created at the request of the workers of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. Since then, Waldorf schools have seen a steady rise, with some notable set-backs. During the Nazi era, all Waldorf schools were closed in countries occupied by the National Socialists, but they reopened quickly when World War II came to an end. When Communism came to an end there was an explosion of interest in Russia and the former Soviet countries where Waldorf had been forbidden for decades. When apartheid came to an end in South Africa, there was a surge of interest in Waldorf early childhood education in the townships. Now there is huge interest in China, where hundreds of teachers are enrolled in Waldorf teacher training programs.

During its 100-year history, Waldorf has changed and adapted to each new stage of its life. Yet its devotion to a well-balanced education based on a deep understanding of a child's development has remained constant. This book addresses both elements: the underlying understanding of the child, as well as the diverse ways to apply such an understanding in different cultures.

Today, there are over 1,000 Waldorf or Steiner Schools, and nearly 2,000 Waldorf early childhood programs in more than 70 countries. They are independent of each other yet work closely together in national and international associations.

Over the years many books have been written about Waldorf education. In the early childhood field most focus on practical aspects of the education. This book is different. It includes descriptions of the practice of Waldorf early education, but it primarily focuses on the underlying ideas of the education and the ways its approach links to educational and scientific theories of our time. For instance, the section on the senses connects Rudolf Steiner's view that there are 12 senses with current neurological thinking about the many senses of the human being, all of which need to be cultivated in a well-balanced child.

Also, this book goes beyond focusing on Waldorf education. As the authors state in their introductory chapter, 'This book is as much a defence of childhood as it is an advocacy of Steiner education'. This defence of childhood comes at an extremely important time. In my 50 years of working with and for children, I have never seen a time of greater need to defend childhood, especially in the United States where I have been active. There is a growing materialistic view of the world and this applies to children, as well. Rather than paying attention to

the way children actually develop and then creating educational approaches that support the child's healthy development, the child is viewed in a machine-like way, and arbitrary goals for achievement are set as if one can simply recalibrate the child to perform tasks at ages we arbitrarily decree.

In the United States, we see this tendency especially in the new Common Core standards that require children to read basic books with 'purpose and understanding' by the end of kindergarten. Some children are capable of this task, but many are not developmentally ready, and suffer from this unreasonable demand. Those setting the standards claim they are evidence-based, but in fact there is no evidence that says that teaching reading in kindergarten leads to better reading and comprehension skills by third or fourth grade. Early gains, which do take place, are quickly lost, but the effect of the pressure which the children experience in preschool and kindergarten is not so easily lost. It can create anxiety and tension, which can then interfere with developing a love of reading and of learning in general.

Efforts to speed up young children's development can result in serious stress. We currently see increases in physical and mental health problems among children, which many associate with the growing stress of childhood today. The decline in children's health and well-being concerned me so deeply that after 30 years as a Waldorf early childhood educator, I enlarged my focus and co-founded the Alliance for Childhood, a broad-based organization comprised of educators, health professionals, play advocates, and many others who are deeply concerned about the plight of children today. The Alliance has focused on issues such as the over-use of electronic media in childhood, the ill-effects of too much academic instruction in preschool and kindergarten, and the need to restore creative play in children's lives.

This book addresses many of the issues which I and others have worked on for decades, and it is most welcome both for its contemporary look at Waldorf early education and its emphasis on what is needed for a healthy, well-balanced childhood. It fills an important niche in academic circles and among parents who want to deepen their understanding of Waldorf early education and its relevance today.

Joan Almon
College Park, Maryland, USA
February 2019

Prologue

On the first Sunday of December – although winter this year had not yet really taken hold – a light covering of snow lies on the ground. As the afternoon wears on, growing greyer by the minute, the pristine, almost luminescent blanket of snow appears to glisten in contrast to the gathering dusk. Coats and woolly hats, scarves and snowsuits drawn tight at the neck attempt to hold the cold at bay. Although only weakly illuminated by dim candlelight, the kindergarten building, with its angular yet organic forms gradually dissolving into the oncoming dusk, invitingly draws guests into its midst. Upstairs in the main room, parents have exchanged their coats for the quiet murmur of anticipation.

In the middle of the room a large spiral formed from pine tree cuttings is laid out with a single upright candle placed in the centre. To the right of the window a harpist is seated, beneath the barely visible silhouette of an oak tree – the very one that shaded the children during the hot summer days.

Quietly at first, initially accompanied by just a few of the parents and teachers, the lyrics of 'Little Donkey' weave their way into consciousness, increasing in volume as the children tentatively enter the candlelit room and take their seats. Some faces bear grins, still more beam with pride, others peer and gaze towards the seated parents. A moment of quite follows, before the young harpist begins to fill the room with the delicate tones of Albinoni's Adagio. A peaceful, majestic mood reigns, the melancholy, beauty and hope in centre-stage.

A teacher picks up an apple, the centre of which has been carved out and replaced with a small beeswax candle, and walks slowly with it to the middle of the spiral. There, she lights her own candle from that which burns brightly in the heart of the room, before walking back a small way and carefully placing the apple down amongst the pine sprigs. The room now glows just a little brighter. One after another, each child follows the same path, some children ambling slowly and dreamily, others purposefully and energetically, some smiling coyly at their parents as they go, before placing their candles at various points along the spiral. Each child, with unique gait and personality, purpose and pace, enriches the room with a flame, until the wintery darkness is almost overcome by the warm, gentle flickering light emanating from the spiral.

Universe and child, light and darkness, music and art, movement and stillness. What is Steiner education all about?

Chapter 1

Introduction: Education to Meet the Needs of the Child and the Times?

> How education proceeds from this point will transform society, or send it plummeting back into the savagery of the dark ages.
>
> *(Sardello and Sanders, 1999, pp. 244–245)*

Of the many paradoxes of recent times, one stands out perhaps above all others. Childhood is revered and respected – and yet also subjugated and ignored – like never before. Hardly any other area of life is the recipient of such lofty and benevolent praise in the abstract, while falling victim to banality and neglect in practice. Barbaric practices such as child labour and corporal punishment may have been eradicated in much of the (Western) world, yet childhood remains well and truly under threat – for childhood is misunderstood.

When we contrast the state of childhood, of being children, with our adult conceptions and shadowy memories for how it was 'to be young', this discrepancy becomes comprehensible. Our memories are often verbally dominated, and thus it is perhaps no wonder that our conceptions of childhood are also clothed in concepts and terms. The path back to understanding childhood is thus achieved through an overcoming of this abstract scaffolding to begin to see and experience the reality of childhood underneath. For this, we require – alongside the scientific, legalistic and pragmatic – an inherently phenomenological approach to childhood. This is precisely what the founder of Waldorf-Steiner education endeavoured to do.

Indeed, because life itself is so complex, and arguably increasingly so, an appropriate education that can meet the full reality of modern life must also be inherently complex. Perhaps only through an attempt to observe the world exactly, investigating its many riddles with integrity, can the initially hidden

threads linking many phenomena together be slowly discovered. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that before Waldorf education could be founded by Steiner, he had first to found his approach to knowledge out of which practical answers to the riddles of life could slowly be developed. Perhaps the unique feature of Steiner education, if not its defining characteristic, is that at its heart lie decades of struggle by its founder, Rudolf Steiner, to understand the riddles of human existence. This approach to knowledge he termed 'anthroposophy', and the attempt to understand child development and education out of this leads to Steiner-Waldorf education.

This book is as much a defence of childhood as it is an advocacy of Steiner education. We seek to lay down and make explicit the principles for child development and a corresponding early childhood education that addresses the needs of children, and that deepens what is understood, integrating research across many disciplines, all the while stimulating further thought and initiative. No education approach has the right to rest on its laurels, clothed in a mantel of self-congratulation and dogma, but through its deeds it must prove itself again and again, one child at a time, accepting the new challenges and developments that individually and collectively arise.

The idea for the current publication originally arose from an introductory German text written by the first author in 2015. We soon realised that an expanded and more comprehensive text in English would not be without merit. Our aim in writing this book was to fundamentally take the principles and practice of early years Steiner education and comprehensively illustrate these in a fashion to which the modern reader can relate. Too often we encounter people who say that they are interested in, or even connected to, Steiner education, but that they have difficulty finding literature that is written in an accessible way, incorporating other conceptions and scientific work, while not shying away from the spiritual-philosophical foundations. Our intention is that people from many different walks of life may find a way of relating to the ideas presented here, even those who may initially find the use of the word 'spirit' troublesome. This is perhaps an ambitious undertaking, but one that we hope to have at least partly achieved with our contribution. Our intention takes nothing away from the many existing works on this topic – often more practice-oriented – which this book seeks to complement rather than to replace. Many of these are referenced throughout, and we encourage the reader to extend his or her understanding of specific areas by referring to such previous literature.

Our aim is to demonstrate the relevance of Steiner early childhood education in the modern world. Some people may perceive this form of education as old-fashioned and out-dated – where are the electronic toys, I-Pads and other

marvels of the modern world? But it is precisely in the current climate that the progressive elements of Waldorf education, with its truly humane understanding of childhood, anchored in deep philosophy, sustainable education, common sense and practical aesthetics – in short, covering everything from Plato to play silks – are needed.

In writing this book, we deliberately limited the scope to traditional kindergarten age children, namely, ages three to six. As the modern world changes, the demand for childcare starting at significantly earlier ages is obviously also increasing. Some Steiner institutions have responded to this demand by opening groups specifically designed to address the needs of the younger child, but such considerations are beyond the scope of the current book. However, the principles outlined here can be used to guide practice for these younger children also. At this juncture, a note on our adopted nomenclature. At different times we have used the term 'Waldorf-Steiner kindergartens' as well as 'Steiner kindergartens' and 'Waldorf kindergartens'. This seems sensible, not least because it is useful to give readers the full range of nomenclature used in the field. These terms are interchangeable, therefore, and all refer to the same phenomenon.

Education is a life-long process, and we anticipate (and certainly hope!) that many years from now, we may be wiser than today, and certain passages or ideas in this book may no longer be current or consistent with our developing understanding. In this vein, we request that our words not be written in stone, and we reserve the right to change our minds, and encourage you, dear reader, to do so too, using each child as the only true book in which the principles of education are inscribed.

In a Nutshell

- An education is needed that grasps the essence of childhood.
- The time for advocacy and partisanship in education is over; instead, times call for a deep and flexible responsibility to the challenges presented to childhood.
- Steiner-Waldorf has the potential to pave the way, so long as she is open and self-critical, not resting on any (false) laurels.

Chapter 2

The Anthroposophical Foundation Demystified

2.1 Education arising from philosophy

> The problem here is not that there [is] anything wrong with saying that it is the job of schools and teachers to pass on knowledge and skills conducive to effective individual and/or social functioning, success or flourishing, but that more needs to be thought and said about what constitutes such success or flourishing if we are to avoid dangerously narrow or attenuated conceptions of education and schooling.
>
> *(Carr, 2012, p. 28)*

Both modern and ancient thinkers have argued that education without philosophy is often a form of – or may soon end up in – tyranny (Carr, 2012). In Plato's dialogues, Socrates addresses this problem in critiquing the Sophists, who teach useful knowledge and skills simply for profit, with little regard to the virtue or moral development of their pupils. A similar approach to the Sophists appears to have been adopted by large tracts of modern educational curricula and governments, with their strong focus on skills relevant for the economy (Labaree, 2014). Exemplifying this, the European Commission recently claimed that discussions on the purpose of education were now finished: the purpose is simply to serve the economy (Dahlin, 2012). This adult-centred way of thinking about education has become seemingly detached from the nature of children, not stopping to, as small children do, repeatedly ask: 'But why…?'

Even if one formulates ideas about what education should achieve beyond serving the economy, the ensuing ideals and aims often become too abstract, or take on the form of slogans that are difficult to implement, or which in and of themselves mean little. Examples of such slogans are perhaps that education should be for: 'all', 'social justice', 'tomorrow's world', or 'the whole human

being'. The end-result of such slogans is often formulating ideals, standards and competencies that children should acquire, with education then becoming the process of fitting children into such abstract ideals (Steiner, 1924/2004).

Nor is it particularly fruitful to expound truisms, such as 'let children be children' or 'educate for democracy and tolerance'. Although on the surface such 'progressive' statements sound nice, do they allow us to defend childhood if we cannot say exactly why a child is different from an adult? Does education for democracy mean that citizens need to function in society, simply vote once every few years and pay taxes (i.e. collectivism), rise up against state-sanctioned (kratos) injustice, or conform to the will of the demos (Greek for people)? What is tolerance, and how do we educate children to tolerance without generating indifference?

Currently, if one looks at government educational webpages from around the world, idealistic aims of education (e.g. tolerance, freedom, democracy) are stated alongside utilitarian ones (e.g. learning to read, supporting the economy). The former are nearly impossible to measure and dictate through policy, whereas the latter can be reduced to a narrow range of skills that can be taught and tested. The consequence for education tends to involve propelling this towards focusing on an increasingly narrow array of standards (i.e. reading, writing and science) that have clear practical utility (House, 2007).

Although certainly difficult, reflection on what the purpose of education should be needs to comprise the very first step in any formulation of education (Cahn, 2009). Indeed, Steiner education arose out of Rudolf Steiner's struggles with age-old questions, such as: Are thinking and knowledge objective? Do we possess free will? What is the soul or psyche and human 'I'? How do psychological states relate to physical states? How exactly are children different from adults? – and so on.

As will be outlined in this book, Steiner developed detailed ideas about the human being, on the nature of knowledge, freedom and truth, which form the philosophical groundwork of many of the principles in Steiner education. His philosophy was called anthroposophy: hence, just as education arises ideally from philosophy, anthroposophy arises from his philosophy, which we turn to next.

2.2 Anthroposophy arising from philosophy

> By the turn of the century, a split had occurred, into a soulless neurology and a bodiless psychology.
>
> *(Sacks, 2015, p. 98)*

In the decades before Steiner education arose, the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner spent much time outlining what he believed to be an approach to studying the world that had the potential to extend human understanding both downwards into the details of physical existence, and upwards, or into the more hidden workings and laws of the universe. He sought to combine: (a) a science of ideas as expounded by the likes of Plato and Pythagoras, with (b) a detailed observation of the world, as advocated by Aristotle and empirical science, via (c) an eminently phenomenological, experienced-based approach, in the sense of Goethe and the phenomenologists of the twentieth century.

For his approach to knowledge he adopted the term 'anthroposophy', which is derived from the ancient Greek words 'ánthrōpos' (human) and 'sophía' (wisdom). As mentioned earlier, anthroposophy is intended to provide an approach for better understanding life itself, which renders it, by definition, complex! Furthermore, because much of that which constitutes life is essentially invisible – such as memory, experience, thought, idea, emotion, mental image – anthroposophy necessarily delves into the realms of the invisible. Furthermore, another often overlooked point to note is that Steiner intended his epistemology to complement other approaches to knowledge. In no way was it intended that anthroposophical insights render those of other fields – be it psychology, biology, or even artificial intelligence – redundant (Steiner, 1917/1996).

One might well justifiably ask at this point, why do we need something like anthroposophy when millions of researchers and practitioners are working across the world to constantly provide new insight and improve human existence on this planet? Modern science has enabled countless important discoveries of primarily the physical world. Nearly every square inch of the Earth's surface has been mapped, and matter and anatomy are being examined in ever-smaller detail. Brain and organic processes are being investigated with increasing sophistication.

Although there is undoubtedly still more of the physical world to discover, it has been argued that the next horizons to be explored are psychological-intellectual or soul-spiritual in nature (Lievegoed, 1985). Evidence of this need arises from the still primitive treatments available for the epidemic of psychological disturbances (House and Loewenthal, 2008). Similarly, our understanding of matters of the mind is still very much in its infancy. To illustrate this point, we still do not understand where logic comes from and how it comes to be such a reliable, eternal and steadfast companion, fundamental for knowledge and society. Similarly, there is still no accepted definition of what a number is (Rosenberg, 2012). Studies of the human brain recognize a complexity that matches that of the entire universe. As these simple examples show, the next important voyages of discovery will likely involve deepening our understanding

of ourselves, which is precisely a goal of anthroposophy (Lievegoed, 1985).

A second reason for developing additional approaches to knowledge is that scientific progress can be extremely slow regarding the animate world, especially in the field of education. Educational research, when conducted empirically, tends to lead to a focus on quick and measurable gains (Suggate, 2015) – at the expense of a more patient, long-term approach as found, for example, in Steiner education. As discussed later, there are compelling empirical findings pointing to the harm that can be caused by focusing on short-term, measurable academic gains instead of guiding children in their development, like a gardener patiently does, intervening only as necessary. However, these empirical findings require decades of research, by which time 'progress' has flooded early education with new and 'better' programmes whose true effects also require decades of research to understand. An example here is the focus on digital learning – with technological giants able to develop products far more quickly than science is able to investigate their long-term effects. Clearly, we cannot always wait until empirical science has conducted decades of work and debate before embarking on educational reform. Instead, we need an approach to observing the child that is schooled in empirical reality but which arises out of a more sensitive observational ability. This also is a goal of anthroposophy.

In his last year of life, Steiner defined anthroposophy as 'a path of knowledge and development that sought to lead the spiritual in the individual human to the spiritual in the world' (Steiner, 1925/1989, p. 14). To do so, we must cultivate hard knowledge of both ourselves and the world around us, that recognizes both the physical and the psychological-intellectual realms of existence. Some readers may query the use of the term 'spirituality' when we have just argued that anthroposophy seeks to represent a scientific path to knowledge. However, before addressing the place of the spirit in science and education, let us first expand on what is meant here by the term 'spirit'.

The English word 'spirit' originates from the Latin word 'spiritus', which is connected with breath, air, soul and life. In Steiner's mother tongue, the German word for 'spirit' is Geist, which has a broader meaning than in English, encompassing both 'spirit' and 'intellect'. Because Geist in German relates to both thinking and a less tangible essence (more similar to the English meaning of spiritus), it is easier in the German language to show how these two principles are potentially related, as the German idealistic philosophers tried to do. In English, however, the word 'spirit' has come to have abstract, religious connotations, and often evokes a negative reaction in people who perceive the term as being connected with a lack of rational, scientific thought. As discussed in more detail in later sections (see Chapter 3), the spirit as here

intended can be understood as that part of the human being that is able to experience, often through thinking, that part of existence that relates to eternal, invisible but nonetheless 'solid' ideas. One particularly clear example of such ideas is those found in mathematics; although, for example, a negative number is nowhere to be 'seen', it is still a generally accepted concept with proven use (at least for mathematicians and engineers).

A similar approach to anthroposophy can be found in the emerging discipline of phenomenology. Although phenomenology has many different forms developed by diverse thinkers, including Goethe, Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger, there are some common features that are also important for anthroposophy. First, the mind, or conscious experience, is seen as the starting point of inquiry, not an abstract law or hypothesis that is first projected into reality. Secondly, phenomenology tries to direct the mind to experiencing the various things of the world in their entirety before beginning to dissect these and theorize about them. Thirdly, any given phenomenon is seen as being experienced in a number of different ways and on a number of (potentially infinite!) different levels – a number is both a certain collection of objects and a mathematical building block or law, for example. A human being has a body, but also has psychological and intellectual-spiritual states too. Thus, to phenomenology, one side alone – usually the physical and quantitative one – should not dominate scientific considerations, but should always be considered along with other dimensions. Fourthly, at least in the phenomenology developed by Goethe and Steiner, our limits to knowledge are created by our limits to consciousness – something which has evolved historically, however, and will continue to do so.

As one first step, this phenomenology calls us to then go beyond theories and approach 'the source of thoughts' (Petitmengin, 2007) themselves, which may bring us to look more closely at the nature of thinking itself (Dahlin, 2009). Perhaps such an approach will allow us to develop educational ideas that arise directly out of the needs of children as these phenomenologically represent the needs of the times.

2.3 Education arising from anthroposophy

> It is not our goal to teach ideology in the Waldorf school, though such a thought might easily occur to people when hearing that anthroposophists have established a new school. Our goal is to carry our understanding gained through [anthroposophy] right into practical teaching.
>
> *(Steiner, 1921–1922/2003, p. 125)*

For many people, the first question that arises upon hearing of Steiner education

is how can it be scientific and appropriate to our times when it is based on an anthroposophical foundation with its spiritual character – which makes it 'religious' and hence 'unscientific'. As discussed throughout this book, a very good many practices in Steiner education are supported by empirical evidence, even when the Zeitgeist has been pushing hard in the other direction. Examples include: (a) the benefits of free play; (b) the positive effects of story-telling; (c) the value of incorporating nature, aesthetics and art into education; (d) the importance of physical movement for learning and development; (e) the dangers of electronic media; (f) fostering imagination; (g) the full recognition of imitation in early childhood; (h) the links between educational experiences and health; and (i) the importance of human relationships in learning. Indeed, these aspects have been at various times – or still are! – entirely absent from mainstream education.

Throughout this book, we refer to the idea that the anthroposophical approach to knowledge can be understood as a kind of self-education and self-development. According to this notion, the human being needs to develop new faculties to investigate new phenomena. The faculties that need developing depend on whether the phenomenon in question is a sense-perceptible or an intellectual or even spiritual one. In the physical sciences, equipment is used to extend human perception into domains that were previously not able to be perceived (e.g. the electron microscope, and the infrared camera). In the 'spiritual' sciences or humanities, such as philosophy or mathematics, the development of faculties of logic and the ability to think in and perceive mathematical laws can be learned.

In his book *Riddles of the Soul* (Steiner, 1917/1996), Steiner specified what he believed to be the relationship between anthroposophy and sciences that have physical sensory impressions as their starting point. These physical sciences provide sensory input that forms the content of mental images. In modern psychological and philosophical language, these mental images would be called 'constructs' or 'representations'. These mental images are subjective representations of reality, based on an objective world existing outside, which is perceived by the senses. However, there is also a subtle, internal world that has its own rules, forming the representations from the 'inside'.

If we closely observe this inner subjective world of mental representations, it is possible to notice that there is also an influence from an inner objective source alongside the outer one that we know as the physical world. This inner world is most noticeable for the modern human, in its manifestation in the laws of logic. In the world of mental images, even this objective inner world of logic reigns supreme. To illustrate the supremacy of objective inner worlds, try

imagining a logical impossibility, such as a triangle with five corners, a colour that is bright pink and bright blue at the same time, or a single number that is both positive and negative.

Steiner saw no reason why science should confine itself to physical facts simply because only 'physical' instruments were recognized as objective. Instead, he maintained that we have to simply find the right instruments for psychological-intellectual phenomena as well. The great philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose ideas are still very influential today, was of the opinion that there were clear limits to our knowledge. Everything that could not be investigated with physical instruments and logic was an issue of faith. From an educational point of view, this means that certain questions remain difficult to investigate once these transgress Kant's boundaries of knowledge. For Steiner, following from Goethe, the question was rather, how we can develop the faculties that we need to investigate previously inaccessible questions. Steiner believed, accordingly, that there should be no boundaries to knowledge (Steiner, 1918/1986): everything was a question of development. And herein lies the need for anthroposophy alongside psychology, sociology and anthropology.

To summarize, a sound education that does not fall into abstract idealism or unreflected pragmatism needs to be built on careful contemplation and inquiry on both the purpose of education and the nature of the human being itself. In contrast with our impressive conquering of the external physical world, we are but dabbling fools in exploring our psychological-intellectual lives. Here we depend on logic, mathematics, memory, intuition – without being able to say what these really are, or how they arise. To do so requires new advances in self-knowledge, which is what Steiner tried to initiate with his anthroposophy. Based on his insight, he detailed his understanding of the human being, which we will discuss after presenting a brief sketch of Steiner's life. In short, the anthroposophical approach has two key implications for education. First, Steiner education is based on a thorough phenomenological-anthroposophical observation of human experience. Secondly, this method of observation leads to the recognition of both spiritual and psychological aspects of human existence alongside physical ones. Both have to be cultivated with the exactitude and creativity with which modern empirical science sets about its tasks.

2.4 A short sketch of Rudolf Steiner's life and work

Although Rudolf Steiner died before the first Waldorf kindergartens became established, his work forms, without question, the foundation of this educational approach. Steiner was born on the 25 February 1861 in Kraljevic,

a village formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian empire but now situated in modern day Serbia. His family relocated frequently during his childhood, as his father worked for the Austrian train service. Despite having to travel daily for up to three hours on foot to school, Steiner read widely, teaching himself languages, which allowed him to tutor other students in order to supplement the meagre family income. Philosophy played a prominent role in his reading list, especially Immanuel Kant and, later, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and he was also particularly fascinated by geometry and mathematics.

After finishing school, he attended the University of Applied Sciences in Vienna (1879–1882), where he began his career writing philosophical and cultural works. From 1884 to 1890 Steiner worked as a tutor for the Specht family, where he was responsible for educating their intellectually disabled ten year-old son Otto, who suffered from hydrocephalus. When Steiner began working with Otto, he hardly seemed capable of learning, having only acquired 'reading, writing, and arithmetic in a most rudimentary form' (Steiner, 1925, p. 84). In his time with Steiner, Otto not only soon caught up in his subjects but he also excelled to such a degree that he later went on to study medicine and qualify as a doctor. Steiner wrote that his time tutoring Otto provided 'a rich source of learning' with some of the acquired knowledge later metamorphosing into the guiding principles of Steiner education. Steiner wrote of this time:

> I had to find access to a soul which was in a kind of sleeping state that gradually had to be enabled to gain mastery over its bodily manifestations. In a certain sense, one had first to awaken the soul within the body. I was thoroughly convinced that the boy really had great, although hidden, mental capacities.... This educational task became to me the source from which I myself learned very much. Through the method of instruction which I had to apply, there was laid open to my view the association between the spiritual-mental and the bodily in man. There I went through my real course of study in physiology and psychology.
>
> *(ibid., S. 84–5, translation adapted by the authors from wn.rsarchive.org)*

Based on a recommendation from Steiner's friend and mentor, the professor Karl Julius Schröer (1825–1900), he was nominated to edit Goethe's natural scientific writing. As with his time in Vienna, this new activity in Weimar – a cultural and geographical centre of Germany in the late nineteenth century – bought Steiner into contact with many prominent personalities in the blossoming literature and art movements of the time. In 1892, Steiner

received a doctorate in philosophy for his work, the essence of which was later published in one of his most widely read books *The philosophy of freedom*.[1] In this work, Steiner attempted to lay the philosophical foundations for using our thinking to rise to a spiritual world view resting on solid scientific foundations, from which humankind could learn to become truly free.

Between finishing his doctorate in 1892 and the founding of the first Waldorf-Steiner school in Stuttgart in 1919, Steiner lived first in Berlin and then in Dornach in Switzerland. This intervening period saw him lecture in a workers' school, edit a literary and culture journal, head the German section of the Theosophical Society before being displaced because of his failure to comply with its ever-growing anti-Western streak, produce many written philosophical works, hold thousands of lectures around Europe, and found the Anthroposophical Society. Prior to his death on 30 March 1925, Steiner wrote and lectured on multifaceted topics relating to the fields of medicine, agriculture, education and special education, philosophy, architecture, eurythmy, theology, Christology, natural science, history and psychology. This work is reflected today in a very large number of institutions, including: biodynamic farms, Steiner schools, special schools, anthroposophical medical practices, the Christian Community and higher education institutions.

The first Waldorf-Steiner school was founded in Stuttgart during the catastrophic year directly after the end of the First World War. Emil Molt was the owner of a large cigarette factory and was concerned about the well-being of not only his workers, but about society as a whole. After attempts to improve the working conditions and cultural life of his workers, he came to the conclusion that a new educational approach was needed before sustainable societal change was possible. Molt then asked Steiner about the possibility of founding a new school, which soon gave rise to the Waldorf education movement, named after Molt's Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory.

Subsequently, Steiner began to lecture more systematically on his ideas about education, not only in Germany but also particularly in Holland and England. There are many fascinating accounts of his visits to the first Waldorf school. He would involve himself in many different capacities – from jumping in to take over lessons, observing children and instruction, meeting with individual students, advising and supporting the teachers, and helping with the development of the school. By all accounts he was greatly admired by the students and teachers, and he could often be seen walking down the corridor smiling to himself after being in the classroom. It is believed that the school and corresponding educational approach was the favourite of all the initiatives arising out of his philosophy (Lindenberg, 1997).

On New Year's Eve of 1922/1923, the nearly completed first Goetheanum was burned to the ground in an arson attack, which constituted a very significant blow for Steiner. The Goetheanum was a building that Steiner and others had built on a donated piece of land in Dornach (near Basel, Switzerland). The building had a wooden construction, much of it carved by Steiner and his colleague's own hands, embodying a new form of 'organic' architecture. Many reports indicate that this event affected Steiner greatly, with his health suffering immensely (ibid.). Nevertheless, after expending every available effort to put the fire out until the smouldering ashes were greeted by the first sunrise of the New Year, a determined Steiner insisted that work must continue, and his programme of lectures continued on that very day. Recognizing several deficiencies in the Anthroposophical Society, Steiner re-founded this society one year after the Goetheanum fire, and was elected as its head. In the next nine months his activity was still more intense, travelling frequently and maintaining a busy schedule of lecturing and writing on a diverse range of topics, visiting and advising the growing initiatives in medicine, agriculture, education and religious renewal, and making plans for the building of a new Goetheanum. In September of 1924, however, his activity was abruptly halted due to deteriorating health, and he died on 30 March of the following year.

Steiner was, and remains, a controversial figure, evoking a broad spectrum of reactions. Some people look on his life's work with astonishment, struck by the number of new initiatives he developed, his depth of knowledge and insight into many diverse fields, and his human qualities of humour, self-sacrifice and attempts at cultivating a cultural impulse to raise post-war Europe out of its misery. Others see in him a significant person and respect the fruits of his work but themselves have difficulty relating to the perceived 'mysticism' or the strong spirituality in his work. A small number of vocal critiques – and a cursory search of the internet bears testament to this – simply reject his ideas out of hand, and scour his work searching for statements that can be used to argue that Steiner education and anthroposophy are dangerous. Finally, there are a small number of scholars who work academically with Steiner's work, and a growing number of empirical publications testing aspects of Steiner's approaches in medicine, education and agriculture.

In a Nutshell

- The purpose and philosophy of education need to inform how we educate.
- One approach to understanding the purpose is to understand humanity. This leads from philosophy, to anthroposophy, to education.
- Rudolf Steiner founded anthroposophy to focus and develop our abilities to attend to subtle yet crucial aspects of humanity that are often ignored.
- Such crucial aspects include acknowledging and exploring our mental life, which can provide a new source for insight into the riddles of education.