

## Longitudinal Research on Waldorf School Graduates (in Germany)

The following excerpt is taken from a December 14, 1981 article in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* reporting on a German government-sponsored study.

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Waldorf Schools were founded by Rudolf Steiner in 1919 and now number more than 1,000 worldwide.

Waldorf schools, generally reputed to produce "beautiful souls" [who are, nevertheless,] weakened for the tasks of real life, actually do quite the opposite – [graduates are actually impressively strengthened in their preparation for the real world] reports a study which could even favorably influence the evaluation of "Gesamtschulen" (twelve-year schools which include both those students preparing for college and others as well).

During the current school year, 32,000 students are being educated outside the state school system, in 72 Free Waldorf Schools, according to the pedagogical concepts of the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner. They attend a school which, according to the aims of their founder, aspires to transmit not only knowledge and ability but also content helpful for life and a perspective on life's purposes. Their school day does not follow the 45-minute beat of strict timetables, but runs according to the rhythm of "blocks" and, during the first eight years, with strong artistic emphasis. Their career is not accompanied, year after year, by reports, marks and promotions, but is free of selection and pressures of grading – a tempting perspective surely, but for many parents hardly a realistic one or an adequate preparation for the battles of life.

This view is now being shaken by a scientific study of "The Educational Background of Former Waldorf Students" – the first empirical research of the Waldorf Movement.

Three independent scientists, paid by the Bonn Department of Education, interviewed 1,460 former Waldorf students born in the years 1946 and 1947 and came to a "prevailing positive result in favor of Waldorf schools." Their students have achieved, so the examiners have discovered, "an educational level well above the average."

The results appear to be formulated conservatively. For it is just this achievement of the Waldorf schools that holds surprises for the educational policy-makers. Twenty-two percent of the students polled passed the "Abitur" – at their own Waldorf school – even back in the years 1966 and 1967, almost three times more than in the state schools. Moreover, 40% of those polled, who had "never attended any other school than a Waldorf school" from grade 1 through 13, passed the "Abitur."

These statistics appear even more significant when the conditions under which the exams were taken are considered – for instance the fact that "the Abitur does not lie within the interests of Rudolf Steiner pedagogy" as stated by Stefan Leber, Board member of the Association of Waldorf Schools. Practically speaking, this means that the students are taught according to Waldorf guidelines ...