

# Future proof

What childcare training involves under the Steiner Waldorf approach. By **Jill Tina Taplin**

**W**hat really is necessary to provide successful education and training for someone who wants to work with young children? What are the priorities for a course to equip someone professionally and vocationally for this important work? The Steiner Waldorf approach has a unique take on these questions.

## FIRM FOUNDATIONS

The Steiner Waldorf approach, as part of the European tradition of a later start to formal education, considers that early childhood encompasses the first seven years of life. During this time, we might say, children build the foundations of the house that they will live in for the rest of their lives.

The task of parents, other carers and educators is to support children while they do that foundational building work, by providing the best possible building site, equipment and materials. We see

that every house is going to be unique and every young builder brings special gifts.

## FUTURE GENERATIONS

All those working with young children are very fortunate because our task is future-orientated, though this does set us a significant problem and a mighty responsibility.

When we look ahead to the time that the children we currently accompany will be the adults taking charge of the world, we cannot imagine with any certainty what the world will look like. However, we can be sure that those future adults will need to be creative, co-operative and empathetic, and we need to provide them with the tools.

## A SERIOUS TASK

Educating adults for a career working with young children sits against this impressive background and is certainly worthy of greater respect than it currently has. This serious task needs serious preparation and the Steiner Waldorf approach recognises that



Adults learning how to make dolls

fact. Steiner Waldorf programmes include an understanding both of what it is to be a human being, and of childhood development towards an adulthood of mental and physical health.

On our programmes, we look at what it is to be a human being and how we can support an individual to become someone able to take wise and responsible decisions. That means not loading young children with too much information and too much choice too soon, but creating a balanced day filled with free play and meaningful activities.

## THE RIGHT BALANCE

Our students look at the importance of free play as an educational activity initiated and directed by the child. They consider what adults can do to

## at first hand

### Merel van Dijk completed Level 4 through NESWEC and is about to complete Level 5

'I have worked with groups of children in many different settings over the past 15 years. It was such a relief to me to discover in Steiner Waldorf Early Years a sense of community, a protection of unhurried childhood, and warmth and respect for the individual child. This inspired me to become a kindergarten teacher, and so I started the NESWEC course three years ago.

'The weekends I have spent in York

have been a lovely interlude filled with song, movement, handwork, lectures by dedicated and experienced tutors and conversations with students. The philosophical insights are rooted in the "real world" and have helped me to deepen my ability to be a self-reflective practitioner.'

### Eva Gonzalez has completed the Holistic Baby and Child Care Course

'I decided to do the course because of its unique blend of Waldorf pedagogy and an introduction to the Pikler

approach. The tutors' wisdom, care and support helped me to complete all assignments. The course has a great balance between theory and practice, and I have gained confidence through the many group exercises we have done, covering different aspects of childcare, even how to change nappies or feed respectfully.

'We have learnt different crafts which we can do with children and parents and this, with singing and the social relationships I have developed, has nourished my soul throughout the year.'



support that and become articulate about its value. Students investigate in-depth how to create a rhythm of the day balanced between child- and adult-led activities.

Students discuss what is essential to include in the environment, the importance of open-ended toys, of building on children's innate connection with the natural world and of involving them in caring for their own environment, preparing food, cleaning, repairing and creating what is needed.

## SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Alongside a greater understanding of child development and its practical implications, students are given a wealth of opportunities to develop themselves on all levels.

Healthy development in children is supported by adults who are on their own paths of self-development. Students are offered many options for self-development and a reflective, research-based attitude. It must be acknowledged that the pressures on early childhood educators and carers are great and it is a strong belief in the potential for each individual to progress which gives practitioners the resilience necessary.

Building on this, working sensitively and effectively with colleagues, including parents and other carers, is fundamental to our programmes. Our students learn people skills and non-judgemental approaches to support growing

healthy trusting relationships with all the adults involved in a child's care. This not only facilitates trusting relationships with parents, it has the potential to create a community where children can safely learn to be social themselves.

## ARTISTIC PRACTICE

Creativity is supported by the varied challenges of artistic work. Our programmes all contain opportunities for engaging with many artistic media, such as painting and woodwork, puppetry, music, storytelling, movement and all the skills which can bring more beauty into practical everyday life.

While some of this is directly pedagogically relevant, artistic practice for its own sake has a place in our programmes because of the creative outlook it encourages.

## ACROSS THE WORLD

Steiner Waldorf settings and schools are a growing feature across the world. In England, Steiner kindergartens have access to the funding for two-, three- and four-year-olds and, of course, comply fully with the requirements of the EYFS, with exemptions from areas of learning which conflict with the Steiner approach.

## OPTIONS IN THE UK

In England there are three part-time programmes through which students can study alongside family and work commitments and achieve Ofqual-regulated qualifications which enable the holder to be included as a qualified person in the child:adult ratios for Ofsted purposes.

**CACHE Level 3 EYE Holistic Baby and Child Care Diploma, offered by Emerson College,** combines Rudolf Steiner's insights into child development, an introduction to the Pikler approach from Hungary and the EYFS. It prepares students to care professionally for children up to five years old and support parents and families. It has a unique emphasis on the crucial first three years and holistic approaches to childcare in a range of settings.

The course is part-time over 14 months, meeting in London once a month on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, there are two four-day residentials at Emerson College.

See [www.emerson.org.uk/holistic-baby-and-child-care](http://www.emerson.org.uk/holistic-baby-and-child-care).

## REFERENCES

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- Lachman G (2007) *Rudolf Steiner. An Introduction to his Life and Work*. Floris Books
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- 'Working together for children in the 21st Century – Inspiring, innovative and creative early childhood practice', part of the Steiner centenary celebrations, will be held on 5 October. Visit: <https://bit.ly/2kHujq9>

**The London Steiner Kindergarten Training and the North of England Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Studies Programme** (NESWEC) cover all of the first seven years from a Steiner Waldorf perspective. A two-year, part-time programme including a placement requirement gives a Level 4 qualification, awarded by CACHE. This incorporates the required Level 3 EYE criteria.

The Level 4 can be followed by a one-year placement-based programme with an emphasis on Leadership and Management, leading to a Level 5 CACHE qualification and is approved by the International Steiner Waldorf organisation, IASWECE. The London course includes monthly one-day attendance in central London and residentials in Gloucestershire. The NESWEC programme holds monthly weekend residentials in York and longer residentials in the West Midlands.

The students are a diverse group with a wide spread of ages and backgrounds, nationalities and cultures. Many intend to become Steiner kindergarten teachers, and some intend to or are already working in non-Steiner childcare settings or other professional childminding situations. They and the teams of tutors involved in each programme are united by a passion to give children the quality of time and attention which will give them the best preparation for their future.

Although the ideas behind the approach have their origin in a school which opened 100 years ago, we are looking to the future and maintaining the essence of a truly child-development-centred approach.

These qualifications are offered at London Steiner Kindergarten Training (contact the course director, Lynne Oldfield, at: [lynneoldfield@lineone.net](mailto:lynneoldfield@lineone.net)) and NESWEC (contact the course co-ordinator, Jill Taplin, at: [jill@neswec.org.uk](mailto:jill@neswec.org.uk)). Course applications are still open for NESWEC. ■

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