



Save Steiner Education in England

Jennifer Militzer-Kopperl

co-author, *The Roadmap to Literacy* (2018)

author, *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* (2020)

<https://renewalofliteracy.com/>

It is a dangerous time for Waldorf education in England—half of the 26 English Steiner schools failed their initial inspections in 2018-2019, and six schools have closed. Teachers face a devil's choice: be true to Steiner's philosophy or compromise to pass academic inspections. There is a third way: Renewal of Literacy. It is a language arts program for Steiner schools 1–8 that is in alignment with Steiner's indications and the objectives of regulatory institutions such as Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

Steiner schools know that literacy is so much more than literacy skills (i.e., reading, writing, and spelling). True literacy also includes knowledge of the world (Book of Nature) and human knowledge (Book of Man/Book of Human Beings). The curriculum of the Steiner schools is built around this larger definition of literacy. Literacy *skills* are taught in classes 1–3, but the curriculum expands to include literacy in the Book of Nature and Man in classes 4–8.

However, Steiner schools have not been able to fully embody this expanded definition of literacy because too many have done an inadequate job of teaching literacy skills in years 1–3. Students' poor literacy skills undermine the rest of the Steiner School curriculum. Now Ofsted is taking corrective measures, and Steiner schools are closing in England. These poor academic showings are an invitation to Steiner schools and teachers to do things differently. There is now a program to help them do so: Renewal of Literacy.

Renewal of Literacy

Renewal of Literacy is a complete language arts curriculum for Steiner schools 1–8. It is a systematic approach to literacy/language arts instruction that is based on Steiner's indications, but modified for the English language. Renewal of Literacy is contained in two books:

- *The Roadmap to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 1–3* (Langley and Militzer-Kopperl, 2018).
- *Continuing the Journey to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 4–8* (Militzer-Kopperl, 2020).

The Roadmap to Literacy focuses on literacy skills. It is a systematic approach based on Steiner’s view of child development and the structure of the English language. It contains everything necessary to teach literacy skills, and thus enable teachers and schools to pass Ofsted’s academic inspections.

The sequel is called *Continuing the Journey to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 4-8*, and it takes an expanded definition of literacy. It considers all aspects of literacy—from language arts skills such as spelling, grammar, and reading to subjects such as history, geography, science, natural science, and math. *Continuing the Journey to Literacy*’s objective is literacy in all areas. It contains ground-breaking scholarship in Steiner’s indications and practical advice for bringing language arts in the subject blocks. In the process, the students achieve proficiency in both literacy skills and knowledge of the world and humanity.

Renewal of Literacy believes that literacy skills and literacy in subject matter are equally important. It embodies an expanded definition of literacy—students should be literate in both skills and subject matter. It enables Steiner education to fulfill its promise—to make students literate in every sense of the word in the healthiest way possible so that they can take part in the modern world as free human beings.

The Crossroads

Steiner education in England is at a crossroads. Drastic change is needed to prevent more academic failure and more school closings. Renewal of Literacy could help teachers do a better job teaching literacy skills. *The Roadmap to Literacy* documents how to teach literacy skills systematically, in alignment with Steiner’s indications and with the demands of the English language and human development.

The Roadmap to Literacy is in alignment with Steiner’s indications. Take the quiz “Would Steiner Support *The Roadmap to Literacy* Curriculum?” to learn more! Go to <https://renewalofliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Would-Steiner-Support-The-Roadmap-to-Literacy-Curriculum-3.0.pdf>.

Summary of Steiner’s Advice to Teachers: Balance Two Contradictory Impulses

Teachers fear that teaching an academically robust curriculum that includes direct instruction in literacy skills would harm the students’ health and future development. Steiner has words for teachers who hold this view—as well as some advice:

During the first three years the students in our school are to be educated, stage by stage and wherever possible, according to what is considered relevant to their inner needs. At the same time, the standards generally achieved in other schools are to be respected to the extent that, after completion of the first three years, the students of the Waldorf school should be able to fulfill the necessary requirements for entering corresponding classes in other schools, if desired. Such an offer, for our teachers, amounted to an “ingratiating compromise”—forgive this term, I cannot express it otherwise. A realistic mind has to take such a course, for discretion is essential in everything one does. A fanatic would have responded differently. Naturally, many difficulties have to be ironed out when such a policy is chosen, and many of our teachers would find it preferable to steer a straight course toward our aims and ideals. Lengthy and minutely detailed

discussions occurred before a passage was found through these two conflicting approaches (Steiner 1996, 147).

Steiner would be in favor of compromising with educational authorities such as Ofsted. He reminds teachers not to take the objective to provide a healthy education to extreme measures. The objectives stated by Ofsted (i.e., proficiency in academic skills) are just as valid as vouchsafing the students' health. Both need to be respected.

A Call to Action

Steiner schools know that literacy is more than being able to read, write, and spell—it includes literacy in the Book of Man and the Book of Nature—including literacy in the following subjects: natural science, geography, history, art, literature, mathematics, science, etc. This is where Steiner schools should excel. However, the Steiner School curriculum is often hobbled because too many Steiner school students possess inadequate literacy *skills*—including reading, writing, spelling, and grammar. The solution is simple:

- Improve the teaching of literacy skills in classes 1–3.
- Expand the definition of literacy to include subjects in classes 4–8.

This solution is both the foundation of Steiner's curriculum as well as the basis for the Renewal of Literacy approach to literacy. *The Roadmap to Literacy* provides the foundation in literacy skills in classes 1–3, and *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* provides the foundation for literacy is subject matter in classes 4–8. Between these two books, teachers have everything they need to teach language arts in classes 1–8. Steiner schools that adopt the Renewal of Literacy books can realize the promise of Steiner education: They can demonstrate to the world that literacy is more than just proficiency in skills, and they can show Ofsted that there is no conflict between a healthy education and an academically rigorous one. In so doing, they can save Steiner education in England—and possibly provide a model for the Steiner school movement in the rest of the English-speaking world as well.

Bibliography

Steiner, Rudolf. 1996. *The Child's Changing Consciousness as the Basis of Pedagogical Practice*. Translated by Roland Everett. Anthroposophic Press.