

The Mission and Teaching of World Languages in Waldorf Schools

Teaching a world language is a multilayered pedagogy that aids in social development and ultimately provides the tools and skills needed to create peace. It is not only through discussion or information that students learn, but through experiences and inner work.

The purpose of language study is to build the capacity that fosters the ability to communicate. Through the art of communication, we meet the essence of another person. This process raises one's social conscience and nurtures an important objective of Waldorf education: to cultivate an interest in others, which will inspire students to share their knowledge, abilities, and experiences. Those who are touched by such an interest will contribute to global understanding and to the progress of humanity. Because of this, world languages in Waldorf schools are an integral part of the curriculum.

The manner in which we think is expressed through the language that we speak. Inherent within every single language lies a distinct and characteristic way of looking at the world, and studying languages is a window into the soul of a different culture, into its genius, individuality, and musicality. In capturing the spirit of the language that molds human beings, one begins not only to understand other cultures, but also to change one's way of thinking, feeling, and willing. Thinking becomes more expansive and the individual is able to penetrate the soul of the other culture. This serves not only to extend the individual's horizon in a formal manner; it also enriches and diversifies his inner life, nurturing his very soul.

Although language expresses the thinking of an individual or culture, it arises from the feeling life. The language is internalized in the child's feelings through the interplay between sympathy and antipathy. This process works on the growth of imaginative thinking and the development of the human being.

The whole manner in which objects are subjectively perceived inevitably forms the structures and usage of language. It is vital, so Steiner maintained, to introduce languages other than one's own as a means of counteracting whatever one-sided influence any particular language has exerted on the developing child. The individual word is created by a perception. It is not an imprint of the object itself, but of the

picture it creates in the soul. By naming and recognizing the objects in the world around him in a different way through the medium of a new language, every child is given the opportunity to break free from the confines of his mother tongue.

Education of this kind prevents children from becoming narrow-minded, nationalistically biased adults. Instead of encouraging attitudes that ultimately separate people and nations from one another, tolerance and mutual understanding between nations are consciously cultivated.

The world language lesson is suited, like practically no other lesson, to encourage openness and awaken interest for what is foreign to oneself – an openness that has an effect on their entire life and especially on their social abilities. This is a pedagogical mission of the first order.

General Objectives for Teaching Spanish in a Waldorf School

- 1. To sow the seed for the learning of Spanish and to develop abilities to communicate in the language.*
- 2. To develop the capacity for understanding and acceptance of a different culture, promoting and generating a feeling of brotherhood among human beings.*
- 3. To discover other points of view, by acquiring the ability to reflect on aspects of one's own culture.*
- 4. To develop and deepen capacities for thinking, and willing through the Spanish language.*
- 5. To develop supportive learning conditions among several disciplines.*
- 6. To foster interest in the future participation of students in local and international multilingual communities.*

***In order to carry out the general objectives,
the world language teachers need to commit themselves to the
following: (short version)***

- 1. Master different forms of artistic expression (drawing, singing, dancing, acting, etc.)*
- 2. Find methods and materials in the language, appropriate for the age group, and according to Waldorf pedagogy, to assist and nurture the children in all their faculties. Be conscious in bringing material that you can weave, expand and deepen as they go through the grades - like a tapestry.*
- 3. Be committed to bringing the language to the students with the appropriate correctness and respect, so that its genius and its spirit will be living in the richness and liveliness that are necessary in the class.*
- 4. Offer the living qualities in the language not only through its artistic and literary expressions, but also as an experience of daily living.*
- 5. Help the class, through pedagogical methods find meaning in what is being taught, especially in the upper grades.*
- 6. Connect with native speakers if you are a nonnative to perfect your pronunciation and grammar. Excellent pronunciation is an invaluable gift to the students. If possible spend a considerable amount of time in a Spanish speaking country.*

K-8 Objectives

Kindergarten

Kindergarten is the ideal time for children to acquire near native pronunciation. There is one lesson per week and it is part of their morning circle. At this age developmentally, the child is the most receptive to “becoming” what he/she is experiencing. If a poem is about the golden leaves of fall and the wind, the child is afforded the opportunity to “be” those elements and live into their essence. The language permeates their being.

First, Second & Third Grades

In the first three grades, the experience of language is completely oral and interactive, just as younger children learn their mother tongue. The children experience the gestures and melody, the rhythm and cadence, the sound and movement of the language. Learning a language immerses the child in the world of the unknown (translation is to be totally avoided) where insecurity and mistakes are part of the learning process. This strengthens the will to learn what is not yet understood. To develop the ability to accept and open up to a learning experience without having an overview or comprehension of it is a special achievement. It asks for courage, and trust in self and others to eventually understand sounds that were once strange, not just to the ear, or the mind. The heart and will have to be engaged to succeed.

These are inner capacities, which are regularly practiced in a world language class, and prepare students for greater capacities in later life. Through gesture, mime, songs, poems, rhymes, games, stories and drama, to name some, the children learn vocabulary and, with their innate ability for imitation, remain connected with the environment and their practical everyday life. The rich thematic variety that is found in their world is reintroduced through the lessons, e.g. nature, colors, parts of the body, clothing, food, numbers, animals, etc. The children learn phrases that become practical expressions, and with recitations rich with lively movements, they eventually form a tapestry of words which become their own.

Fourth & Fifth Grades

Grades four and five are transitional, bridges towards the upper grades. What has already been learned by ear is now reviewed and expanded more consciously. Up to this time, the child is more closely connected to nature and the environment. Between the age of nine and eleven, he begins to experience separation from the environment; he differentiates between himself and his surroundings, while experiencing an increased consciousness of selfhood. The stronger the consciousness of self, the sooner the capacity for imitation diminishes. The child begins to assert himself more and change attitudes and behavior.

In grade four, the student has distanced himself enough from his surroundings so that he perceives people and objects around him in a new light. This is the optimal time to introduce writing in Spanish. By now, they have built up a large “treasure” of poems, stories, etc., having at their disposal a suitable body of language and activities that can be used in the first steps of handling the written word. The next stage, from writing to reading, becomes easier as the students recognize the fact that what they are reading is what they have written. The familiarity of what they have heard manifests into reading success.

In these grades, in order to bring the students a stronger awareness of language structure, they are exposed to the first grammatical elements, going from “the whole to the parts” at first, and a little later, to verb conjugation. This analytical activity awakens the child to a greater understanding, as words already used in vocabulary become consciously manipulated in grammar.

Sixth, Seventh & Eighth Grades

In grades six, seven, and eight, more complex grammatical concepts are presented. These provide important formative elements for the growing capacity of analytical thinking which begins to develop in adolescents. Moreover, the focus on grammar fosters concentration and strengthens the will forces during puberty. Now that the students are more conscious of their own mother tongue, they discover alternative forms of expressing themselves, whether in prose or verse, and they become more aware of the intricate structures of their own language through grammar, syntax, and idiomatic expressions of the world language.

The curriculum also continues to develop the powers of imaginative thinking, which are actively reinforced through the use of verses, poems, plays, tongue twisters, songs, history, biographies, and dialogues.

Language Acquisition

Will the student be fluent in the world language we teach? No! Language acquisition is a complex process that involves communication, grammar, structure, comprehension, and language production along with reading, writing, speaking, and listening and these are a few of the simpler aspects of language learning. Fluency goes beyond “getting by” and even beyond having basic conversational ability in a language.

Learning a language is a subconscious process. While it is happening we are not aware that it is happening. We do not learn consciously. We work on it, don’t get it, stop, come back to it... Learning comes in phases and spurts. There is a subconscious fermenting that we are not aware of. Research shows fluency is achieved between 5,000 and 10,000 hours depending on immersion, class size, frequency and duration, different levels in a class, interest, capacity, tutors, etc. SBS students are exposed to less than 30 hrs. a year. This exposure does not bear tangible fruits immediately, however it has laid a strong foundation for future learning, and is a vital formative experience.

Importance of Parental Confidence

Parents are encouraged to allow their child to enjoy learning Spanish, without the burden of being asked to perform or to recall their lesson. They are like germinating seeds - best left undisturbed. The children immerse themselves in their lessons during class and “feel” the language internally. The ease and confidence at which they can express themselves is very much tied to being in the classroom, a phenomenon called “place memory.”

It is important to note that Waldorf education is not product oriented. It is more important how students acquire knowledge and what kind of experiences they have in the process of learning.