

# An inquiry into Steiner Graduate Outcomes in Australia and New Zealand: The role played by ‘subjectification’ in Steiner pedagogy

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**ABSTRACT.** In our research project we explored attitudes of Steiner Waldorf alumni and graduates to their education. We explored features they valued and whether they felt that their education had delivered on their expectations and needs. A further key question focused on their views of the role of *anthroposophy* in Steiner Waldorf education. In reviewing our findings, certain thematic topics resonated through the graduates' reflections: we found that their education had in some way defined their sense of themselves and their identity. Graduates expressed that their capacities, and the values and beliefs that shape who they are today, in their personal, career and social lives were strongly moulded by their schooling experiences. We were intrigued to discover a strong correspondence between the features they valued the most and the core 'Pedagogical Values' of Wisdom, Life, Love, and Voice as characterised by Gidley (2009, 2016, 2022) and applied as guiding principles in the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework (SEA, 2011; Haralambous, 2018). In this article we review the graduates' comments on the formation of their values and sense of self-identity through the lens of Steiner's (1894/1964) philosophy of *ethical individualism* and Biesta's (2022) idea of *subjectification*.

**Keywords:** Graduate outcomes, anthroposophy, pedagogical values, ethical individualism, subjectification

## A brief overview of our research study

A full report of the Australian Steiner Graduate Outcomes Research Project that includes detailed figures, tables, and graphs, is freely available on the web pages of Steiner Education Australia (Haralambous & Carey, 2021). In this article we expand on the discussion of key themes that emerged from our data and focus on the way in which Steiner Waldorf graduates and alumni described their beliefs, values, and sense of self-identity. We were strongly guided, in the planning and delivery of our research project, by previous Steiner Waldorf graduate outcomes research studies, particularly those undertaken in America (Safit, Gerwin, Stokes & Starzynski, 2020), and the most recent project carried out in Germany (Randoll & Peters, 2021). We are deeply grateful to Dirk Randoll and Jurgen Peters who were willing to share their research questions and data with us. This generous gesture enabled us to embed a comparative international component into our analysis of the data we collected. The American Steiner Waldorf researchers noted in their research publication (Safit, Gerwin, Stokes & Starzynski, 2020) that it was not their intention (in their project or report), to attempt an evaluation of Steiner Waldorf education, nor to assess the efficacy of specific schools. Following in their footsteps, we too shunned this intention, and aimed instead to identify, from the reflections of teachers, graduates, and alumni, trends that are influencing the Steiner Waldorf school movement, and to draw global comparisons relating to strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of the pedagogy.

We were led, in our collection and interpretation of data, by a Mixed Method of Inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), and principles which inform Qualitative Research, Participatory Action Research (Kemmis, 2008) and Contemplative Inquiry (Haralambous, 2016; Kresin-Price, 2013; Zajonc, 2009). Data were collected from alumni *from all* the Steiner Waldorf High Schools in the six states in Australia: NSW, VIC, WA, SA, QLD, ACT, and four schools from two capital city regions in New Zealand: Auckland and Wellington. Our sample covered around half of the schools operating over the past 40 years (because we only included those with high schools). Data collection instruments included: an online survey, 13 graduate/alumni focus group interviews with 32 graduates and alumni, and two teachers' focus group interviews with eight teachers (Haralambous & Carey, 2022, p.9).

We expanded the reach of our survey by drawing on social networking sites as a way of communicating with Steiner/Waldorf graduates, which meant that through "snowballing" the survey link was passed on to other Steiner Waldorf alumni (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.9). Survey completion was voluntary and anonymous, and participants could opt out of the survey at any point as directed through the Research Project Information Sheet and consent information (Human Research Committee, Ethics approval [number blinded]).

The kind sharing of data for this purpose, enabled us to draw comparisons of our survey results with two recent similar surveys: German Waldorf graduate alumni ( $N=1,770$ ) (Randoll & Peters, 2021) and US Waldorf graduate alumni ( $N=438$ ) (Safit et al., 2020). In the case of the US data, we were not able to make direct comparisons because only aggregated data were available. As the German researchers were able to provide all their raw data for statistical purposes, we used the German survey as the basis for the design of our survey and replicated many of their survey scales. Given that our sample size was considerably smaller than either of these research studies we applied Welch's independent samples t-test:

To deal with the unbalanced sample of  $N=165$  Australian/NZ respondents compared to the comparison group of  $N=1770$  German respondents, for statistical tests comparing group means, a random sample of  $n=165$  responses were extracted from the German data set. Welch's independent samples t-test was used for this purpose because it copes with incidences of unequal variance in the samples being compared. In the case of comparing proportions with descriptive statistics, the whole German data set ( $N=1770$ ) was used in a comparison with the ( $N=165$ ) Australian/ NZ data set. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.9)

As noted above, 'this purposive sample' can only be interpreted as 'indicative of the school experience and graduate outcomes of Steiner Waldorf graduates' and 'cannot be used to make claims inferring representation of the whole population because random sampling of the Australian/NZ Steiner Waldorf population was not possible with the sample size (ibid., p.9).

## A comparative review of tertiary qualifications and career pathways of Steiner graduates

The highest level of tertiary education obtained by the Steiner/Waldorf graduate sample ( $n=109$  responses) was elicited using the Australian qualification categories to enable direct comparison with the Australian Bureau of Statistics population data for all Australian graduates (ABS, 2016 census, Figure 1) shown as relative proportions. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.12)



Figure 1: Comparison of tertiary qualifications of Steiner Waldorf and Australian graduates  
(Sources: ABS, 2016 census, Figure 1; Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Figure 2, p.12).

### Comments on Figure 1:

In our Steiner Waldorf graduate<sup>1</sup> sample, nearly half of them (49%) hold a bachelor's degree, which is higher than the national proportion of around a third (31%) of tertiary qualified graduates in Australia. As the graph indicates, this means that a smaller proportion (an eighth or 12%) of our graduates hold a Certificate III or IV trade certificate, compared with the national proportion of a third (or 33%). It is possible that our study drew Steiner Waldorf graduates who hold postgraduate qualifications and who were possibly more interested in research and therefore more willing to participate in our project. Whatever the reason, our data shows that a greater proportion of the Steiner Waldorf graduate sample hold a postgraduate degree than the national proportion.

It is interesting to note the *human-centred* nature of the choices made by Steiner graduates in Australia and New Zealand. The larger proportion of tertiary education programs they selected were the Arts and Humanities (20.37%), Health and Welfare (19.44%), and Education (17.59%), followed by Social Sciences, Journalism & Information (12.04%), and Business, Administration and Law (11.11%). Their choice of Arts and Humanities is *four times higher* than the national average (4.71%) and for Education, *nearly twice* as high (9.89%) (ABS, 2016). By comparison, the most popular career choices in the broader Australian population (ABS, 2016) were associated with the sectors of Business, Administration, and Law (25.14%) and Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction (19.59%). Less than half this proportion of Steiner Waldorf graduates chose careers from these sectors. Our findings are aligned with those of Safit et al. (2020) who also note that the most popular tertiary study programs and career choices of their Steiner Waldorf graduates were in the Arts and Humanities, and Social and Behavioural Sciences. Similarly, Randoll & Peters (2021) found that their Waldorf students chose a career in the field of 'health, social affairs, teaching and education' more often than in the general German population (p.34). These authors also note that 3.4% (N = 64) of the Waldorf graduates they surveyed observed that they have followed typically "anthroposophical" professions, such as 'teacher at a forest village school', 'eurythmist', or 'support worker', and that these findings support their earlier data (Barz & Randoll, 2007).

1. We interviewed both recent graduates and alumni but for ease of expression we will refer to both as graduates in the remainder of this article.

## The role of Anthroposophy<sup>2</sup> in Steiner Waldorf education

Following the example of Randoll & Peters (2021, p.108), we explored ‘whether a deeper commitment to the pedagogy is likely to be carried over by generations of ‘traditional’ Steiner Waldorf graduates which may then strengthen the ethos of schools (Haralambous & Carey, 2021), or alternatively, whether a weakening of key anthroposophical principles may make the delivery of characteristic pedagogical features, such as Main Lessons, eurythmy,<sup>3</sup> and Steiner-inspired festivals, more challenging to maintain (p.24).

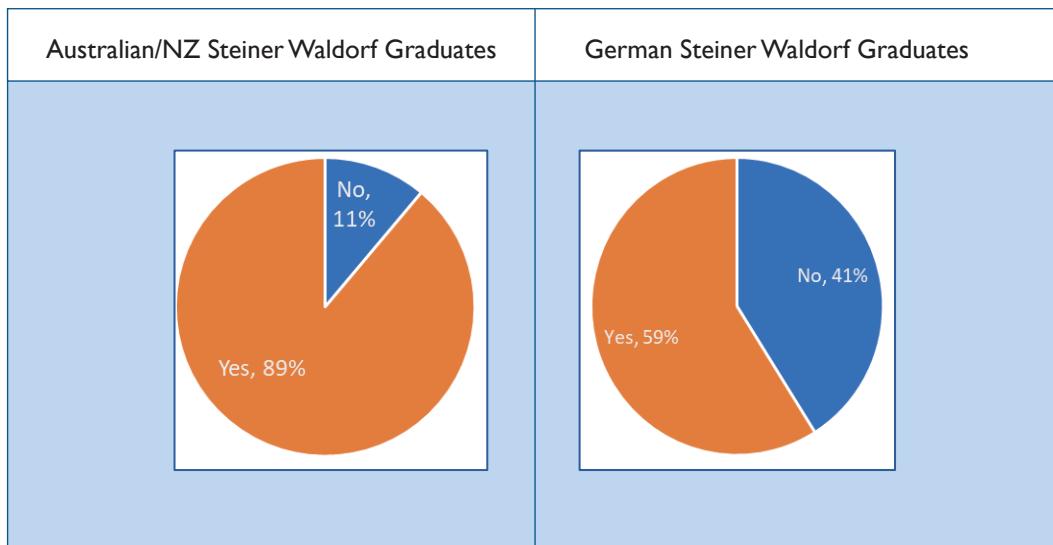


Figure 2: Comparative relevance of Steiner Waldorf pedagogy (Survey Question 26: *Do any aspects of the anthroposophical/philosophical foundations of Steiner Waldorf education have any relevance in your life now?*)  
Source: Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Figure 9, p.25.

### Comments on Figure 2:

Two other questions in our survey related to this inquiry:

*Question 24: If you had the choice, would you go to a Steiner/Waldorf School again today? YES/NO*

*Question 34: If you have children, do/did you apply aspects of Steiner Waldorf educational philosophy when raising your children? (YES/NO)<sup>4</sup>*

While these responses (to Question 26) suggest that the anthroposophical principles underpinning Steiner Waldorf education have a longer lasting influence on Australian/NZ graduates (89%) than they have on German graduates (59%) (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.24), responses to Question 24, which yielded the same 89% positive weighting in both data sets, (that they would choose to attend a Steiner school again), indicate that both German and Australian/NZ graduates continue to feel a strong commitment to Steiner education. Further analysis of our data, and that from the German study, reveals that what graduates value are mostly the *pedagogical* rather than the *anthroposophical* features (Randoll, 2021, p.68), such as:

2. Anthroposophy, meaning ‘love of the wisdom of humanity’ is the name Steiner gave his philosophy

3. Steiner (1923) describes eurythmy as “visible speech, visible music.” Gestures, movements and colours express sounds and rhythms of speech and tones and rhythms of music.

4. We also asked about parental motives of Australian/NZ graduates for enrolling their children in a Steiner Waldorf school and provide a comparative review of our findings in relation to German graduates (Jurgens & Peters, 2021) in our Research Report (see Figure 18 in Appendix IV). ‘The ‘pedagogical’ and ‘traditional’ motives (family members attended a Steiner Waldorf school) are stronger in the German responses, probably because the schools have been established for longer than the ones in Australia’ (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.55).

... [The] holistic values, and their application in child rearing practices and life choices, love of nature, outdoor activities, and environmental awareness; commitment to sustainable living and health-oriented lifestyles; and creative practices of music, crafts, and art. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.24)

One area where pedagogical and anthroposophical features overlapped was in the celebration of *Steiner-inspired rituals and festivals*.

## Pedagogical values

Steiner (1921/1986) strongly recommended that the anthroposophical principles which underpin and inform Steiner pedagogy<sup>5</sup> should not be explicitly taught to students (pp. 127-130). While it is important for teachers to know and understand the pedagogy, they should impart the values in a *living* way by enacting them in their teaching and interactions with students, colleagues and parents. Most of the graduates, apart from some who have become Steiner teachers and/or are parents of children attending Steiner schools, noted that they still lack knowledge of the underlying principles of the pedagogy.

I have never read or learnt any [Anthroposophical principles] personally so the only influence that [Anthroposophy] has in my life now would be what has been incorporated into my life through my education and upbringing. I do associate the development of many of my passions in life with the upbringing and education I received.

When I had my second child [...], I [studied] Steiner early childhood ... coming back to it as an adult ... to some of the theory and reading some of the lectures that Steiner gave, [...] suddenly there were these little light bulb moments of, 'oh, that was what that was all about,' [which I had not realised] as a child because [I was] just in [my] little wonderful world as a child (Marian, FG4, p.12)

It therefore came as a surprise to us to hear graduates identifying qualities associated with Steiner pedagogical principles as the values they held in highest esteem. In her in-depth study and research of Steiner's texts and lectures, Gidley (2016, 2022) identifies and names the 'Pedagogical Values of Wisdom, Life, Love, and Voice' as thematic principles that underlie Steiner's educational indications.<sup>6</sup> In the *Educational Foundations* papers (SEA, 2011; Haralambous, 2018), which review the academic underpinnings of the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework (SEA, 2011), these pedagogical values are applied as nodal points for comparative dialogue between principles of the Australian National Curriculum and guidelines that inform Steiner curriculum (Gidley, 2022, slide 45).

**Pedagogy of Wisdom**, Gidley (2016) observes, is characterised by an integral, balanced, and well-rounded approach to education that is supported through the implementation of holistic teaching and learning strategies (p.149), multi-modal learning modes, and the valuing of multiple intelligences, creativity, and complexity' (Gidley, 2022, slide 45). These features of the approach are effectively illustrated in one graduate's reflection on what he most valued about his education:

'... exposure to many different skills and ways of learning have helped me a lot in terms of adapting to the university environment.'

Many other graduates, in their responses to our surveys and interviews, observed that they highly valued the *holistic* nature of their education. They appreciated the interconnected quality of the content they studied and their experience of being closely connected with others and with the world around them.

It is one of the strengths of the high school, ... you undertake academic tasks much more holistically. [I also appreciated that] you're in an existing relationship with people who are in class all the time, you know where you need to be. [These] things make such a difference that it's a joyful experience to go to school and learn because you're not dealing with what room number am I in, what cohort, what's this change, et cetera. Having Main Lesson structure allows an embedding into particular curriculum areas over the course of the year that you can

5. For ease of expression, we refer to Steiner Waldorf education and pedagogy as 'Steiner' only in the remainder of the article.

6. The word 'indications' is used for Steiner pedagogical principles because Steiner wished teachers to further develop his concepts and observations (Stockmeyer, 2015).

continue to foster that love and joy of unpacking things and learning new things and exploring, which I just don't think you can do in a standard high school setting. (Ann, Focus Group 9, 57.12)

Ann was not alone in mentioning the Main Lesson, the classic vehicle in Steiner education for the delivery of integrated and *wise* curriculum. Others referred to these aspects of Main Lessons:

A balanced education, doing Main Lessons in more areas than I would have delved into if I had only picked my 5 or 6 VCE subjects.<sup>7</sup>

Large range of topics covered by Main Lessons.

Critical thinking/analysis of information, studying a concept for 4 weeks during (Main Lessons) to compile your own thoughts, and experiences.

Being able to explore different topics through Main Lessons even if some weren't the most exciting subject, to have that opportunity allowed me to have better understanding in life, career opportunities out there, and gain knowledge in different fields that I otherwise would not have. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 16: Pedagogy of Wisdom, p.34)

Gidley (2022) explains that 'complex thinking' is a 'key marker of postformal reasoning.'<sup>8</sup> 'Complexity' enables us to incorporate 'paradox and contradiction' into our thinking, and 'to see things from multiple perspectives' (slide 49). It is a thinking that helps us move away from being 'ego' focused towards a broader, more 'eco-logical' awareness (Scharmer & Kauffer, 2016).

Wisdom is something which strongly opposes human egoism. Wisdom is something which always reckons with the course of universal events. [...]. [A] wise man cannot judge egoistically; for if one learns from the world, and grows in understanding for the world, one allows one's judgment to be corrected by the world; thus, wisdom detaches us from narrow and limited vision and brings us into harmony with itself. (Steiner, 1915)

'Educating with Pedagogical Wisdom,' Gidley observes, enhances the "complexification of thinking and culture" (slide 69). Endorsing this value, graduates mentioned that they appreciated the way multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion were embedded in their education. They commented on:

The diverse range of students attending the school from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Inclusiveness, acceptance, encouragement, diverse learning topics.

Looking out for people who are new.

Willingness to accept and have an interest in all peoples of the world.

Seeing the interconnectedness of the world.

A deep understanding of the connectedness of everything, spiritual awareness, and practice. ((Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 16: Pedagogy of Wisdom, p.34)

Johnny described in more depth his ability to see things from multiple perspectives and to 'understand how other people think':

Steiner education is very good at preparing you for the world and building up resilience. Because of the small nature of the classes you learn how to deal with a lot of different personality types. That's useful in the workforce, especially when you're doing managerial work [...]. There are not very many personalities that surprise you. [...]. Oh, you didn't have to get on with everybody, but you were with them, and so you learn to be very tolerant of lots of different perspectives and get used to having people look at the same subject in very different ways, which helps you to understand how other people think about things rather than just thinking that your way is the right way. I feel that I can give everybody a chance and that I don't just write people off because of how they look or what they're into or something like that. Yeah, I can find interesting things about most people. (Johnny, Focus Group 12, 33:38)

**Pedagogy of Life** is characterised by vitality and thinking that is fluid and organic, mobile and life-enhancing (Gidley, 2016, pp.122, 123; 2022, slide 59). Teaching strategies that support the growth of what Steiner (1894/1964) called *living thinking* (Haralambous, 2016), include process and discovery

7. VCE is the acronym for Victorian Certificate of Education, a school leaving certificate for entry into tertiary studies and employment. (<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/Pages/Index.aspx>).

8. See Gidley (2016) for more detail on postformal thinking and reasoning.

learning (Bruner, 1961/1986), and the diligent observation and appreciation of Nature based on Goethean observation (SEA, 2011, pp.14, 19, 31, 39). Dianna explains what Goethean-inspired teaching meant for her. After completing her Steiner schooling and university education, Dianna enrolled in the Steiner-inspired International Youth Initiative Program.<sup>9</sup>

[The approach at university applied] a completely different way of relating to nature and science which I enjoyed learning to see how they do it. But it was a very reductionist approach and I realized that it did harm me to learn about nature in that way and to see things that I had so much awe for be reduced to numbers and interactions that were just based on this competitive survival of the fittest idea. Now coming back to Goethean science and really seeing how phenomena are something that happen in relation to myself and the object or the thing that you're observing, that's been a really beautiful thing to regain this more direct relational experience between myself and the natural world around me. I am now remembering how we did things in Steiner school, so it feels like after ten years or more, I'm coming back to that and seeing that continuity. But it was absent during the four years at university. (Dianna, Focus Group 11, 35:44)

Many other graduates commented on how much they valued the close connection they formed with the natural world which was fostered through their education. They expressed their appreciation of the natural bushland setting of many schools, outdoor education, and gardening classes. Several graduates shared their love of the outdoors gained from camp experiences.

I absolutely loved the camps. Always talk about them and still very much love doing all those things like hiking, camping. I wouldn't do them now if I hadn't had that experience at school, because I wouldn't be confident in just going out with a backpack for several days. (Natalie, Focus Group 4)

Some of the outdoor stuff really pushed me beyond my comfort zone. I just remember really struggling with the actual walk sometimes, but always with that was the beauty and wonder in the morning when you get up, the dawn and the mist, but also then the triumph when you get to the end, and you've survived and you can talk about it. So even at the time, while I might not have liked them, I always felt good about them afterwards. (Marian, Focus Group 4)

Gidley (2022) observes that Pedagogy of Life aims to enhance ecological and environmental awareness and awaken an understanding of sustainable and regenerative lifestyles and practices (slide 45). By imagining life processes observed in Nature in their minds (when applying Goethean methods), students are taught to strengthen their capacity for creating rich inner pictures and images (Haralambous, 2011; Haralambous, 2014). This kind of living thinking, as a form of imagination, also nurtures the growth of empathy (Haralambous, 2016, pp.93, 103, 236), the ability to imagine how other people are feeling, as reflected in this survey comment:

I was encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility to leave a positive influence on the environment and the people in my life. (Survey comment)

The integral nature of Steiner education means that the pedagogical values are implemented in an interconnected manner. The growth of *living thinking* is supported by the integrated delivery of Pedagogical Wisdom and Life, through multi-modal teaching strategies and the interweaving of aesthetic practices, such as art, music, Bothmer gymnastics, eurythmy,<sup>10</sup> and crafts into all subjects of the curriculum.

The overwhelming thing that I've realized is that my education helped me to understand the connectedness of everything. I never grew up feeling like art was separate from science, or that language was separate from mathematics. I never felt that you need to look at one discreet thing. I thought everybody else understood that too, but I have realized that's not the case, that a lot of other people see things in a very segmented way. (Louise, Focus Group 4)

It's probably the enduring faith that keeps coming back to this word 'connection,' that we're all connected, that we are of one. There is a sense of relevance between us and the natural world and each other, and all our intentions. It's [therefore] okay that there's so much difference, and that little things matter in that sense of

9. <https://yip.se/>

10. For eurythmy, see note #3 above. Bothmer gymnastics is a form of gymnastic movements based on Steiner's view of human development.

relationship, between the many different things in our existence. That [sense of connection] is just so deeply in me, and it helps. (Brenda, FG10, 01:36:41)

**Pedagogy of Love** builds on the foundations of the interconnections between self, others and the natural world that are fostered through Pedagogical Wisdom and Life. Critical of sentimentality in relationships (Steiner, 1928, 1947), which he referred to as ‘a kind of deafness,’ Steiner (1923/1966) presented a new view of love as a ‘cognitive force’ (Haralambous, 2016, pp.110, 258; Nesfield-Cookson, 2011). He explains that the way we think has a *formative*, and potentially positive and creative influence on others and happenings or events in the world around us. His thinking here is aligned with more recent ‘evental’ philosophies (Ben-Aharon, 2011). As our thinking is moulded according to our assumptions, beliefs, values, and world views, it is of paramount importance for teachers to examine and review their thinking and to constantly reshape it according to the main task Steiner set teachers of trying to understand human development through a ‘soul-spiritual’ lens:

The first thing we gave teachers in the seminar was a basic knowledge of the human being. We hoped that, by contemplating the true nature of humanity, inner enthusiasm and love for education would grow within them. With such knowledge comes a spontaneous love for humanity that is the very best quality for the practice of education. Pedagogy is a love for humanity, resulting from knowing humanity, and only on this basis can it be established. (Steiner, 1923, p.77)

Gaining a *soul-spiritual* understanding of the human being cannot be achieved by only undertaking a course of study, but by following an ongoing pathway of inner growth and maturation towards living thinking (Haralambous, 2016) and what Gidley (2016, 2022) calls ‘postformal reasoning.’ Pedagogical Love is therefore embedded in a ‘spiritual education’ characterised by ‘conscious, compassionate, spiritual development’ (Gidley, 2022, slides 55 & 56). The collaborative aspiration of the Faculty of Teachers to develop a *basic knowledge of the human* being strengthens the *cognitive force* of Pedagogical Love. Ruby observed that the ‘all-encompassing, bigger spiritual picture’ of child development which is held by the ‘collective’ is one of the defining features of Steiner education.

I did a postgrad paper a few years ago on Steiner pedagogical ways of educating. Our lecturer [asked us] what makes a Waldorf or Steiner classroom? What is it? We talked about it a lot. Eventually he said that for him [...] you could take the room away and the desks, paintings. [...]. All those trappings that people tend to go on about, don’t matter. [...]. It really comes down to that spiritual picture, [...], of the relationship between the teacher and the child, and that picture of development. That is how I see things as well. It really doesn’t matter whether you’re teaching under a tree or whether you’re teaching in a classroom with all the silks and whatever. It’s so much more about that development. That’s what I’ve seen when I’ve gone to many different schools, that relationship between the teachers and the children and young people. [...] a sense of care that is enacted for each one [...] there’s such a lot of care given. (Ruby, Focus Group 8, 18:06)

The observation concerning the importance of ‘care’ was reiterated by Sally:

[...] at school, [...] I always felt respected and seen. Without even realizing it, [...], I don’t know what the magic sauce is in a Steiner school, but [...] I would say that at school I felt calm and safe and confident in that environment. And I felt like who I was, was fun. I didn’t feel like I had to change, to be different to be good or something. [...]. So it probably was just in the ether and the attitude of all the teachers, I think they just love and care so much. That’s what they teach you at the Steiner school and that is just the foundation that makes all the difference. (Sally, Focus Group 7, 33:50)

While Pedagogical Love may sound idealistic, the value has practical ramifications that build respect for self, others, and the environment. The ‘*trappings*’ to which Ruby refers find their place within the deeper context of the pedagogical ‘*foundation that makes all the difference*.’ Sally, expanded on the nature of the respect to which she referred:

I was at a good state school ... and remember being astounded by the lack of respect in basic ways that I hadn’t even realized Steiner had. I’d always appreciated my education, but I hadn’t realized how basic respect was just baked into everything. The paper we use, the pens, the crayons. [...]. I don’t think it was perfect, but there was always this basic level of respect, like the teachers respect the students and of course, the students respect the teachers. ... Suddenly for the first time, I was using exercise books that were just A4 paper and ballpoint pens,

and there were no Main Lesson books. Everyone's handwriting was so messy, and people were cheating off each other all the time. I came from this idea where, when we did a test at the end of a Main Lesson in high school, my mindset was I wanted to see how much I'd learned so I would never cheat. (Sally, Focus Group 7, 5:15)

Pedagogical Love then, inspires not only a close and meaningful relationship between teachers and their students, but a love of learning as well, as noted in these survey comments:

Joy of learning – Lessons were extremely engaging, so much so that I never wanted to miss a day of school – Enjoyment in going to school, with school feeling like another home.

One of the teachers we interviewed reinforced Sally's observation.

I think the students value their close relationship with their teachers which inspires them to be a lot more giving. They do ask a lot of questions and they're very keen to learn for the sake of learning, is my experience overall. I don't know if it's worth making the comparison because it was probably twenty years ago that I was a teacher in private schools across Sydney. But those schools were obviously very marks driven and very competitive. ... The emphasis shifts in a Steiner school. There's still a healthy level of competition and striving. But I see the students, particularly with the way in which they're educated in the primary school, that they become disappointed if learning becomes something that is for an exam or for some other purpose other than learning itself. It's like, we just want to learn this because it's worth learning. And it's interesting. And it's deep and it's wonderful. I mean, I'm generalizing, but that's been my experience. Definitely. (Stephanie, Teacher Focus Group 2, 11:04)

The love that forms between teachers and their students is often long-lasting as Ian points out in this anecdote.

Funnily enough, we just got a Messenger group set up on Facebook. [...]. We just found out that our class teacher is retiring this year. One of the students reached out to our entire alumni group from the class of Year Eight, which we completed in 2000, so that we could all share some messages to send to this teacher, 21 years later, as he retires. We wanted to share where we're at in our lives now and to thank him for the positive impact that he has had on our lives. (Ian, Focus Group 13, 23:19)

**Pedagogy of Voice** is the foundational value in Steiner pedagogy. The oft-quoted maxim that Steiner education strives to support students to find 'purpose and direction' in their lives (Marie Steiner, 1923), expresses the overall orientation of Steiner's ethical philosophy and pedagogy, for, as Gidley (2016) observes 'even an education that is caring, lively and wise will not be effective in the long run if young people are not empowered to find their voice' (p.249). By implementing teaching strategies that provide students with the scaffolding they need for deep learning (Angelo, 2021) and deep knowing, teachers trust that students will be able to 'find their voices,' (Gidley, 2022, slide 45), and have the self-confidence and moral strength to voice their opinions and enact novel and creative 'deeds of love' (Steiner, 1894/1964).

Yvonne told us that one of the gifts of her Steiner education is her capacity to express her opinions to others.

I've come out with a real conviction that I have a right to have a voice at the table. And I'm not sure whether that comes from my home life, or from the school, [...] it's just part of who you are because you were immersed in it. (Yvonne, Focus Group 2, 42.50)

In the surveys many students also referred to their capacity for confidence in speaking, and for voicing their opinions.

Opportunities for growth and development of self-confidence, especially public speaking. – I gained so much confidence being cast as a lead role in our play for which I would never otherwise have auditioned. It changed my whole perspective on my ability to speak for myself with conviction. – Having a voice and sometimes having a say in how and what we wanted to be educated in (in the latter years anyway). (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 17: Pedagogy of Wisdom, p.35)

Gidley (2022) identifies Pedagogical Voice as an empowering force (slide 43). Lisa, who works as a nurse in the 'outback' in Australia, shared with us how important she feels it is for young people to 'have a sense of their power.'

I think particularly in our time, with capitalism in its death throes, the environment in a precarious situation, and many social structures in the world falling over, having a level of resilience as a young person and knowing you have some picture of your power as a young person is really important. I work with a lot of young people, most of whom have never been to Steiner school, and I see that there's so much in the world that can look frightening to them. [...].

I do think that young children need to have an underlying picture that the world is a good place, that people are good, and that they can grow a love for the natural world, because I think it can then carry them through some of the scarier times that I see young people going through [when] they're on antidepressants and unable to cope. So, I don't know if it's the influence of Steiner education, but it is an interesting coincidence that Steiner students have a level of resilience and take leadership around some of [these issues] I think. (Lisa, Focus Group 6, 1.06.57)

Pedagogical Voice has a literal as well as a symbolic application, in the value Steiner pedagogy places on the spoken word and language. Teachers enact this value, when they include 'poetic recitation, singing, drama and natural conversation,' pay attention to 'silent spaces and sensitive sounds' (Gidley, 2016, p. 260), and when they give students 'opportunities to voice their hopes, fears, interests and dreams' (p.261).

Pedagogy of Voice is the main vehicle for the delivery of teaching goals and strategies associated with the growth of self-identity and self-realisation, with the capacities that Biesta (2020) identifies with subjectification. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.34)

## **Capacities: the mark of a Steiner Waldorf graduate**

In a couple of interviews, graduates noted that some friends and colleagues tell them that they 'bear a mark of difference.'

One day I told my older German colleague that I went to a Steiner school. And he said: 'That's what it is about you. I knew there was something different but now that I know you went to a Steiner school, I understand what that is. I just thought you had extraordinary parents.' And then he corrected himself again and said: 'Well, you did have extraordinary parents because they sent you to a Steiner school.' (Cheryl, Focus Group 6, 40:46)

Lisa, who was in Cheryl's group, then responded:

I have that same experience. Quite often people ask, what is it? And when they find out that I went to a Steiner school they say: 'Oh, that makes sense.' (Lisa, Focus Group 6, 42:31)

Melanie then suggested capacities of Steiner graduates that may account for this difference:

I think maybe ... we just see the world differently. We embrace every person that we meet, we meet every person just as who they are. I don't judge a person, I just meet each person. As themselves. And maybe, we're good at listening. At having a conversation with a person and really listening and being interested in what they've got to say. We're really good listeners, I think after all those stories and all the recall. (Melanie, Focus Group 6, 42:45)

Louise, in a different Focus Group, reflected that she feels that she *does* think differently as the fruit of her Steiner experience:

I have had the experience [of people asking me] where I went to school. And when I say: 'I went a Steiner school,' if people have heard of it, they say: 'Oh, well, that explains you.' And I think: 'What do you mean that explains me?' But then, perhaps I do think differently. And I guess I wear that as a badge of honour, too. I quite like thinking differently. (Louise, Focus Group 4)

When analysing our data, we were intrigued by these comments which raised further questions for us. If our participants, (and the others whom they report), recognize that Steiner graduates *bear the mark of difference*, what capacities are associated with this difference? We wondered whether Melanie's suggestions about 'different worldview,' 'respect towards other people,' and 'good listening skills' are collaborated in our data, and what other capacities characterise Steiner graduates.

In the survey they designed, Randoll & Peters (2021) identified a list of potential capacities that Steiner graduates may have developed in response to the influence of Steiner Education on their personal development. In our survey, we used the same list which enabled us to draw comparisons between their

participants and the Australian/New Zealand ones. Strong correspondences in the data across the two studies endorse the positive, more global influence of Steiner pedagogy.

The responses are consistently affirmative, with an overall positive influence on personal development proportions ranging from 72.7% for c) My 'capacity to engage with strangers,' to 95.2% for a) My 'creative capacity' (combined rather positive and positive influence). (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 21, p.39)

**Table 1:** Comparative survey of German and Australian/NZ graduates' attitudes towards how Steiner Waldorf learning activities influenced their personal development.

Steiner Waldorf influence on personal development	Aust/NZ responses					Mean importance**		Mean diff. (p)
	Negative influence	Rather negative influence	Neither negative nor positive	Rather positive influence	Positive influence	Aust/NZ	German	
a) My creative capacity	0.6%	1.8%	2.4%	28.5%	66.7%	3.65	3.69	.506
b) My capacity for resilience	3.0%	1.2%	8.5%	30.3%	57.0%	<b>3.54</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>.000*</b>
c) My capacity to engage with strangers	3.6%	3.0%	20.6%	32.1%	40.6%	3.38	3.49	.205
d) My capacity to look confidently into the future	3.6%	0.6%	17.0%	31.5%	47.3%	3.47	3.36	.187
e) My self-esteem (in the sense of 'I am worth something')	3.0%	2.4%	19.4%	25.5%	49.7%	3.51	3.37	.088
f) My self-confidence (in the sense of: 'I can do something')	3.0%	2.4%	12.1%	27.9%	54.5%	<b>3.52</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>.032*</b>

\* Higher average scores equal more positive influence.

(Source of German data: Randoll & Peters, 2021; Source of Australian/NZ data Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 21, p.39).

### Comments on Table 1:

As we noted in our Research Report, in our survey Australian/NZ Steiner Waldorf alumni responded with a significantly higher level of positive influence than the German ones for:

b) 'My capacity for resilience'

and for

f) 'My self-confidence (in the sense of: 'I can do something').'

However, Australian/NZ Steiner Waldorf alumni responded with a *statistically equivalent level of positive influence* to the German ones for all the other categories of influence in Table 1 (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, p.40).

Some of the data we collected from the interviews, and longer comments in the survey, fleshed out in more detail what the listed capacities (in **Table 1** above) meant for some of the participants.

**Table 2:** Comments on the influence of Steiner education on graduates' personal development

CREATIVE CAPACITIES
I think one of the strengths of a Steiner education, is creating such a broad holistic set of creative opportunities that you don't get anywhere else. But then allowing students to weave their own path and focus more on music if that's what they want, or to provide more creative outlets through science. For me, natural science is what motivated me. I had such a strong grounding in what's important in supporting the environment, supporting people. And that's where my work has culminated now. (Ian, Focus Group 13, 12:19)
I can approach situations personally and professionally with creative ideas and solutions – Finding balance in my life because I have a creative outlet/skill set and interests in many areas. My colleagues also comment that I'm very practical ... in my thought processes but also in the work I do.
I am a woman in engineering, a very male dominated profession but I distinctly remember my Year 8 Steiner Class Teacher in Canada telling me she thought I could be an astronaut and letting my play with the safe physics equipment from our Main Lesson during lunch and recess. The creativity she allowed helped cement my love of science and my belief that scientists should be taught a broader education. In the mainstream system where students are segregated into faculties at a younger age, scientists are not necessarily taught how to dream and be creative, traits needed when innovation bating and problem solving.
RESILIENCE
Resilience, critical thinking, independence – Resilience, openness – Being open to new ideas and learning for life – Resilience and confidence – Confidence in my ability to look after myself – Ability to think outside the box. Where others sometimes struggle with seeing positives or negatives for certain scenarios, I can excel in this – [I am able] to seek outside help when necessary – Learning could be fun, engaging, it was okay to struggle with some things and learn from that, and that everyone was valued/is of value. – I was taught to be persistent and to keep trying even when I want to give up.
CAPACITY TO ENGAGE WITH STRANGERS
Having had that space held for me, that every single human being is true and 'whole-ly' good has helped me. [Understanding that others] might not be in tune with that because they may have had things happen to them that has meant that they are not aware of it. But having that space held in my childhood, as well as in my adulthood, by other people, has supported me to find that again for myself so that I can in turn hold it for other people. It's quite profound ... (Jenny, Focus Group 10, 53:17)
HOPE, AND CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

I think what helped me in my career, I always have hope ... no matter what anybody is experiencing, that there's always hope that things can look different. [...]. I'm hoping that I can share that hope with everybody else to know that there is a place that is less overwhelming and less scary and less difficult. (Lisa, FG6, 8:07)

How to enjoy life! That we live in an extraordinarily beautiful world, and that if we're given a chance to slow down, observe and enjoy it we can become very fulfilled. When you marry the wonders of music, art, literature, geometry, movement, you see that our cultures and ways of living have joy and surprise and wonder in them!

### SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-WORTH

Sense of self, self-love – Independence – To believe in myself and find a way forward even when obstacles are in the way – [I gained] the ability to believe and trust in my abilities as a person and the ability to be confident in who I am – [Steiner education] taught me to see the good in others and have confidence in my own strengths.

### SELF-CONFIDENCE (MY CAPACITY TO DO SOMETHING)

Self-confidence really. I'm very sure of who I am and what I want, and I attribute that to my Steiner upbringing. Reaching a point where I have a pretty good idea of who I am and knowing what I need to do to look after myself.

### Comment on Table 2:<sup>11</sup>

The way graduates describe valued aspects of their Steiner schooling, and skills and capacities developed through their education, offers us an opportunity to hear their individual voices as an expression of the fulfillment of the pedagogical values.

### Subjectification

For me, the resounding aspect that was cultivated through my time at school was my sense of self. I have been given a foundation that has encouraged me to explore who I am and a capacity to take that out into the world. This is consistent with many of the students who come through the Steiner system. In no way are we without our problems, but we are rounded, generally good and interested people who seek to offer something to our community and engage in the world around us. (Survey comment)

Drawing together the thematic threads we have reviewed, in Table 3 below, we illustrate how the Pedagogical Values support the development of certain sets of capacities and life skills.

**Table 3:** Orientation of Pedagogical Values towards the development of skills and capacities

11. The survey is the source of unreference comments. Repetition of words and phrases indicate multiple similar responses. Dashes between phrases and sentences show a new speaker.

<b>Pedagogy of Love</b>	Confidence and creativity Empathy and Community awareness Capacity to: Connect with self, others, and the world Value diversity and inclusivity
<b>Pedagogy of Life</b>	Ecological awareness Capacity to: Transform knowledge into experience Think in a living and imaginative way Connect with Nature in an observant, meaningful and regenerative way
<b>Pedagogy of Wisdom</b>	Empowerment Capacity to: Value multiple perspectives and develop multiple intelligences Understand complexity
<b>Pedagogy of Voice</b>	Finding one's voice Capacity for: Deep knowing Ethical awareness and action (deeds of Love)

Sources: Gidley, 2022, slide 45; Haralambous, 2018, p. 21; SEA, 2011, p.31

### Comments on Table 3:

As noted above, while the Pedagogical Values are delivered in an integrated way, the three values of Love, Life and Wisdom come to fruition in Pedagogy of Voice. Looking back at Table 2, for example, although the capacities listed support Pedagogical Love in particular, *confidence in learning* provides a firm foundation for the later maturation of *self-confidence*, and *ethical action* in their post-school lives and careers, as a manifestation of Pedagogical Voice. To achieve their goals, graduates need to be able to *think imaginatively*, be *empathic*, and feel *empowered to find their voices*.

Another section of Question 21 (in the Survey), focused on the way graduates' Steiner schooling influenced their self-determination (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 18, p.36).

The responses are consistently positive, with an overall positive influence on self-determination proportions of over 85% (combined 'rather positive' and 'positive' influence) for all categories. [...]. Australian/NZ Steiner Waldorf graduates responded with a significantly higher level of positive influence for:

- a) My capacity to express my opinion to others
- b) My capacity to think independently
- c) My capacity to assess my strengths and weaknesses
- f) My willingness to engage with less-interesting topics

- g) My career aspirations
- h) My capacity to form opinions on issues (*Ibid*, pp.36-37)<sup>12</sup>

These categories, created by Randoll & Peters (2021), provide valuable markers for 'self-determination' or what Biesta (2022) calls 'subjectification,' that plays a vital role in Steiner's (1894/1964) *Philosophy of Freedom* or 'ethical individualism.' Characterised as the ability to enact a novel and free deed of love, this 'free' deed is dependent, counter-intuitively, on the growth of a range of prerequisite capacities, such as *empathy* (based on imaginative insight into the feelings of others), *social discernment and skilfulness* (based on an inspired understanding of how to support others), and intuition (based on knowing what to do in a new moral dilemma, *and a highly disciplined will to act*) (Haralambous, 2016).

The pathway of development towards ethical individualism, Steiner observes (1894/1964), is a spiritual one because thinking itself, when it is a *living thinking*, is a *spiritual activity*. Steiner (1923/1966) argues that the growth of ethical individualism is characteristic of a new planetary stage of consciousness that he calls 'consciousness soul,' and Gidley (2016, 2022) updates with the term 'postformal reasoning.' Through the lens of planetary evolution, self-determination or subjectification involves a process of self-transformation from being 'ego' centred to becoming 'eco' focused.

What's being born is less clear but in no way less significant. It's something that we can 'feel' in many places across Planet Earth. This future is not just about firefighting and tinkering with the surface of structural change. It's not just about replacing one mindset that no longer serves us with another. It's a future that requires us to tap into a deeper level of our humanity, of who we really are and who we want to be as a society. It's a future that in those moments of disruption begins to 'presence' itself through us.

[...]. It's a shift that requires us to expand our thinking from the head to the heart. It is a shift from an 'ego'-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an 'eco'-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself. When operating with ego-system awareness, we are driven by the concerns and intentions of our 'small ego' self. When operating with eco-system awareness, we are driven by the concerns and intentions of our emerging or 'essential' self – that is by a concern that is informed by the well-being of the whole. (Scharmer & Kauffer, 2013, pp.1-2)

Both Steiner (1919/1996) and Biesta (2022) argue that before students can undertake the shift towards 'essential' self, they need 'to be 'a' self,' and then they can 'be(come) self-active':

... this is not about being/becoming 'your'self, and particularly not about being yourself in the simplistic sense of just doing what you want to do, but about being 'a' self, being a subject of your own life. (Biesta, 2022, p.46)<sup>13</sup>

The task of the teacher is to summon the child or young person to be a self and fire their will to 'exist as subject of their own life' (pp.46-47). Biesta (2022) notes that 'refusing children or young people the comfort of not being a subject ... is what education as subjectification ... is about' (p.47). Thus, Biesta argues against the kind of 'subject' who can be changed into a 'thing' or 'object' that is 'produced-by interventions-from-the-outside.' Educators should not offer 'templates' or 'images' of what/how their students should become, or 'what they should do with their freedom,' which includes the possible rejection of our call (p.47).

... whether the child or student will respond to the call, is entirely up to them and can neither be produced nor controlled by the educator. That is why what is at stake in subjectification is the freedom of the one being educated. (p.47)

So, while Steiner teachers take care not to teach 'anthroposophy' to their students as a way of protecting their freedom, the students are aware of the background influence of these ideas in the pedagogical strategies and methodology.

The ethical, moral intentions that permeated the teachers and events created a learning environment that felt safer and more supportive which I really appreciated. (Survey comment)

Comments from some of the graduates in response to Question 26 on the influence of anthroposophy on their lives, indicate a positive response to the call to subjectification.

12. Category 'd' identifies the capacity 'to think critically' which is an important facet of self-determination, but which is not included in this list (because Australian/NZ graduates and those in Germany achieved equitable scores here).

13. As I have written all the quotations in this article in italics, I have identified the author's use of italics here with inverted commas.

[Anthroposophy/Steiner educational philosophy] has shaped me – Very relevant to who I am in this world and I’m very grateful to have had it – Helped me understand the world – Spiritual sense of life – Spirituality – True purpose and meaning in life – Ability to think independently and creatively, to forge a future for myself — To think more creatively – Think for myself – Think freely – Think differently – Think independently – Self-assurance & self-confidence, self- identity – I am a grounded person. (Haralambous & Carey, 2021, Table 9, p.25)<sup>14</sup>

Biesta (2022) reflects that the most we as educators can hope for is that our students will allow our teaching to have a voice through their response to our call.

What we hope is that, at some point, students will turn back to us and tell us that what we tried to give them was actually quite helpful, meaningful, even if, initially, it was difficult to receive. At that point we can say that the unidirectional exercise of power transforms into a relationship of authority, where what intervened from the outside is ‘authorised’ by the student – is “allowed” to be an author, is “allowed” to speak and have a voice. (Biesta, 2022, p.56)

Not all the graduates in our study responded in a positive way to their Steiner education. A small minority of graduates felt strongly wronged through a misuse of the ‘unidirectional exercise of power’ of their schooling. We offer our heartfelt compassion to these graduates for the pain they experienced. We also offer our sincere gratitude to the generations of teachers who delivered the high aspirations of Steiner pedagogy, and to the large majority of participants in our study, who acknowledged their education as ‘helpful and meaningful’ and that it lives on in their voices.

I’m very passionate about my Steiner education and I’m a big advocate for the learning style. I’ve learnt to be independent and follow my dreams, to not let others’ opinions or views of me define who I am - I’ve learnt to remain positive and treat everyone with kindness, and I’ve learnt to always have an open mind. I don’t follow a particular religion, but I love all religions and I believe in the world. (Survey comment)

## Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the University of the Sunshine Coast for their partnership with Steiner Education Australia, their administrative support and ethical guidance. We thank Steiner Education Australia for the funding and moral support we received from their office, and the conscientious participation of Steiner school directors and administrations, teachers, and graduates and alumni.

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14. Also see copy of Question 26 on Page 4 above.

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