

Survey of Waldorf Graduates, Phase II

Abstract

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It has taken approximately two years to formulate, conduct, and evaluate this survey of North American Waldorf graduates, starting with the first Waldorf senior class in 1943 and culminating with the class of 2004. A rich harvest of statistical and analytic information is now available to be mined by the Research Institute and those who read this study.

The survey, based on a sample of around 550 participants spanning some sixty years, suggests that a majority of Waldorf graduates share many characteristics, of which three are predominant:

- Waldorf graduates think for themselves and value the opportunity to translate their new ideas into practice. They both value and practice lifelong learning and have a highly developed sense for aesthetics
- Waldorf graduates value lasting human relationships—and they seek out opportunities to be of help to other people
- Waldorf graduates are guided by an inner moral compass that helps them navigate the trials and temptations of professional and private life. They carry high ethical principles into their chosen professions

The graduates surveyed demonstrated that they are capable of achieving what they want in life and are happy in the process of pursuing their goals. The majority consider life-long learning as a significant part of their life journey. They are devoted to their families, both to their own parents as well as to the families they are part of creating. In short, they know how to make a living, but more important they know how to make a life.

Waldorf graduates are quick to be introspective and capable of putting themselves down with touches of wry humor while others praise them. Professors and employers rate Waldorf alumni/ae more highly in terms of in moral and life skills than these graduates rate themselves.

This survey is comprised of twelve major sections, followed by a series of appendices containing much of the data and anecdotal comments. A statistical analysis was performed on the findings of several sections including comparisons of Waldorf graduates and their general U.S. population, as well as contrasts of recent and older graduates. Our intention is to present the results concisely with descriptions, graphs, and tables interwoven by brief analyses of the material.

Following the order in which the questions were posed, the twelve sections of the survey include:

1. Overview of the participants

This section describes the population taking part in the study. We refer to the participants

as “respondents.”

2. Higher education pursued by Waldorf graduates

We list the wide range of colleges accepting Waldorf graduates, their major fields of study, note the trends among those Waldorf graduates who transfer from one college to another, list the honors and awards bestowed upon them during their college studies, sample impressions of Waldorf students by their college professors, analyze the types of college degrees granted and graduate studies undertaken, and examine what those students who opted to take a year off before college actually did with their year.

3. Relationship of graduates to their career path

The survey documents how pleased most graduates are with their jobs. We list their occupations and note that many of them end up teaching at all levels from pre-school to graduate school—and all ages in between—even though they did not major in education during their undergraduate years. We observe their continued interest in the “human condition” on earth and a tireless desire to improve the lives of others. We also look at a small percentage of Waldorf alumni/ae who went immediately into employment instead of going to college.

4. Overview of the graduates’ cultural and social interests

We document the high degree of importance Waldorf graduates place on activities leading to personal growth and social well-being.

5. Graduates’ attention to local, national, and international news

We find that most graduates consider themselves to be “citizens of the world” and are particularly interested in global developments.

6. Graduates and their human relationships

We find that graduates report an intense interest in friendships, a high degree of satisfaction with their partner, and generally a positive outlook on life.

7. Graduates’ assessment of life and the life skills

In response to questions about their greatest gifts and greatest joys, the graduates overwhelmingly single out their personal relationships—especially those involving family and close friends—but they also point to their love of practicing art and being active in nature, as well as their desire to help others. Regarding their greatest challenges, their most common responses involve self-questioning, achieving a balanced life, and deciding which of their many interests to follow and deepen.

8. Reflections on Waldorf education in hindsight

Graduates are asked to think back on their years as Waldorf students from the vantage point of their present life. They single out how crucial their Waldorf education was for their self-development, their social wakefulness, and for their present struggle to live as balanced human beings in a fast-paced world.

9. Influence and importance of Waldorf education on life today

Graduates describe how their Waldorf education was most influential and important in

developing their creative capacities, love of learning, self-expression, and exploration of different viewpoints. The graduates describe how their education has left them free to choose their own paths in life, and how well they were prepared with many options. Some even complain that their education has kindled so many interests in them that it is hard for them to specialize as adults.

10. Aspects of Waldorf initially rejected but now viewed differently

The graduates are invited to reflect on elements in their education that as students they resisted but have since come to appreciate. It is interesting to see that many graduates re-evaluate and appreciate eurythmy for providing grace in social movement and assistance in bodily integration, something they did not comprehend as students. In a similar vein, they also express new appreciation for the value of bringing form and discipline to the classroom, for restricting exposure to media (especially television), and for providing a multi-faceted curriculum, particularly in the arts.

11. Relationship of Waldorf graduates to anthroposophy

Since Waldorf schools are founded on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, we are interested to know whether graduates feel they were indoctrinated with anthroposophy as students. An overwhelming majority express the view that they were not.

12. Graduates and their physical and mental health

A number of mainstream studies suggest a relationship exists between adult health and childhood education. This section of the survey is not successful in establishing any link between the graduates' experience of school and their present state of wellbeing. This connection remains a fertile subject for future study.

The survey includes five open-ended questions that invite the graduates to offer anecdotal answers to questions about their school days as well as a summary of their greatest gifts, challenges, and joys; these responses, collated in a series of appendices, offer both supportive and critical comments on how to improve the education in North American Waldorf schools.

Overall the study provides a positive picture of Waldorf education as presented by the study population. The graduates live with a passion for learning throughout life, are interested in the quality of their social connections, and are devoted to introspection and working through life's difficulties. They also indicate that they are creative problem solvers, are able to "think outside the box," exercise environmental stewardship, demonstrate high levels of both "social and emotional" intelligence, and have a solid foundation for moral navigation in the fast-moving modern world.