

Chapter 19

Waldorf Schools as Communities of Practice for AVE and Social Sustainability

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Abstract Communities of practice are characterized by an ability to generate social or cultural capital, not necessarily through formal educational provision but through informal learning, individual transformation, and cultural change arising from the collective involvement of like-minded people in a process, association, organization, or event, often based in practice. The associated theory of situated learning also suggests that for adults learning mainly occurs by situations, not subjects, and usually associated with social interaction. In this chapter I explore these notions in the context of a community of practice identified with a Waldorf School for Rudolf Steiner Education, which provided a case study for researching and analyzing the extent to which adults as parents engage in informal, social, and transformative learning. I conclude that the role of active parenting as a vocation and as legitimate work is enhanced and informed by involvement in a school that is defined by a specific educational philosophy which, inter alia, encourages the development of a learning community.

Steiner Education and Waldorf Schools

It is a fact that a Waldorf School provides a learning and growing situation not only for the children but for the parents and teachers as well. (Edmunds, 1979, p. 112)

The first school for Rudolf Steiner education began in 1919 as an initiative of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory in the German city of Stuttgart for employees of that company. The unique approach to education of this “Waldorf Free School” soon attracted interest from other parts of Europe, and it was not long before the initiative spread and schools were established in other countries. From these beginnings, the term “Waldorf” school has passed into common usage, and at the time of writing there were over 950 Steiner or Waldorf schools worldwide, in over 60 different countries (Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, 2007).

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