



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

With the support of the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Union

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: ECSWE REVIEW OF CURRENT PRACTICE

'Assessment is clear seeing, rich understanding, respectful application...Assessment is essentially provisional, partial, tentative, exploratory, and, inevitably, incomplete.'

*M.J. Drummond, Cambridge School of Education
Assessing Pupils' learning, Fulton, 1997*

'Tests are like fire - a good servant and a bad master'

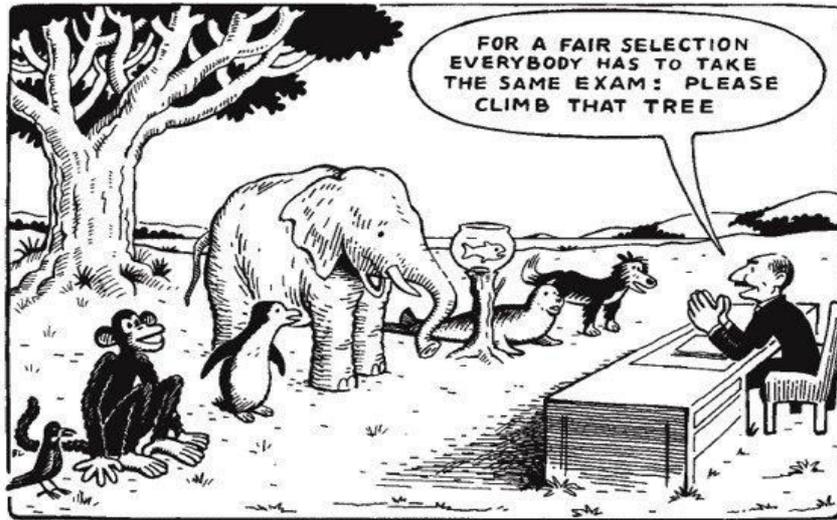
*C. Desforges
Testing and assessment, Cassel, 1989*

*'Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.'*

*Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.*

*Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.'*

Stevie Smith - Not Waving But Drowning



INTRODUCTION

‘How is my child doing?’

Every teacher is familiar with the question and every parent has asked it. There are as many different ways of answering as there are children and the need for some kind of monitoring or assessment is a constant in any educational method or system. This we know as *assessment of learning*.

‘What should I do with them tomorrow?’

Every teacher is even more familiar with this question. We ask it at the end of every day, sometimes during the day, and sometimes even five minutes into a lesson! The methods we use to establish what we should be doing tomorrow we call *assessment for learning*.

‘And isn't it all changing anyway?’

The world of assessment is changing in a number of ways.

- ⤴ The growing **marketisation** of education, with the advent of league tables, commercial competition between school and even performance related pay for teachers puts pressure on schools to measure aggressively, often ‘teaching to the test’, and planning their curricula and timetables at the expense of so-called softer skills, the arts, or value-led education: all harder to assess. Behind this is the underlying assumption within most, if not all state governments, that the primary role of education is the development of human capital as an economic asset.
- ⤴ Another influence is the **international comparative dimension** to standardised testing, and the increased focus on international evaluations such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This has resulted in reform agendas and governmental priorities being determined by the political sensitivity to international league tables and competitive country comparisons.
- ⤴ The other force for change is the growing **individualisation** of education. This is reflected in the growing increase of ipsative (self) assessment and the use of personal portfolios to evidence learning. Innovations such as Dialogic Learning, the growing role of formative assessment, the acceptance of Life Long Learning almost as a human right and the advent of ‘portfolio careers’ with its associated need for flexible learning models all reflect a growing belief that the learner should have ownership of his or her learning and its assessment.

‘Is assessment particularly a Steiner-Waldorf issue or problem?’

Steiner-Waldorf practitioners are not alone in having to negotiate the minefield that is assessment, whether *of learning* - how the children are progressing, or *for learning*, finding indicators that help us to plan. The Steiner-Waldorf approach, however, does bring its own unique considerations and challenges. Some of these are based on philosophy and ethos, others on tradition and habit. That some practitioners intuitively try to limit the impact of testing and assessment on their pupils is not unique to Steiner schools, but it could be argued that the general ethos of such schools makes it easier for teachers to assume an-anti assessment stance and to reinforce their instincts accordingly. It could also be argued that because Steiner schools have a curriculum that enthuses the teachers and of which they are rightly proud, their desire to deliver that curriculum and its rich content can get in the way of methods that allow the pupils, through assessment for learning, to indicate what they need and how they are relating (or not) to the content.

The pressures described above are not always compatible with the broader aims of assessment, especially so in schools that seek to offer an holistic approach, i.e. ones which attempts to integrate cognitive, aesthetic, social, emotional and kinaesthetic modes at every opportunity. Given all of the above it is not surprising that Steiner-Waldorf teachers are reviewing their own practice whilst also looking for ways in which to contribute to the volatile ‘assessment landscape’. Nor should it be a surprise to find that Steiner teachers are more likely to mistrust assessment than many other practitioners, not least because their ‘clients’ may be parents who have chosen this style of education precisely because they expect it to be more concerned with process than with outcome and less concerned with assessment than many of the alternatives. Nor is mistrust of assessment new within the Steiner-Waldorf context. Steiner, speaking in Switzerland in 1920 made his opinions

clear: `The report card system is truly one of the most miserable aspects of our schools. In a superficial, groping manner, teachers must grade their students from 1, 2, 3, 4 to 5 and so on a procedure that stifles the very nature of schools in a most appalling way.`

The reality for many Steiner-Waldorf practitioners is that their work involves assessment in a variety of ways but that the recording and formalising of such assessment is not and never will be a priority. The idea of education as an art and therefore of the practitioner as an artist is often at odds with the need to collect, collate and interpret data, even though many Steiner practitioners are highly skilled in observing their pupils and monitoring their progress in very sensitive and often highly effective ways. It is also true that the expectations of national authorities, of parents, and even of the pupils themselves ensure that the need for methods of assessment that are compatible with the Steiner-Waldorf approach is not going to go away.

Whilst there is a growing volume of literature and research that examines the benefits and hazards of assessment, both *for* and *of* learning, the most comprehensive reviews of the issue within the Steiner-Waldorf context are provided in the following two papers:

- ✦ [Assessment without High Stakes testing, \(David Mitchell, Douglas Gerwin, Ernst Schuberth, Michael Mancini and Hansjorg Hofrichter, 2008\)](#) is a comprehensive overview, within an American context, of the issues facing Steiner-Waldorf schools in working with assessment. As the title implies, an attempt is made to look at methods of assessment that exclude `high-stakes testing`.
- ✦ [The Role of Evaluation and Examination \(Martin Rawson\)](#) in *Rundbrief*, the Journal of the Pedagogical Section in Dornach, Volume 22, Easter 2005, looks at the place of exams and examinations in Steiner-Waldorf schools, but first sets the wider context, including a review of assessment methods currently in use.

In addition the following papers raise questions that are current in all educational contexts but suggest that Steiner schools occupy a particularly sensitive place. They offer an American, European and Australian perspective, respectively.

- ✦ [Standardized testing: \(Eugene Schwartz\)](#)
- ✦ [Testing as a Challenge of Daily School Life \(Claus Peter Röh\)](#)
- ✦ <http://steinereducation.edu.au/news/media/high-stakes-testing-media-release-15-may-2012>

Whilst extensive work has been done by Steiner-Waldorf researchers into [Attainment Targets](#) in Flanders and [Learning Expectations](#) in the American schools, this research is not specifically into the *assessment* of attainment or learning.

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December 2012

Distinctive Steiner-Waldorf Methods of Assessment?

Steiner-Waldorf schools use a variety of means to assess pupil progress and the effectiveness of teaching. Very few of these are unique to Steiner schools, however, and many follow national traditions or respond to cultural expectations and norms. The following are examples of methods used in Steiner-Waldorf schools which are either unique or have been developed to a greater extent than in other school systems.

▲ ONE: Child Study

Child study is at the heart of the teachers' work in all Steiner schools and is the basis for all curriculum development. Although not unique to Steiner schools, (see Marisha Plotnik, below) it is now so embedded within the Steiner-Waldorf methodology that it is appropriate to acknowledge its central place as an assessment tool.

Rawson (Dornach 2005, see below) summarises the aim of child study as an attempt: *'to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the child's being and development. Often the study goes a step further and identifies strategies to help and support the child. In many countries something along the lines of an individual education plan is drawn up involving teachers, therapists, school doctor and even occasionally parents in drawing up a diagnosis and therapy and establishing a time frame for monitoring development.'*

Steiner makes a number of references to its role:

'Time must be devoted to the observation, the psychological observation of each child. This is essential and must be reckoned with in actual, concrete detail when building up the whole educational plan. In the teachers' conferences the individual child is spoken about in such a way that the teachers try to grasp the nature of the human being as such in its special relationship to the child in question. You can well imagine that we have to deal with all grades and types of children with their varying childish talents and qualities of soul. We are confronted with pretty well every kind of child, from the one whom we must class as being psychologically and physically very poorly endowed to the one – and let us hope life will confirm this – who is gifted to the point of genius.

If we want to observe children in their real being we must acquire a psychological faculty of perception. This kind of perception not only includes a cruder form of observing the capacities of individual children, but above all the ability to appraise these capacities rightly.

Arnhem July 21st 1924

A significant body of research and commentary has grown up amongst Steiner-Waldorf practitioners on how best to develop and deploy child study as a means of `holistic` assessment:

Articles:

[The Practice of Child Observation: Heiner Priess](#)

[Child Observation and Study: Michaela Glockler](#)

[Child Observation: Angela Michel.](#)

[Points for Observation and Description in Child Study: Magda Lissau](#)

[Some Aspects of Child Study Work in Faculty Meetings: Magda Lissau](#)

[Developing Child Study for the Young Teenager: Christof Wiechert](#)

[How Do Teachers Learn with Teachers? Understanding Child Study: Marisha Plotnik](#)

Books:

Kevin Avison a Handbook for Waldorf Class Teachers (SWSF 2002)

^ TWO: End of Year Report

The way in which Steiner-Waldorf practitioners approach report writing may well be unique. The report, written by the class teacher or upper school guardian at the end of the school year, aims to characterise the pupil's individual experience. It describes the pupil's level of engagement in his or her own learning, in the peer group and generally in relation to the world. It is a statement of what the child has achieved in clear, comprehensive, comparative terms, and it sets tasks for the individual for the future. It summarises the present and is orientated towards the future.

Unlike with Child Studies, very little has been written on the subject of end-of-year reports, although Steiner clearly set some store by them:

The reports in the Waldorf School are produced in another manner. Where the body of teachers, the college of teachers, is such a unity that every child in the school is known to some extent by every teacher, it becomes possible to give an account of the child which relates to his whole nature. Thus the report we make on a child at the end of the school year resembles a little biography, it is like an aperçus of the experiences one has had with the child during the year, both in school and out.

In this way the child and his parents, or guardians, have a mirror image of what the child is like at this age. And we have found at the Waldorf School that one can put quite severe censure into this mirror-like report and children accept it contentedly. Now we also write something else in the report. We combine the past with the future. We know the child, and know whether he is deficient in will, in feeling or in thought, we know whether this emotion or the other predominates in him. And in the light of this knowledge, for every single child in the Waldorf School we make a little verse, or saying. This we inscribe in his report. It is meant as a guiding line for the whole of the next year at school. The child learns this verse by heart and bears it in mind. And the verse works upon the child's will, or upon his emotions or mental peculiarities, modifying and balancing them.

Thus the report is not merely an intellectual expression of what the child has done, but it is a power in itself and continues to work until the child receives a new report. And one must indeed come to know the individuality of a child very accurately – as you will realise – if one is to give him a report of such a potent nature year by year.

The Spiritual Ground of Education

Rudolf Steiner Lecture: 24th August, 1922 | [Oxford](#) | [GA0305](#)

In a report produced for the Israeli government in which Dr. Brien Masters describes Steiner-Waldorf approaches to assessment, he characterises end-of-year reports thus:

'Waldorf reports tend to be lengthy documents and are written once a year in the Lower School - more frequently in the Upper School. Steiner's advice with regard to the way the pupil receives the content of the report has been characterised as follows. While the parent reads the report aloud, it is as if the pupil listens 'over the parent's shoulder'. (The reading of the report might also take place, of course, in the extended family circle in some cases.) Hearing the report in this way has the effect of elevating the pupil's consciousness towards that of the parent's. And although the event occurs usually only once a year (though it is in the parent's gift to repeat the reading of the report once or twice, say, during the ensuing holidays, or at the outset of the new school year), the anticipation of such occasions lives throughout the preceding year, affecting motivation from within.'

Different schools and national associations have different guidelines, but the assumptions and traditions of report-writing date back to Steiner's direct recommendations. These have been developed over the last ninety years, and in the [Healing Forces in the Word and Its Rhythms: Report Verses in Rudolf Steiner's](#)

[Art of Education](#) (Heinz Müller; Translated by Jesse Darrell), expands on the idea of writing a pedagogical verse to accompany the report, referenced here as a distinctive Steiner-Waldorf method of formative assessment.

▲ **THREE: `Therapeutic` Assessment.**

The traditional links between Steiner-Waldorf schools with those centres offering care and support for students with learning and behavioural differences has led to a certain cross-over of ideas. In addition the so-called Curative Course (Curative Education, Twelve Lectures for Doctors and Curative Teachers, GA 317), given to support practitioners working in the latter sector provides a rich source of ideas and inspiration for teachers working in the former. On the whole this has contributed to the array of `classifications` available to the Steiner-Waldorf teachers (large and small headed, fantasy rich, fantasy poor etc.) rather than methods of assessing achievement. At the same time, the techniques and conclusions derived from detailed observation (see Child Study, above) have been extended in some schools to the close examination of movement, for example in eurythmy, and drawing, especially at key transitional moments such as school readiness, the ninth year and puberty. Resources developed by those working in the curative sector and subsequently in the growing field of Learning Support (Special Educational Needs) include [Reading Children's Drawings The Person, House and Tree Motifs](#) by Audrey McAllen and the class two screening (below).

▲ **FOUR Class Two Screening**

Developed by the Dutch Waldorf Schools advisory service, this diagnostic assessment is now used by many European schools as a means of evaluating the pupil's development across a range of indicators, including primitive reflexes, laterality and dominance, bodily co-ordination, fine and gross motor skills, balance, symmetry, language and numeracy skills. The outcome of the screening determines the level and nature of support each child will receive in the following school year. As such it is strictly a diagnostic tool and is referenced in the national over-view as `screening.`

▲ **FIVE Teacher Reflection and Research**

A central tenet of Steiner-Waldorf pedagogy is that the teacher needs to develop his or her ability to perceive and to understand the `enigma` of each child, and that such abilities require a reflective, contemplative or meditative approach to be at the centre of all such `action research`. This methodology is the point at which anthroposophy and Steiner-Waldorf education relate most intimately, indeed the claim that Steiner schools teach `out of anthroposophy` makes sense only in the context of this meditative approach to the children.

This amounts to a form of assessment that enables the teacher to enter deeply into how the child presents in the classroom. It is underpinned by the approach to child study described above, but also by a range of practices with their own extensive literature, three examples of which are included here.

[The Inner Life and Work of the Teacher: Margaret Duberley](#)

[Lighting Fires: Jorgen Smit.](#)

[Contemplative Enquiry: Arthur Zajonc](#)

▲ **SIX Formative Assessments.**

The idea of assessment *for*, rather than *of* learning, and approaches such as formative assessment and dialogic learning are by no means Steiner-Waldorf innovations. Formative Assessment is included here because it has found a central position in education generally and sits comfortably with Waldorf methodology: just as child study pre-dates Waldorf education but is now one of its distinguishing features, then so formative assessment appears to be developing in a similar way.

The ideas behind Formative Assessment were initially outlined in *Learning through Formative Assessment*

(Shirley Clarke, Hodder, 2008), *Assessment for Learning*, (Paul Black, Dylan William et al, OU, 2003) and *Assessment for Learning: why, what and how?* (Dylan William, IOE, 2009).

One aim of this approach has been to develop age appropriate pupil self assessment together with training pupils to identify and establish their own success criteria in order to aid learning and to increase independence. Teachers find the approach enormously liberating and stimulating and entirely in keeping with Steiner-Waldorf principles. Although a concise step-by-step approach to working with recall, establishing success criteria for work, peer marking and discussion and modelling have been disseminated via interactive presentations and workshops there is currently no Waldorf-specific literature in this area.

Over-view of assessment by country.

W = Waldorf; S = State required.

`Screening` refers to the class 2 assessment and similar `whole-child` approaches.

⤴ Armenia

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: no
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: class 9 - 12

⤴ Austria

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: no
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: class 9 *Hauptschulabschluss*, class 12 *Matura*.

NOTE: PISA Assessment of Cl. 9 in all Waldorf schools, 3 times since 2000. *Hauptschulabschluss* but only written Waldorf Year Reports without exams/state testing.

⤴ Belgium (Flemish)

Kindergarten: W and SA
School readiness: W (some schools)
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: class 6, 8, 10, 12 and class 13 in the vocational training.
Other: Curriculum and assessments have to comply with the alternative attainment targets which the Steiner/Waldorf schools have written and which the Flemish Government has declared of equal value their own. Curriculum and assessment have to meet certain standards but there are no national exams. Class 12 leaving reports and marks given by Steiner/Waldorf schools are state recognised and give general admission to university. In some cases, as for medicine or engineering studies, admission tests are required, but this is also the same for students from other schools. In the professional training program a 13th class is necessary to give general admission to further higher education.

⤴ Belgium (French)

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: W, 3 evaluations: kindergarten teacher + doctor (anthro) + PMS centre, i.e. external evaluation done by state at Waldorf school request.
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 6 (no provision beyond this age).
State required assessments: 9 - 12
Other: class 2: dyslexia detection by professional on Waldorf school request; class 5 numbers on periodic assessments; class 6, numeracy also primary school certification called CEB = external standardized evaluation)

⤴ Czech rep.

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: age 6
Waldorf Year Report 1 - 13
State required assessments: 1 - 13
Other: Reports are done twice a year. From Cl 8. to Cl 13. marks are also given.

⤴ Denmark

Kindergarten: W and SA
School readiness: W
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12, but some schools only every second year
State required assessments: class 9 - 12
Other: Curriculum (and assessments) has to comply with state requirements, but no exams required.

Class 10, 11 and 12 are not funded. No regulated admission.

⤴ **Finland**

Kindergarten: no

School readiness: no

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12

State required assessments: Class 8: required to give grades; class 9: grades plus final certificate; class 13: option of state matriculation exam.

Other: the only normative document is the national curriculum and state officials trust that schools are compliant. All schools and municipalities write their own curricula based on national guidelines. All Finnish schools have to give a final report to the student in the end of the school year. There are no national tests. The state requires assessment, but schools assess in many different ways. The curriculum goals are the same in all schools.

More details are at:

http://www.oph.fi/english/education/basic_education/pupil_assesment

http://www.oph.fi/english/education/general_upper_secondary_education/student_assesment

⤴ **France**

Kindergarten: no

School readiness: no

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12

State required assessments: Class 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12.

⤴ **Germany**

Kindergarten: Some schools, depending on "länder", Tradition

School readiness: W

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12

State required assessments: 11, 12, depending on lander. Arbitur in class 13.

Also: class 2 screening, see attachment.

⤴ **Holland**

Kindergarten: no

School readiness: W

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12

State required assessments: Class 6: transition to secondary assessment, currently optional, will become compulsory. Class 10 for those who leave into vocational training; class 11 for those who leave into higher vocational training. Class 12 `Abi` final exam. In class 10, 11 and 12 some schools use portfolio as a part of the total assessment.

⤴ **Hungary**

Kindergarten: no

School readiness: W

Waldorf Year Report 1 -12

other: Competence assessment, classes, 4, 6,8,10, Class 13 Abiture

⤴ **Italy**

Kindergarten: no

School readiness: W

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 13

State required assessments: 2,5,6,8,9,13 and state exams in 8, 13

Only state and officially recognised free schools have to sit the centralised assessments. Children in private schools and home schooling are examined by state schools teachers every year. All pupils have to take the state exam in class 8.

Note: 'La valutazione dell'alunno nella scuola Steiner-. (Dicembre 2011 Federazione Delle Scuole Steiner-Waldorf in Italia) (23p.)

^ **Norway**

Kindergarten: W and SA
School readiness: W
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: 9 - 12

Other: Class 5, 7, 8 national tests in Norwegian, English, Maths*, PI**; also class 10 PI; class 12 school leaving report and grade. Curriculums (and assessments) have to meet states standards but there are no state exams. Class 12 leaving reports, and marks from the Waldorf schools are state recognized and give general admission to university (mostly supplemented with specified/subject admission, taken in Waldorf or outside). The curriculum has to match the academic level of the state school curriculum but no state exams/test. Class 12 leaving reports and marks given by the Waldorf schools are state recognized and give general admission to university, mostly supplemented with specified/subject admission, taken in Waldorf or outside.

* National test, Norwegian, English, Maths are small tests (1-2 hours). They are supposed to test basic skills independent of curriculum. That is not the case in practice, especially not in class 5, maths. Still Waldorf pupils do well in the tests as an overall impression, especially in Norwegian, English and also in maths after class 5.

** PI = `Pupil Inspections`, an electronic survey pupils fill in about how they like school, the subjects, about their relations to their teachers, to their classmates, facilities etc.

^ **Poland**

Kindergarten: W
School readiness: W
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 9
State required assessments: class 5 - 9
Other: Written reports twice a year. From 2 semester of Cl.5 marks are required.

^ **Slovenia:**

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: no
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 13
State required assessments: class 9, 11, 12.

^ **Spain :**

Kindergarten: W
School readiness: Madrid only
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: class 2, 4, 6, 10, 12
Other: Written Waldorf reports 3 times a year (no marks) only for internal school use.
Class 2, 4, 6, 10, and 12 to the pupils/parents with grades.

^ **Sweden :**

Kindergarten: W and S
School readiness: W (some schools)
Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12
State required assessments: 9, 12
Other: Curriculum (and assessments) have to match state schools, but no state exams/test.
Class 12 leaving reports, and marks by the Waldorf schools, are state recognized and gives general admission to university, mostly supplemented with specified/subject admission, taken in Waldorf or outside

^ **Switzerland**

Kindergarten: no
School readiness: no
Waldorf Year Report: class 2, 6, 9, 12, all after screening
State required assessments: class 12
Other: See paper. "Treffpunkt 9.Klasse. Erprobungsfassung Schuljahr 2010-11" 15 p,
(Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rudolf Steiner Schulen in der Schweiz)
There is a Waldorf agreement with each Kanton relating to the *Abitur* and University entrance.
Children assessed in Cl. 2 and 6. According to kanton requirements

▲ **UK / England**

Kindergarten: W

School readiness: W

Waldorf Year Report class 1 - 12

State required assessments: (Only in state funded schools) Class 3, 5, 9, 10, 11,12.

Other: class 2 screening widely used. Many schools choose to deliver state *GCSE*'s in class 10 or 11.