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CRITICALLY ASSESSING THE REPUTATION OF WALDORF EDUCATION IN ACADEMIA AND THE PUBLIC

EARLY ENDEAVOURS OF EXPANSION, 1919–1955

Edited by

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4 Waldorf Education in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Educational Context in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a Western European country with a population of 17 million people (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). What is unique in the Netherlands is that both public and non-public schools are fully financed by the Dutch government. Only a handful of schools are private schools (some of which are Waldorf schools) that are not funded by the state. The main reason mentioned by private Waldorf schools is that the concept of being private allows schools more freedom to be the school they want to be and, by doing so, provide the best environment for children's development without interference from the government (e.g., Staatsvrij Onderwijs, n.d.; Werfklas, n.d., Waldorfschool Zeevonk, n.d.).

For Waldorf schools, an important part of the Dutch constitution is "Article 23; Freedom of Education" (Ministry of Interior and Kingdom relations, 2019). This part of the Dutch law ensures the right for all people to establish schools according to their own religious or pedagogic educational convictions. There is no national curriculum in primary or secondary education, there are general learning outcomes and a standardised exam at the end of primary and secondary school. Each school is free to appoint teachers who accept the school's identity (ideals, tradition and beliefs) as long as they are qualified (at least a bachelor's degree in primary education and a bachelor's or master's in secondary education). The Dutch (governmental) Inspectorate of Education oversees the quality of education in all schools in the Netherlands.

Waldorf Education and Waldorf Teacher Education in the Netherlands

In 1923, the first Waldorf School in the Netherlands was founded in The Hague. A century later, Waldorf Schools are flourishing in the Netherlands. Especially in the last decade, more and more schools have been founded. Currently, there are over 18,500 students at 97 Waldorf primary schools and over 12,900 students at 27 Waldorf secondary schools (separate from

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Waldorf primary schools) in all parts of the Netherlands (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2022a). In comparison, there are 6,581 primary schools in total in the Netherlands (approximately 1.5 million students) and 641 secondary schools (approximately 1 million students) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023). Figure 4.1 (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2022a) shows the growth of the number of Waldorf schools.

Concerning Waldorf teacher education in the Netherlands, the following is the case at the moment. Although a Bachelor of Education for primary education makes a teacher qualified to teach at every (Waldorf) primary school in the Netherlands, there is a full-time as well as a part-time Bachelor's Teacher Education program for student teachers who want to become a Waldorf primary school teacher at the public *University of Applied Sciences Leiden*. This university also offers programs in Waldorf education as well as eurythmy, music and art therapy (Willmann & Weiss, 2019). This bachelor's is accredited and acknowledged by the state. With the specific bachelor's degree for Waldorf teaching in primary school, teachers are qualified to teach at all primary schools in the Netherlands, both Waldorf schools and any other kind of primary school. Currently, a Master's programme in Education is being developed at the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden*, focussing on Waldorf pedagogy, art and nature. In addition, the HAN¹

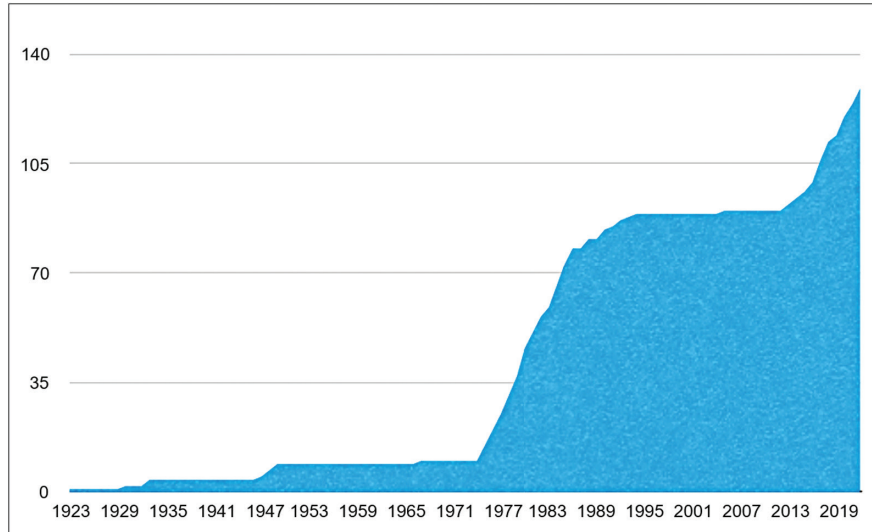


Figure 4.1 The increase of Waldorf schools in the Netherlands from 1923 to 2023.

¹ HAN is an acronym for *Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen* [University of Applied Sciences in Arnhem en Nijmegen, two cities in the Netherlands].

University of Applied Sciences offers a Minor programme on Waldorf Education for primary school student teachers who are interested in Waldorf education. Primary teachers, secondary teachers and school leaders and administrators with a regular teaching degree can take specific courses to learn about the Waldorf pedagogy (Willmann & Weiss, 2019).

Research Question and Methodology

This chapter focuses on the perception of Waldorf education in the Netherlands. The research question is: How has Waldorf Education in the Netherlands developed since the foundation of the first Dutch Waldorf school in 1923? The aim of this chapter is to identify and describe the discourse about Waldorf education in the Netherlands. Special attention is paid to the research group on Waldorf education at the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden* (The Netherlands).

To answer the research question, the authors tried to gather as much information/data about the perception of Waldorf education in the Netherlands as possible. Collecting data by studying existing research literature on Dutch Waldorf education resulted in a few insights: Literature on Dutch Waldorf education is scarce, written in the Dutch language and, in some cases, is outdated and only available in hard copy. In our search for the existing literature, we contacted representatives from primary schools, schools, teacher education, teachers and school administrators. We engaged in dialogue about the themes in this chapter (see the grey box) and also asked for additional literature using the snowball method. Wherever possible, we tried to use literature references in this chapter.

Guiding Questions for the Conversations/Dialogues With Stakeholders

- How is Waldorf education perceived and discussed a) in the public and b) in academia? Is it a concept that is accepted/respected/canonised? Is it part of (public) teacher education or vocational education?
- What are the differences and similarities between “public” and “academic” discourses? Are there influences between the two?
- What is the self-image of Waldorf educators with regard to academia? Is there a tendency toward segregation or integration?
- What is the relationship between the public discussion and the success/spread of Waldorf education?
- What platforms and forums (blogs, journals, publishers) are there for discussions? Are certain media or actors/authors particularly active or visible?

- To what extent is Waldorf education associated a) with anthroposophy and b) with Rudolf Steiner? Are attempts of detachment to be noticed (instead: replacement of topoi from developmental psychology, philosophy, theology)?
- Is Waldorf education primarily perceived as a method, worldview or something else (an alternative choice to the mainstream)? Are there differences between self-perception and perception by others?
- Are certain practices (educational, scholastic, instructional) perceived as representative of Waldorf education? Do these stand out from the image of “typical reform education”?
- Is Waldorf education primarily associated with school, elementary education or communal living (Camphill Nederland, n.d.)?
- Regarding the temporal dimension: Has the image or perception changed in the last years/decades? Have institutions, organisations and practices changed?
- Are there interrelations between Waldorf education and the other anthroposophical fields of practice, medicine and agriculture?

(These questions were derived from the guiding questions for this book publication.)

Existing Research on Waldorf Education in the Netherlands

One of the often referred-to publications is the doctoral dissertation of Hilligje Steenbergen (2009). The Steenbergen thesis comprised a school effectiveness study which compared Waldorf and non-Waldorf schools in the Netherlands. It is, at this moment, the only effectiveness study on Waldorf schools in the Netherlands. Data included cohort data from the year 1999. Variables included both cognitive output (test scores on language, mathematics and general problem-solving skills) and non-cognitive output (student-related: personality factors, self-respect, attitudes towards learning, motivation, learning strategies) (Steenbergen, 2009). The results of the study showed that:

Students in Waldorf schools have nearly the same scores on verbal intelligence and slightly lower scores on symbolic intelligence than students in mainstream education. Looking at personality factors, it can be concluded that students in Waldorf schools, compared to students in mainstream schools, have higher scores on mildness and openness.

(Steenbergen, 2009, p. 155)

Other, more recent research publications have been followed by publications of the Dutch research group on Waldorf education at the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden*. These descriptive, both theoretical and practice-oriented (mostly) Dutch publications focus on a variety of topics in the context

of Waldorf education: Assessment, diversity, giftedness, student engagement, deep listening, teacher artistry, pedagogy, subjectification, teacher education, the value of Waldorf education (for alumni students of Waldorf schools) and identity of Waldorf education (University of Applied Sciences Leiden, 2023). A podcast series of this research group on inclusion and diversity in Dutch Waldorf schools is listened to by over 30,000 listeners (Spotify, 2023). Next to these, there are research publications describing the research group and a brief history of Waldorf education in the Netherlands (Mayo, 2018).

Perception of Waldorf Education in the Netherlands

Waldorf education in the Netherlands is perceived in various ways. A first distinction can be made between perceptions of Waldorf education from “outside” Waldorf schools and perceptions of those within the Waldorf school community.

The Name of Waldorf Schools

One of the reasons for this is confusion about the name that is used in the Netherlands to refer to Waldorf schools. In the Netherlands, Waldorf schools are called in Dutch *Vrije Scholen* [Free Schools]. This name was originally suggested by Rudolf Steiner himself to underline that in the Netherlands, Waldorf schools are free from governmental influence or state regulations. However, nowadays, the name *Vrije Scholen* is, by some, incorrectly associated with a school without proper rules for students where “students are free to do whatever they want” (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022). This has resulted in a reconsideration of the name. A few Waldorf schools in the Netherlands are now referred to as “Waldorf School” instead of *Vrije School* (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022). In a similar vein, the *Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools* has made “protecting the brand” of *Vrije Scholen* (Waldorf Schools) one of its focus points for 2021–2026. Some who use the “incorrect” use of the word *Vrije Scholen*, for instance, by schools that are not Waldorf schools at all but want to state that they are “free” to do what they want, are not protected in Dutch law. The perceived danger of this development is – according to the *Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools* – that the brand of Dutch Waldorf schools will lose meaning.

Student Background

Another perception of Waldorf schools in the Netherlands is that students in Dutch Waldorf schools have a specific background that can be characterised as Caucasian, highly educated, well-to-do parents, with a progressive or left-wing political orientation (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022). In addition, parents of students at Dutch Waldorf schools are perceived to find health (as in organic food, yoga, meditation) and nature important. Dutch Waldorf schools are sometimes seen as closed communities that are focused on their own “bubble” or closed community in society. Also, traditionally, parents

of students at Dutch Waldorf schools are critical towards the Dutch national immunisation programme (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022). The specific reason for this critical attitude of Waldorf parents in the Netherlands was studied to a limited extent in the past. For instance, Harmsen and colleagues conducted a qualitative study on factors that influence vaccination decision-making by parents who visit anthroposophical child welfare centres. Although it is unknown whether these parents also had children in Waldorf schools, it is interesting to see that the study showed that multiple reasons could influence the decision for vaccination, varying from specific anthroposophy-related reasons (anthroposophical health care) to non-Waldorf related reasons (Harmsen et al., 2012). They found that factors influencing Dutch parents are lifestyle (e.g., babysitter rather than daycare, attitudes towards breastfeeding), perception of health, beliefs about childhood diseases (overcoming diseases can make a child stronger), perceptions about the risks of diseases, perceptions about vaccine effectiveness and vaccine components and trust in institutions. This finding is supported by other studies on parents with an anthroposophical worldview (Woonink, 2010). “It is not only anthroposophical considerations that play a role in the parents’ decisions on vaccination; homoeopathic and alternative medicine are influential as well” (Klomp et al., 2015, p. 504). Compared to other persons who might have a critical stance towards vaccination in the Netherlands (for instance, orthodox-protestants), anthroposophical parents are more concerned about the possible risks and side effects of vaccines and about the risks and benefits of childhood diseases.

Alleged Racism in the 1990s

Around the year 1995, a Dutch newspaper published an article about possible racist elements in the curriculum of a few Dutch Waldorf schools. The most prominent example of this is the perception that originated in the 1990s that Dutch Waldorf schools were teaching primary school students about different “races” in which supposedly some “races” were superior to others (Antroposofische Vereniging in Nederland, 2000; Jeurissen, 1997; N.N., 1998; Zwaap, 2000). This resulted in a Dutch committee that studied whether the alleged racist practices were created by a few individual teachers or whether they were connected to statements by Rudolf Steiner (Antroposofische Vereniging in Nederland, 2000). The committee found 12 statements by Steiner that were considered racist or at least questionable in this respect. In a way, these statements by Steiner are contradictory to other statements by Steiner, where he emphasised that all individuals are equal. The committee also mentioned that it is possible scholars who translated Steiner also wrote their own interpretation into the translation, creating some discriminating and racist paragraphs (Antroposofische Vereniging in Nederland, 2000). After the committee presented its results, the *Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools* developed a non-discrimination code of conduct (Zwaap, 2000) and, more recently, also a “diversity code” (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2021a; 2021b). Despite the

commotion in society and within Waldorf schools about the statements by Steiner, the number of students attending Waldorf schools remained stable.²

Dogmatic or Progressive?

Perceptions regarding Dutch Waldorf schools also differ among people within the Dutch Waldorf schools (Hogervorst, 2008). There is a difference between students, parents and teachers who have what could be called a dogmatic-conservative approach and a more progressive-modern approach towards Waldorf schools. Some students, parents and teachers try to follow Steiners' guidelines for Waldorf schools in detail. The latter combines the overall ideas of Steiner together with insights from present-day society (Hogervorst, 2008; De Kam, 2022). An example of these perceived differences within the Dutch Waldorf school community are, for instance, the importance of caring for children and instructional skills, the use of a fixed curriculum or teaching method and the importance of diversity and inclusion. These differences come to the fore when people respond to podcasts regarding the future of Dutch Waldorf schools, essays in Dutch Waldorf journals (Hogervorst, 2008) and professional development courses, for instance, regarding the age of children to start reading or the use of technology in school.

Dutch Waldorf Educators' Perception of Academia

There is no previous research on how Dutch Waldorf teacher educators or Dutch Waldorf educators at primary or secondary schools perceive academia or the perception of Waldorf education in academia. It is common for people who want to teach at primary schools to attend the Waldorf teacher education for primary schools at the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden* (Leiden, the Netherlands) or attend a non-Waldorf teacher education program.

Since 2013, the *Waldorf Teacher Education Institute for Primary Schools* has been a part of this university with all kinds of (non-Waldorf related) studies. Before 2013, the Waldorf Teacher Education Institute was an independent small university that focused solely on teacher education for Waldorf schools. Doing some research, reading academic literature and critically reflecting on literature are a part of the Waldorf teacher education for primary schools. The same can be said for teacher education institutes for secondary schools, with the exception that there is no specific Waldorf teacher education institute for secondary schools with a bachelor's or master's programme. The Dutch *Begeleidingsdienst van Vrijescholen* [Educational Waldorf Consultancy] and the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden* offer various research-based professional development courses on various (Waldorf and general educational) topics for teachers, administrators, school management and special educational needs.

2 Regarding the German reception of this scandal on anthroposophy and racism see Martins in this book [note from the editors].

Although teachers in the Netherlands experience a high workload with very limited time to read literature, certain researchers, for instance, Gert Biesta (2022) and Aziza Mayo (2015, 2018), are followed and respected and their work is read. In addition, publications and podcast series from our (the authors of this chapter) research group *Values of Waldorf Education* (part of the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden*) are found to be of teachers' interest. At the same time, there are also teachers who – within their limited time to read – prefer to study the original works of Rudolf Steiner or teachers who do not experience time to spend on reading or other professionalisation activities at all.

Dutch Waldorf Platforms

Part of, and a stimulus for, the development of the Dutch Waldorf education movement are several online and offline journals, publishers and communities. These platforms function as meeting places and communication channels for all (though mostly parents and teachers) who are interested in Dutch Waldorf Education. These platforms stimulated the development or growth of Dutch Waldorf education, and some functioned as a way to “educate” or introduce parents to Waldorf education practices and the anthroposophical background. In Table 4.1, an overview of the most important Dutch Waldorf platforms is presented.

Table 4.1 Dutch Waldorf platforms.

<i>Name of Platform/Journal/ Publisher</i>	<i>Short Description</i>
<i>Vereniging van Vrijescholen</i> [Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools]	This national Waldorf association represents Dutch Waldorf schools in national and European politics (through ECSWE ³). Next to that, the association supports Dutch Waldorf schools by providing guidelines on themes such as “Waldorf teacher shortage”, “diversity and inclusion” and “educational quality”. In addition, the association also offers an online platform/wiki for teachers to share lesson plans and ideas.
<i>Begeleidingsdienst Vrije Scholen</i> [Educational Waldorf Consultancy]	This national Waldorf organisation offers consultancy, professional development activities and supervision for Dutch Waldorf schools.
<i>Lectoraat Waarden van vrijeschoolonderwijs</i> [Research Group <i>Value and Values of Waldorf Education</i> at <i>University of Applied Sciences Leiden</i>]	This research group at the <i>University of Applied Sciences</i> (Mayo, 2018) consists of teacher-researchers who are working on or have completed their research projects and PhD projects and one chair/program director.

(Continued)

3 European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE).

Table 4.1 (Continued)

<i>Name of Platform/Journal/ Publisher</i>	<i>Short Description</i>
Podcast series: * Values and Values of Dutch Waldorf Education * Diversity and Inclusion in Dutch Waldorf Education	In the last few years, two researchers – Jan Jaap Hubeek and Wouter Modderkolk – from the research group <i>Value and Values of Waldorf Education</i> made two podcast series based on the research they conducted in the research group. The podcasts are available on Spotify (in Dutch).
Publishers: * Christofoor * Paidos * Vrij Geestesleven * Nearchus * Antrovista	There are several Dutch book and journal publishers who primarily publish books related to Waldorf education. A few examples are provided.
Journals * Seizoener * Vrije Opvoedkunst * Motief	There are multiple Dutch journals on Waldorf education (and anthroposophy). A few examples are provided.
Platforms, networks and professional learning communities: * Dutch pedagogical section of the <i>Dutch Anthroposophical Society</i> * School management of secondary education (in Dutch: Platform VO) * School management of primary education (in Dutch: Platform PO) * Language platform/network * Network on gifted students * Rainbow network on social skills and group dynamics of students * Professional learning community on assessment * Professional learning community on inclusion and diversity	Several online and offline platforms, networks and professional communities exist for multiple stakeholders (teachers, school management, etc.) on various topics. A few examples are provided.
Websites/Facebook/Instagram	There are several Dutch websites and Facebook/Instagram pages regarding Waldorf education in the Netherlands. For instance: * everydaymommyday.com * Vrijeschool (Facebook group) * Vrijeschoolleerkrachten (Facebook group) * Islamic.waldorf (Instagram) * Waldorfaandewerf (Instagram) * Vrijehogeschool (Instagram) * Antroposofieinspireert (Instagram) * Seizoener (Instagram)

Typical Dutch Waldorf Education Practices

What was mentioned earlier about differences between Waldorf schools and between students and parents in the Netherlands can also be said about typical Dutch Waldorf education practices. The *Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools*, together with a group of people from schools and academia, has created a “compass” for Dutch Waldorf education (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2023). Based on the Waldorf pedagogics core principles (Leibner, 2017; Wember, 2018), the Dutch compass comprises eight elements and provides insights that Waldorf teachers could use in their teaching. The eight elements are the image of the human being, phases of child development, curriculum, pedagogical skills and teaching methods, teachers’ autonomy, relatedness and relationships, spiritual orientation and human contact.

In addition, there are ten “unique elements” of Waldorf schools (in the Netherlands) formulated by the *Dutch Association of Waldorf Schools* (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2022b). Though not unique for the Netherlands or for all Dutch schools (whether Waldorf schools or not), these elements are seen by the *Dutch Waldorf Association* as unique for Waldorf schools in the Netherlands compared to other schools in the Netherlands. These ten elements can be found in Table 4.2.

During the last decades, two publications state that elements from Waldorf schools have become more and more accepted in all other kinds of schools in the Netherlands (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022, December 5; Mayo, 2018). As Mayo puts it: “Didactical practices, such as the integrated use of rhythmic movement during math lessons that used to be regarded as outlandish and ‘typical Waldorf’, have now become regular features in many mainstream Dutch schools” (Mayo, 2018, p. 272).

Similar differences within the Dutch Waldorf school movement (schools, parents, students) exist nowadays among the discussion about whether Waldorf education is a kind of school with a specific method (for instance, Dalton or Montessori) or a school in which a certain world view (anthroposophy). In

Table 4.2 Proposed unique elements of Waldorf schools in the Netherlands (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2022b).

Proposed Unique Elements of Waldorf Schools (as Opposed to Other Dutch Schools)

1. Waldorf schools prepare students for future society.
 2. Waldorf schools seek challenges in everyday reality.
 3. Waldorf schools offer age-specific education and education is fit for the developmental phase of students.
 4. Waldorf schools follow the rhythm of nature and the seasons.
 5. Eurythmy is a subject which supports all other subjects.
 6. Waldorf schools perceive all learning as a creative process.
 7. Teaching main lessons provides the opportunity for deepening curriculum.
 8. Teachers are aware of themselves as an example.
 9. Waldorf schools develop the innate receptiveness of a child.
 10. Waldorf schools create a safe and trustworthy learning environment.
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the Netherlands, people generally make a distinction between public schools (state-funded), which accept all students and are neutral in their worldview, and non-public schools (also state-funded). The non-public schools can be method schools (Dalton, Montessori, Freinet, Jenaplan) or worldview schools (for instance, Protestant, Roman Catholic, general Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu). It is unclear whether this discussion and this distinction between method or worldview is important for the general public.

The Perceived Relation Between Dutch Waldorf Education, Anthroposophy, Anthroposophical Agriculture and Anthroposophical Medicine

Rooted in anthroposophy, Waldorf schools in the Netherlands “use” anthroposophy in different degrees. Some schools would study and read the works of Rudolf Steiner together weekly and have a portrait of Rudolf Steiner on the walls of the school. In other schools, anthroposophy and the works of Steiner are more perceived as the origin of Waldorf schools, which are not studied actively but “used” as a source of inspiration and origin. In the campaign for new teachers, the *Dutch Waldorf Association* presents Waldorf schools as a school with a warm atmosphere, where you can be yourself and there is room for creativity and “Waldorf pedagogy”. There is no reference to anthroposophy or Steiner. This emphasis on creativity and a warm atmosphere is different from the current debate and policy in the Netherlands to focus on “the basis”, which is interpreted as a focus on mathematics and the Dutch language (reading and writing) (Onderwijsraad; 2022). Parents who chose to send their children to Waldorf schools in the Netherlands stated that they are not so much connected with anthroposophy (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2015). Similar to most movements, there are more conservative and “hardcore” schools and more progressive and innovative Waldorf schools in the Netherlands. Research is needed to gain insight into the (perceived) relation of Dutch Waldorf schools with anthroposophy. A few cases are known where teachers at a Waldorf school desire a different relation or closer connection between Waldorf education and anthroposophy. In these few cases, sometimes teachers leave a Waldorf school to start their own non-funded Waldorf school.

The *Dutch Anthroposophical Society* (a part of the Dornach-based *General Anthroposophical Society*) is the overarching association in which multidisciplinary activities regarding anthroposophical healthcare, agriculture and education can be found. For instance, there is a study group on medical-educational topics. At the *University of Applied Sciences Leiden*, there are two research groups related to anthroposophy; one concerns anthroposophical health care and one Waldorf education. The aims of the research group on anthroposophical health care are to optimise, monitor, validate and contribute to the professionalisation of health care professionals in the domain of anthroposophical health care (University of Applied Sciences Leiden, 2023). The aims of the research group on Waldorf education are:

- Build knowledge and understanding of purposes and practices in contemporary Waldorf education.

- Explore and evaluate innovative practices in Waldorf education.
- Contribute to the professional development of present and future educators in Waldorf schools.

(Mayo, 2018, p. 269)

Both research groups are funded by the *University of Applied Sciences* itself and receive additional funding from the Dutch Waldorf movement and anthroposophical health care movement in The Netherlands. In addition, both research groups acquire funding through grant applications.

For some schools and parents who perceive anthroposophy as their worldview or lifestyle, the combination of attending Waldorf school, having an anthroposophical general practitioner and eating bio-organic food is self-evident. An example of this can be found in the Camphill communities in the Netherlands (Camphill Nederland, n.d.). On the other hand, there are also many parents who send their children to Waldorf schools just for the school itself and who do not affiliate with anthroposophy, health care or agriculture, as was shown by a survey of the *Dutch Waldorf Association* (van Baars & Harmsen, 2022, December 5; Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2015). There is, however, research that shows that parents and students who choose Dutch Waldorf schools do so because of the *Bildung* aspect and the importance of arts and creativity and personal development of students (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2015). This might be related to the societal tendency to focus on mathematics and the Dutch language, which might lead to parents choosing a school with the mindset of whole child development.

Changes Over Time in Dutch Waldorf Education (Institutions, Organisations and Practices)

Due to societal changes at the end of the 20th century (globalisation, technological developments), the quality of education according to “society” was “defined by the extent to which it contributed to the economic progress of society”, with an emphasis on economic participation and the importance of qualification for specific jobs (Mayo, 2018, p. 270). These developments gave rise to governmental policies and preferences regarding assessment results.

As part of a larger reform in Waldorf education in 2000 in the Netherlands, a transition took place in the Dutch Waldorf education school system. The Waldorf schools adapted towards the governmental organisational system in which primary schools consist of eight years (students age 4–12), where there was an additional year formerly. Also, the schools embraced the system of exams and (standardised) assessment and national examination, both in primary and secondary Waldorf education. Where formerly all students stayed in school till 12th grade and received a vocational certification as the only option, now also certificates for pre-university education are an option for students, and depending on their desired level of certification, students stay in school till the 10th, 11th or 12th grade (Mayo, 2018; Steenbergen, 2009).

Within Waldorf schools, this development is evaluated differently. Some educators feel that the core Waldorf principles are difficult to maintain in the new system, while others value the innovation in Waldorf schools to prepare students for societal challenges. Nowadays, Waldorf education has gained popularity, is growing in number (Vereniging van Vrijescholen, 2022a) and is accepted in Dutch society (Mayo, 2018). With solid national rankings, Waldorf education has, in the last decades, been seen by parents as a good school with room for creativity and broad personal identity development of children (Mayo, 2018).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter focused on the perception of Waldorf education in the Netherlands. The research question was: How has Waldorf education in the Netherlands developed since the foundation of the first Dutch Waldorf school in 1923? The development can be characterised in a few ways: In terms of absolute student growth, Waldorf education started small in 1923 and has been increasing in number (of schools and students) ever since. Waldorf education has gained popularity over the years and is accepted in Dutch society. Especially in the last decade, the number of Waldorf schools and students increased. In terms of worldview or the role of anthroposophy, Waldorf education has developed in the last century towards multiple perspectives and interpretations of the core principles or concepts of Waldorf education. The role and interpretation of anthroposophy varies within and among Waldorf schools. Research about Waldorf education in the Netherlands is scarce, and more research would provide insight into how Waldorf education is perceived in the Netherlands, how students perceive the added value of Waldorf education and which role the tradition of 100-year-old Waldorf education in the Netherlands can play in the future.

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