



**THE APPLICATION OF WALDORF EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE PRINCIPLES
WITH THE AIM OF DEVELOPING LITERACY
IN THE FOUNDATIONAL ACQUISITION CYCLE**

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Summary

Waldorf pedagogy stands out as an alternative that facilitates the learning process through its distinctive, slower approach, aligned with the natural development rhythm of the child. As a result, literacy development is based on students' innate curiosity and fosters a growing interest in reading and writing. This paper aimed to identify Waldorf alternative principles that teachers in traditional education can successfully integrate into the literacy process of students in the foundational acquisition cycle to optimize the instructional-educational process.

Keywords: *generative principles, curriculum, literacy, Waldorf alternative, foundational acquisition cycle.*

1. Brief History

Waldorf pedagogy is an alternative educational approach created by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919. Steiner was an eclectic intellectual who published over 50 books and gave approximately 6,000 lectures on various topics, including the philosophy of

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science, art, and education. He also initiated a movement called “Anthroposophy”, which he defined as “the wisdom of the human being.” This movement encompasses themes such as economics, the business area, the politics area, and the spiritual area (Trostli, 1998).

The Waldorf alternative it’s an idea that originated as a way to provide education for orphans after World War I and reflects a result of fraternity, equality, and freedom (Onur, 2012). The first Waldorf school was established in a German factory where the factory manager sought to create a suitable school for the children of the women working there. Thus, he met with R. Steiner to develop such an organization. Art was the cornerstone of the school, as, in Steiner's view, art represents the way to communicate with the world (Coppentrath, 2012).

Steiner set several criteria when establishing the school, such as a unique curriculum that focuses on imagination, the sense of truth, and responsibility. In addition, this school had coeducation. In the school, every child, regardless of the language spoken, race, or nationality, had equal opportunities (Edwards, 2002). Waldorf schools began spreading across Germany and internationally until 1939. However, the Waldorf system was banned by the Nazi regime, under the pretext that “it teaches children to think.” After World War II, these schools reopened and continued to grow widely (Williams & Johnson, 2005).

2. The Philosophy of Waldorf Education

Steiner’s philosophy, which prioritizes spirituality over material concerns, is called Anthroposophy. This philosophy integrates humanity and spirituality to create true and innovative knowledge (Ogletree, 1996). A mix of objectivity and self-awareness is necessary in anthroposophy. Two core elements of this philosophical idea are "uniqueness in the world" and "self-knowledge." The first refers to the idea that there is a connection between nature, human life, and death. In the second, individuals should examine themselves in order to achieve integrity (Williams & Johnson, 2005).

Life is perceived as a plant, requiring detailed research on this topic. Language, thought, individuality, and self-control are also essential for the outpouring of the spiritual entity that exists between the self and the body. Thus, the body, spirit, and soul are three fundamental elements that must be considered in children’s education (Onur, 2006).

The Waldorf approach aims to develop all aspects related to children by adopting the philosophy of “head, heart, and hands” (Driscoll & Nagel, 1999). These three elements represent thinking, feeling, and willing (Dündar, 2007). Waldorf pedagogy emphasizes the importance of holism and draws attention to the role of temperature in health and development, emphasizing the necessity of maintaining balance (Patterson & Bradley, 2011).

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National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

Waldorf schools operate independently and are led by teachers following Steiner's principles (Oberman, 1997). There are 12 years of compulsory education, as education should not conclude until a child's ego is fully developed. The ego impacts an individual's existence, much like nourishment and nature (Schmitt-Stegmann, 1997). Self-control, emotions, and thoughts—components of ego-consciousness—develop through formative forces fostered by nutrition. The transformative energy focuses on the development of various elements, such as self-control, feeling, and thinking at different moments (Lopata, 2000).

Art, which forms the foundation of Waldorf schools, fosters children's self-confidence and creativity, equipping them to find solutions to any problem (Coppenrath, 2012). Supporting the child's spiritual and emotional growth enables the development of holistic thinking, prioritizing the child's happiness. Artistic learning is an integral part of the curriculum, as children's initial learning experiences are rooted in pictorial thinking. Humans require rhythm, which lies at the core of the human organism during all developmental stages (Lopata, 2000). Predictable daily activities that are part of the routine provide children with a sense of security. Typically, both children and parents are familiar with the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly routine (Kotaman, 2009).

3. Generative Principles: The Basis for Developing the Waldorf alternative educational Curriculum

The term of generative principles refers to a set of ideas that can be applied to generate and evaluate practice. These principles reveal the nature of the developing human being from an anthroposophical perspective, originally derived from the works of Rudolf Steiner, and further enriched through lectures and discussions with the teachers at the first Waldorf school, complemented by the experience of the last 100 years.

This pedagogical anthropology includes the interactive relationship between the body, mind, and the spiritual core of the human being, a learning theory, individualization processes, the triple nature of humans in sensory-nervous, rhythmic-circulatory, and metabolic-limb domains, the nature of thinking, feeling, and willing, and their interactions. It also considers various sensory modes, states of consciousness, and the role of education in guiding and harmonizing these processes.

These ideas lead to a series of learning, teaching, and school organization practices, which belong to the core practices in Waldorf schools around the world.

The curriculum refers to the totality of students' experiences during the educational process, encompassing both explicit and the hidden or tacit dimensions. Therefore, the curriculum

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includes school culture, the learning environment, relationships, and community, as well as what is taught, when, and how it is taught.

The basic assumption behind the curriculum in a Waldorf context is that there is a fundamental developmental goal underlying the sequence of what, how, and when things are taught and learned. Learning situations are arranged in such a way that certain learning processes may emerge, serving socialization, qualification, and individualization. The curriculum, like the entire educational approach, translates generative principles into practices that serve the goals and intentions of education at a local and specific level.

The foundation for developing the Waldorf curriculum is the nature of the developing human being, which is interpreted through a set of generative principles. The development of the curriculum begins with the goals and intention of education, which also function as evaluation criteria. The relationship between the general objectives of education, personal development, specific learning outcomes in the form of competencies, learning dispositions, and knowledge, on one hand, and the actual learning process of students, on the other hand, can be represented in diagrams as follows. What connects these two processes is the evaluation.

According to K. Bransby & M. Rawson (2020), the curriculum can be framed and analyzed at three levels incorporated into a meta-level context:

- The meta-level curriculum which includes the core generative principles and objectives of education, based on an anthroposophical understanding of the general nature of the developing human being and how various aspects of pedagogy affect the human being as an integrated body, soul, and spirit (body, mind, and subject/individuality). These principles describe the prerequisites for healthy learning and development, as well as the pedagogical context. A meta-level curriculum also emphasizes the capabilities humans can develop throughout life and, specifically, how these are learned during the childhood and youth phases.
- The macro-curricular framework of tasks and themes sensitive to age and development is structured thematically on a horizontal level (i.e., the connection between subjects within the same year), a vertical level (i.e., the progress within the discipline and the development of skills are established throughout the entire school cycle.), and a spiral level (i.e., the expansion and recurrence of key concepts throughout the entire school career). A macro-level curriculum is a set of development themes that outline a developmental framework, which Waldorf considers that provides a general structure in which individual development can take place.
- A mezzo-curriculum level involves ideal age-related types or teaching and learning models that articulate the connection between the general themes of the macro-curriculum and the interpretations of current learning conditions, such as external social and cultural

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expectations that feed into the curriculum content. This considers cultural factors as well as global issues such as the climate crisis, pandemics, digital mass-media or sources of conflict. National or statutory curricular requirements (if applicable) are also taken into consideration at the mezzo level. A mezzo-level curriculum provides a semi-permanent framework of guidance for all these aspects, which is reviewed and adjusted to reflect the historical, social, and cultural space with its specific orientations and requirements. This is the level where aspects like the decolonization of the curriculum emerge, because these are distinctly situated from a historical and cultural perspective

- Micro-curriculum can be developed by teachers for specific classes and learning groups, taking into account individual learning differences, interests, and biographical needs. The development of the entire group can also be considered at this level. Such micro-curricula might be regularly informed through professional discussions and revised through internal and external occasional moderation.

4. Literacy Competence

In primary school, ensuring continuity with the same teacher is important. Such continuity is essential for teachers to protect their authority and to have information about the children's developmental levels and progress (Dündar, 2007). The main subjects during this period are poetry, play, legends, the history and stories of the ancients, geometry, world geography, and botany (Astley & Jacson, 2000). The theme is presented to children through images or dramatization, with images helping to develop their imagination. Elective courses are part of the curriculum, allowing children to understand their potential. As a result, children find an opportunity to develop skills that are appropriate for them (Patterson & Bradley, 2011).

In the context of current discussions about optimal methods through which children learn to read, Waldorf education offers a valuable and alternative model for a “balanced and comprehensive” approach to literacy, based on a tradition of success. For example, the Waldorf method for reading always includes detailed and intensive instruction in phonetics, i.e., the connection between sounds and letters. Moreover, these specific skills (such as phonetics) are developed in a broader context of meaningful linguistic experience: words, even individual letters, come to life through stories, poetry, movement, theater, and art, allowing children to explore reading and writing through a variety of enjoyable, familiar, and meaningful experiences.

In concrete terms, alphabetization represents the stage in which a student learns to read and write, while literacy refers to the ability to use the skills acquired during the alphabetization

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National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

period. This includes relating to a text, understanding it, interpreting it, and formulating new opinions and contexts based on a text read from various fields, using diverse materials (written, audio, digital).

Children start the school program with the main discipline for two hours. In this course, they learn to read and write through playful learning (Onur, 2004). However, children are not alphabetized until the age of 9 (Dündar, 2007). In other words, children understand things that emerge and change independently, gaining a different perspective on the relationship between objects and themselves. Letters are taught with images of letters, including abstract symbols. For example, the letter "s" is taught and associated with the image of a snake (Carnie, 2003). In "Literacy and Power", Hilary Janks (2010) emphasizes the importance of design and redesign practices, as well as analyses of power, access, and diversity, in developing transformative critical literacy practices. Young children are often capable of recreating or "re-versioning" the texts to which they are exposed, and Waldorf-inspired approaches provide them with the freedom to interact creatively and explore texts (in a broad sense) through various media. By emphasizing productive activities, these methods support the initiative and creativity of students, offering them a dynamic and living content that can be negotiated, interpreted, and transformed into their imaginative play, into drawings, paintings, or creative retellings. It is essential that, by avoiding limiting the concepts of "learning" or "literacy" solely to the (re)production of written letters, words, and sentences, these creative practices stimulate "multiliteracies"—a concept developed by The New London Group in 1996, referring to a variety of literacy forms, increasingly relevant in the context of socio-economic changes and communication practices in the globalized era.

The curriculum is implemented through a carefully planned and balanced combination of activities that engage children in areas they would not be able to discover on their own without the help of an adult, providing them with a safe and nurturing environment conducive to practicing these skills in groups as well as independently. The literacy curriculum for the first years, with a detailed approach to developing the fundamental skills necessary for future formal literacy, facilitates a quick assimilation of these competencies starting at the age of 5 ½ - 6 years. By the beginning of first grade (6+ years), children already have solid listening skills, developed working memory, phonological awareness, a good narrative understanding, an extended vocabulary, and the ability to use their imagination to create mental images. They are also capable of working independently and with their own style. Emphasis is continuously placed on developing fine motor skills, sequential work, and visual and auditory discrimination,

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National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

all of which are achieved through various games and artistic activities designed to maximize the effectiveness of learning.

H. Janks (2010) argues that the various ways of reading and writing about the world, in diverse formats, constitute an essential resource for transforming consciousness. Waldorf-inspired approaches broaden the concept of literacy to include a wide range of forms of communication and expression, such as drawing, movement, painting, imaginative play, crafts, storytelling, and other oral modalities, as well as promoting multilingualism. These multimodal pedagogies harness the imagination as a primary resource, creating an environment conducive to children's diverse ways of using words (Heath, 1983).

Focusing on productive practices, these Waldorf-inspired approaches expand literary-critical perspectives, which mainly focus on cognitive or analytical aspects, highlighting that children's critical abilities go beyond cognitive thinking and are much richer than what can be expressed within traditional literacy constructs or in verbal discussions about texts, which play an important role in critical pedagogies. These creative literacy practices allow teachers to take on the role of creative subjects from the very beginning (Freire, 2000). In this sense, positioning teachers as creative subjects reflects Comber's (2001) ideas, which emphasize that young people possess complex productive and analytical capabilities to engage with what truly matters.

5. Particularities of Literacy in Waldorf Pedagogy

The connection between sound and letter is consolidated in first grade, where students are introduced to letters and words through stories, poetry, movement, and art. Similar to the activities in kindergarten, children listen to, retell, or act out stories and recite simple poems, word games, and rhymes, but now written words also come into play. The process of developing reading and writing skills involves a transition from an oral-auditory environment to a visual one; students correlate familiar sounds with something new—the visual representation of language. This process is precisely what happens in a Waldorf classroom: students hear a story, then observe words or sentences from that story written on the board, alongside an illustration created by the teacher. The familiarity of the words and their context (the story and illustration) helps students establish a simultaneous connection between sound, image, and meaning.

The process then follows a different sequence from that of many traditional classrooms: Waldorf students begin creating their own books as early as first grade—individual, self-composed, and illustrated records of their learning in each subject—a practice that continues

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National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

throughout their school years. Initially, students copy poems or alliterative verses written by the teacher on the blackboard. Gradually, they begin to write their own sentences, usually summarizing a captivating moment from a story, which they may also illustrate. Thus, their first reading experience is connected to their own writing, allowing them to revisit familiar material. In this way, reading and writing develop together as interdependent activities, enabling the child to be an active participant from the beginning, discovering that they can put words on paper and later read them to others. Through this process, the child relives and recalls the story. It is a natural and continuous process, evolving from listening to a story to visualizing the words, then writing them—initially by copying—and eventually reading them. At every stage, the activities are closely tied to stories, images, and experiences that are familiar and enjoyable for the students: fairy tales, fables, poems about animals, and similar themes (Prouty, 2008).

This connection between letter, sound, and image mirrors the evolution of letters from pictograms and hieroglyphs to the modern alphabet system. For young children, letters become part of a meaningful, engaging, and enjoyable set of experiences; this approach goes beyond the abstract perception of letters as simple black-and-white symbols on a page, embedding them into a familiar and accessible context. In Waldorf classrooms, the introduction of letters takes on an almost ceremonial quality. Although many first-grade students are already familiar with the alphabet when they begin school, they are often captivated by this creative presentation, which demonstrates the power of the alphabet and language to open worlds rich with meaning.

During this initial stage of becoming familiar with letters, there is an intense focus on phonics. Students are encouraged to associate letters with familiar words and sentences while creating their own examples. Together, the teacher and students analyze stories or verses written on the board, gradually introducing other letters and spelling patterns. By the end of the first grade, Waldorf students compose and illustrate their own "first readings," which include pages with letters, word families, favorite stories, and poems, which they can later share with their families. As a recognition of their integration into the world of literacy, the teacher may present them with a reading booklet containing stories, poems, or even a play that the students performed during the year.

In the second grade, students continue developing their reading and writing skills through exposure to various printed texts from the classroom library, individual and group readings, as well as narrative and descriptive writing exercises in their notebooks. Speech activities, drama, storytelling, and revisiting stories, along with classroom discussions, contribute to enhancing

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National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

students' oral language skills. The connection between orality and literacy is consistently maintained and emphasized throughout the school years.

The early development of literacy in Waldorf schools progresses more slowly compared to current recommendations for public schools. The Waldorf curriculum is similar to that of several European educational systems, particularly in Denmark, where students begin first grade and are introduced to literacy at the age of seven, achieving an almost 100% literacy rate. The detailed and creative process of learning the alphabet takes time, as does the oral practice and the integration of artistic activities such as painting, drawing, modeling, and rhythmic movement, which help students experience language as a domain rich in meaning. However, by fourth grade, Waldorf students have reached a literacy level comparable to that of their peers in public schools.

Young students participate daily in an activity called "ring time," which includes songs, movement, language games, rhymes, and poetry. Older students engage in listening and language games such as "Hunt the Slipper", "Fruit Bowl" or "I Spy".

- Songs, rhymes, and poetry contribute to developing understanding and skills related to rhyme and rhythm, helping students perceive the segmentation of sentences into words, words into syllables, and syllables into their basic sounds (Bryant, 1993).
- Word games and rhymes support the development of phonemic awareness and the ability to distinguish initial sounds.
- Repetition and recitation of songs and rhymes strengthen students' ability to organize language, recognize patterns, and deepen their understanding of grammar and syntax.
- Students listen to an oral story every day, ranging from simple, repetitive narratives with refrains to fairy tales with a well-defined narrative arc and even longer, more elaborate stories. Adults use various storytelling resources, from simple props serving as visual aids to complex puppet shows performed by multiple people.
- Stories and puppet shows, which become increasingly sophisticated and are repeated over several days, help young learners develop skills in listening and attention, memory, narrative understanding, sequencing, prediction, and inference.
- Narratives employ rich vocabulary, with students' comprehension supported by the story's context and repetition (Feinstein & Duckworth, 2006).
- Oral storytelling and simple puppets aid children in developing their ability to create mental imagery (Woolley, 2010).

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- Students are provided with open-ended materials that allow them to recreate and retell the stories.

In conclusion, Waldorf students begin their education with a carefully prepared and participatory experience in oral language, exploring it in all its diversity and richness. Throughout the entire program, emphasis is placed on maintaining and developing oral language skills. In the first and second grades, students transition deliberately through carefully modulated introductions to literacy, starting with an extended presentation of the alphabet and the relationships between sounds and symbols, followed by their first attempts at writing. Reading is introduced later, beginning with texts they have written themselves, progressing to orally presented materials, and finally to unfamiliar texts. Reading skills, such as phonics, word-attack strategies, and decoding, are explicitly developed but always within the context of meaningful reading experiences. This gradual and carefully structured approach to literacy provides students with the best opportunity for success and equips them with the comprehensive language skills they need for the future.

6. Research Design

The Waldorf educational alternative is not widely spread in Romania, which means that primary school teachers are generally unfamiliar with its specific characteristics. Regarding literacy, there are numerous valuable practices that actively engage students in the instructional-educational process while also supporting learning. Some of these elements can be integrated into Romanian Language and Communication classes, which is why this research was conducted to identify particular features that do not require significant changes to the educational approach already planned by teachers, but still bring meaningful improvements in academic outcomes.

The research conducted is qualitative, focusing on the perspectives and opinions of the participants, using methods such as Focus-group, observation, and conversation. The results are non-numeric, with the data being interpreted based on the context created. This type of research highlights the experiences of the selected teachers, capturing aspects and opinions that would not have been uncovered through other research methods.

6.1. Purpose, Objectives, and Research Question

The purpose of the research is to identify how teachers in traditional education apply the principles of the Waldorf educational alternative to develop literacy in the foundational acquisition cycle.

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The objectives of this research are:

- identifying the limitations of traditional methodologies in the literacy instruction process;
- identifying the principles of the Waldorf educational alternative that could be applicable by teachers in traditional education;
- analyzing how these principles are integrated into literacy activities.

To what extent can some of the principles of the Waldorf educational alternative be implemented in the literacy process of students of the foundational acquisition cycle in traditional schools?

6.2. Hypothesis and Research Variables

It is assumed that some principles from Waldorf pedagogy, such as experiential learning, integration of the arts, and the use of storytelling, can be used in traditional education to support the development of students' literacy skills.

Research Variables

- Dependent variables: students' ability to understand and interpret texts, written and oral expression skills, students' motivation and attitude toward reading and writing, teachers' opinions on the effectiveness of Waldorf principles, students' responses regarding the attractiveness and effectiveness of the methods.
- Independent variable: Experiential learning, integration of the arts in the educational process, use of storytelling, how these principles are integrated into the traditional curriculum, adaptation of teaching methods.

7. Research methodology

7.1. Application of Focus-group method

The Focus-group method does not have a precise definition, the term actually designates a variety of techniques (Carey, 1994). However, the method can be defined as "a group interview «carefully prepared» to obtain « information on a defined area of interest, in a permissive setting, free of threats. It is led by a trained interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for the participants because they share ideas and perceptions with each other. The members of the group influence each other by responding to the ideas and comments made during the discussions" (Patton, 2002, p. 386).

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We used this method in the current research, constituting a group of 5 people, recruited on a voluntary basis, according to a criterion that gives the group a certain homogeneity, namely, all five people are teachers for primary education in the traditional education system, first-grader and with experience in the profession of over 20 years.

The focus-group method has a built/structured character, so the entire social context in which the data is collected was structured:

- Human resources: participants did not know each other in advance, being chosen according to criteria that ensure homogeneity (primary teachers, teaching traditional classes);
- Spatial resources: the members of the group were summoned in a specially arranged space (round table, so that each of them could view all the participants) and equipped with recording/observing technique;
- Time resources: the participants were summoned for a fixed term, known in advance (1-2 hours); the actual session was preceded by a pre-session: 15-20 minutes of familiarization of participants with space and others.

Also, this qualitative research method has a focused and structured character, thus, the discussion was strongly focused on a topic and especially on several aspects of it (developing literacy skills through the practices of the Waldorf alternative). The participants had previously available an interview guide similar to the semi-structured qualitative interview: a number of questions or issues that need to be analyzed, in the order in which they will be addressed.

The discussion is led by a leader (Carey, 1994) or moderator (Krueger, 1994). The moderator is the researcher. During the application of the method, the moderator's tasks were observed, so he monitored the interventions and maintained the focus, stimulating the silent ones and tempering the overly talkative ones, he made sure that the list of questions was fully covered, monitored the time and decided whether to let the discussion continue on a certain aspect or move on to the next question.

According to the literature in the field, the following steps were followed in the application of the Focus-Group method:

Stage I: Preparing the Focus-Group

In this first stage, the construction of the object and the instrumentation, were carried out, thus, a consistent bibliography was consulted on the given topic and a conceptual scheme was developed (Figure 1) containing 3 research questions, each with a few sub-themes/questions (according to the conceptual scheme).

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Discussion theme: Developing literacy competence
through the practices of the Waldorf alternative

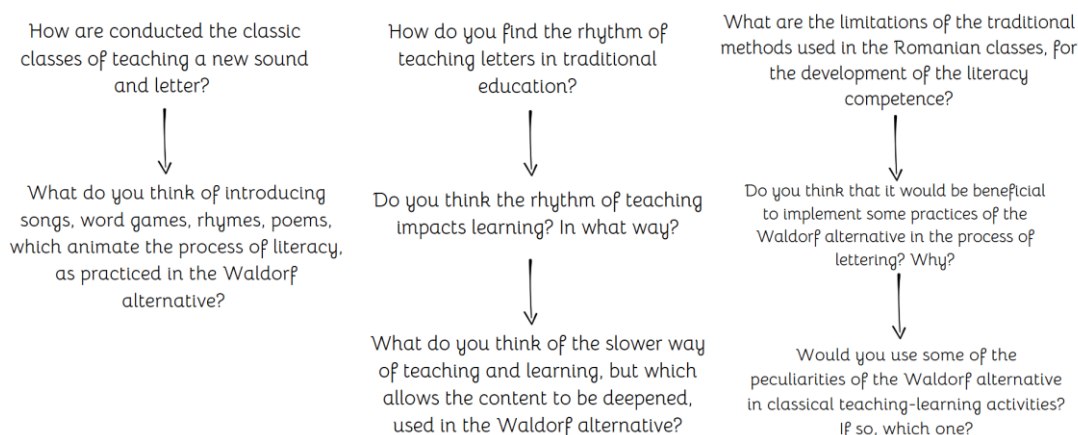


Figure 1: Conceptual scheme of the discussion

The recruitment and selection of participants was done on a voluntary basis, disseminating information on the principles of the Waldorf alternative in the previous meeting. Selection criteria were taken into account such as: relevant experience in relation to the research topic, homogeneity of subjects from the perspective of their experience, but also from the status perspective (primary teachers in traditional schools), homogeneity encouraging free expression.

Logistical preparation was also carried out: material conditions (quiet, heat, light, round table arrangement) were taken into account; psychological conditions were offered to stimulate the provision of information: privacy and security. The recording equipment was positioned efficiently and with discretion.

The moderator made sure that he had the text of the introduction and the interview guide on him, he also trained in managing the group dynamics, one of the most difficult aspects of the focus group, it requires training and prior experience.

Stage II: Conducting the interview and recording the data

- The pre-session

This stage is intended for the reception of subjects by the leader himself and the familiarization of the participants with the space and with the other colleagues: as they entered the space intended for the session, they, they were invited to serve something from the buffet and talk to others. The moderator discreetly observed the participants: who was more willing to talk, who was not, who was spontaneously associated with whom, who was avoiding who spontaneously,

**Innovation in Education. Openings to Educational Alternatives
National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

who was avoiding who, using these observations in positioning the subjects around the discussion table and in moderation.

- The session

In the introduction, the moderator provides participants with information about registration and use of the recording. Participants who do not accept registration are given the opportunity to leave the room. They are told the rules related to the conduct of the discussion:

- anything related to the theme can be said; there is no restriction, there must be no restraint;
- all experiences or opinions are equally valuable for the purpose of research, there are no experiences or opinions better or more interesting than others;
- no consensus is desired, but we are interested to know when someone has an experience or opinion similar to another, but, but it also matters when one has a different or even opposite experience or opinion;
- no one makes judgments of opinion, everyone shows respect for others;
- it is important that everyone feels free, to be himself, with his experiences, thoughts, feelings;
- everyone can intervene whenever they feel the need, without asking permission, but only after they made sure that the one who spoke before has finished what he has to say, or they can make a discreet mark to the moderator (hand raised slightly);
- the moderator will intervene from time to time, not to say what is right or true, nor to give justice to someone, but only to ensure that in the time available to the group, all aspects will be addressed and that each participant will tell his point of view.

The moderator launches the general theme (Developing literacy competence through the practices of the Waldorf alternative), then asks the first question "How are conducted the classic classes of teaching a new sound and letter?" and invites participants to express their opinions. Following the debate of the first question, it was noted that most teachers (4 out of 5) follow the same teaching pattern, focusing on identifying sounds, syllables, words and their position, clear pronunciation, then focusing on the actual writing, which is carried out in the type notebook. One of the participants takes a more creative approach, using elements such as thematic stories, characters, also involving, manual work in the production of products to support the activity of learning the letter.

**Innovation in Education. Openings to Educational Alternatives
National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

For the next question, derived from the previous one, "What do you think of introducing songs, word games, rhymes, poems, which animate the process of literacy, as practiced in the Waldorf alternative?", the answers were similar, the teachers saying that the information transmitted in the previous meeting, can serve as a solution for the transformation of teaching hours, from monotonous to attractive and active-participative. However, teachers also pointed out the lack of time as a reason why it is difficult to integrate various activities in teaching, because of the loaded content, which must be transmitted in a limited time.

This remark generated the facile transition to the next question "How do you find the rhythm of teaching letters in traditional education?". The conclusion of the discussion, in this case, was valid for all respondents, each arguing why they consider that a slower and deeper approach to the teaching of letters, would be necessary, with the opportunity to treat the content from several perspectives, giving the student the chance to participate in various activities aimed at developing and forming the targeted competence.

The discussion was continued by asking the following question "Do you think the rhythm of teaching impacts learning? In what way?". The participants stated that such a change would benefit pupils with a slower learning rhythm and would also allow all students participating in the learning process to better secure and strengthen the content.

The reference was made to the practices of the Waldorf alternative through the following theme of diction, related to the previous ones: "What do you think of the slower way of teaching and learning, but which allows the content to be deepened, used in the Waldorf alternative?". The participants expressed their opinions, the final conclusion being that the rhythm approached in the Waldorf alternative is justified and thought out in a way that gives the necessary time for both the teacher to conceive interesting and complex activities, but also the student to assimilate the content and experiment with its application.

Thus, we have come to debate the third research question "What are the limitations of the traditional methods used in the Romanian classes, for the development of the literacy competence?". Here the answers were varied, each respondent coming with their own contribution, analyzing at the same time the responses of the other participants, without making opinion judgments on the vision of others. Among the limitations presented by the best-argued and often-specified teachers were: the approach of classical methods to the detriment of interactive and modern ones, implicitly also of technology, caused by the insufficiency of materials, and, temporal means and resources; dealing with content in a collective manner that does not meet the particular needs of students and thus does not support student-centered learning.

**Innovation in Education. Openings to Educational Alternatives
National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

"Do you think that it would be beneficial to implement some practices of the Waldorf alternative in the process of lettering? Why?" it was the question that sparked the most positive responses, focused on the characteristics that could be taken over and that could significantly improve the educational process and that would increase at the same time the motivation of the students for learning.

At the end of the discussion, the focus was on concrete aspects: "Would you use some of the peculiarities of the Waldorf alternative in classical teaching-learning activities? If so, which?". Each respondent intervened with his or her own selection of items that he or she believes could actually apply without making any considerable changes to the already established planning structure. For example, participants stated that elements such as introducing stories for each letter would be beneficial and not impossible to achieve. Also, elements such as poems, riddles, plastic creations can be successfully introduced into classical activities. The only element that primary education teachers felt they could not apply is the adaptation of the current pace according to that of the Waldorf alternative.

- The end of the session

At the end of the session, the moderator asked for feedback from the respondents, possible additions, satisfactions, grievances, to express their opinion on how the activity was carried out and also thank the participants for their involvement and interest.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Focus-group method was successfully applied, with the moderator not needing to intervene significantly, allowing them to focus on guiding the conversation and making effortless and natural transitions between the main questions. The teachers involved actively participated in the discussion, being open and sincere, much more relaxed than anticipated.

The rules were followed, which helped maintain a conducive atmosphere for dialogue, and the suggested setting induced a relaxed state, allowing for a natural flow in participants' individual speech. The moderator's insistence on respecting others' opinions encouraged honest responses. The topic of discussion proved to be engaging and stimulated interest, so there were no moments of silence or unanswered questions. Although the proposed topic focused on the potential implementation of Waldorf principles, the discussion also highlighted several limitations regarding the methodologies commonly used in mainstream education.

Participants noted that elements of the Waldorf alternative could be introduced into the literacy process to engage students actively and contribute to the development of literacy skills in a

Innovation in Education. Openings to Educational Alternatives National Conference Proceedings, 2024

creative and adaptable way to the specific needs of students in the foundational acquisition cycle.

However, it was noted that there are limitations to implementing Waldorf principles in the literacy process in mainstream education. For instance, the change in pace to a slower rhythm, which would make it difficult to cover the content within the school year, is one of the features of the Waldorf alternative that cannot be achieved. Furthermore, the introduction of playful elements to support letter teaching requires creativity and innovation, as well as more thorough preparation, which demands availability and openness from the teacher.

Nonetheless, there are practices that can be easily implemented and would improve student outcomes. For example, suggesting activities closely tied to a main story, upon which the content is based, encourages student involvement in the activity and facilitates the integration of interdisciplinary material.

This research concluded that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the philosophy underlying the Waldorf educational alternative to uncover various elements that could be integrated into traditional education without significant changes to the current curriculum, thus not forcing primary school teachers to deviate from their well-established methods.

To address the issues raised during the focus group method and to gather more opinions, further development of the research is needed, involving a larger sample and the application of diverse research tools and methods to generate more substantial results.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to support reflection on more aspects of the Waldorf alternative, extending beyond literacy, to discover solutions to existing issues in traditional education.

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**Innovation in Education. Openings to Educational Alternatives
National Conference Proceedings, 2024**

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