

Abstract:

Examining the efficacy of the Waldorf teacher training: a comparative study of Waldorf and non Waldorf teacher trainees.

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The main focus of traditional teacher training programs rests on knowledge acquisition (subject, didactic, pedagogical). To justify this emphasis one could argue that the acquisition of (cognitive) knowledge is one of the main purposes of schooling. However both, researchers and practitioners agree that the demands teachers must cope with are much more complex. Consequently, educationalists have highlighted the importance of social-emotional competencies in helping teachers cope with the complex demands of teaching. Teacher social-emotional competencies have also been linked to healthy social emotional outcomes in pupils. Furthermore, studies have shown a relation between one's academic performance and social emotional-competencies.

Several studies have shown links of specific training interventions and increases in specific social emotional skills. However, a focus on social emotional competencies as an integral part of teacher training is missing from a majority of teacher training programmes.

One teacher training that purports to focus on the development of social emotional competencies is the Waldorf teacher training with its emphasis on a comprehensive understanding of the human being, based on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical foundations, and the strong emphasis on the arts. Support for the importance of artistic experience comes from research indicating the possibility of transfer of art experience to other areas such as creativity abilities and social-emotional competences. The current study represents a first attempt to examine specific social emotional competencies in teacher trainees. Specifically we examined mindfulness, tolerance of ambiguity, and empathy, a selected set of indicators from the social emotional domain that have been related to both teachers health and positive pupil emotional and academic outcomes.

In the study we compared advanced Waldorf (N=71) and non Waldorf teacher trainees (N=68) tolerance of ambiguity, mindfulness, and empathy. Our findings indicated that Waldorf students scored higher on tolerance of ambiguity, mindfulness and empathy. Finally, engagement in natural, artistic, and moral beauty was significantly higher in Waldorf students and was positively correlated with levels of perspective taking and tolerance of ambiguity but not in non Waldorf students,

indicating a possible link between artistic experience and social emotional competencies.

These results highlight the possible relation between the unique aspects of Waldorf training and positive social and emotional outcomes. Future research will look to carry out experimental studies to clarify the causal links of specific training aspects and teachers social-emotional functioning and related pupil outcomes.