

## RUDOLF STEINER: FATHER OF WALDORF SCHOOLS

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was a philosopher and architect born in what is now Croatia. Steiner developed a holistic approach to learning which is still used today in Steiner (or Waldorf) schools worldwide.

*Steiner created schools all over the world*

Steiner believed learning was the key to human development. He felt the learning process should follow the learner's needs and not be the same for everyone. That is why he felt teachers must watch learners carefully to know when they were ready to learn something and to notice how they learn. A comprehensive understanding of the different stages of human development were necessary as part of this process, according to Steiner.

In 1919, Steiner was invited by Emil Molt to give talks to factory workers at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. Steiner established his first school for the children of these factory workers, which is why schools using his approach today are called Waldorf schools. In 1922, he was invited by Professor Millicent Mackenzie to Oxford, where he presented his ideas on education at a conference. Following this visit the first Waldorf school in the UK was set up the same year.

Steiner had very clear views about child development. He identified three distinct developmental stages: ages 0–6/7, 6/7–14 and 14+. Waldorf schools worldwide follow these stages closely and encourage different skills at each stage.

*three stages in child development*

The kindergarten stage (0–6/7) aims to show young children that the world is good. By providing creative hands-on activities and encouraging creative play, children are able to learn from experience and by copying others. At this stage, Steiner believed that introducing theory and formal teaching was harmful to young developing minds.

*aims are different for each age group*

The primary stage (6/7–14) aims to show children that the world is beautiful. Students at this level are encouraged to develop their artistic expression and social skills. Here, the emphasis is on creation and analysis. Unlike traditional education, Steiner believed that children should develop an understanding of ideas rather than learning by heart.

The secondary stage (14+) aims to show adolescents that the world is true. The development of critical understanding and a sense of idealism are important at this stage. Through combining academic, practical and artistic activities, Steiner hoped that the secondary stage would produce free and morally responsible individuals.

Recent studies have shown that children who are educated at Waldorf schools have a deeper understanding of science than other young people. What is more, it has been claimed that levels of bullying are much lower among students at Waldorf schools. Studies in Australia have also shown that graduates of Waldorf schools are more likely to be active socially and politically and display greater self-confidence than graduates of conventional schools.

*students at Waldorf schools do better (compared to students at normal schools)*

Before his death in 1925, Steiner saw a total of six Waldorf schools established. The schools in Stuttgart and King's Langley, as well as in Hamburg, Essen, The Hague and London were all built in his lifetime. By 2014 there were over 1,000 schools in 60 countries.