

A worldwide survey of Steiner/Waldorf school doctors

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Eugen Kolisko, MD, PhD
1893-1939
Professor for medical Chemistry in Vienna. Joined the first Waldorf School Initiative in 1927 to become the first integrative school doctor

Background

Many schools around the world have school doctors, however, Steiner/Waldorf Schools are the only brand of schools we found to have their own school doctors with an explicitly holistic approach. There has been no research on holistic school doctors to date.

Aim

This study aims to assess the spectrum of the Steiner/Waldorf School doctors' tasks and the various organizational and financial arrangements they have with the schools as well as medical, social and spiritual aspects of their work.



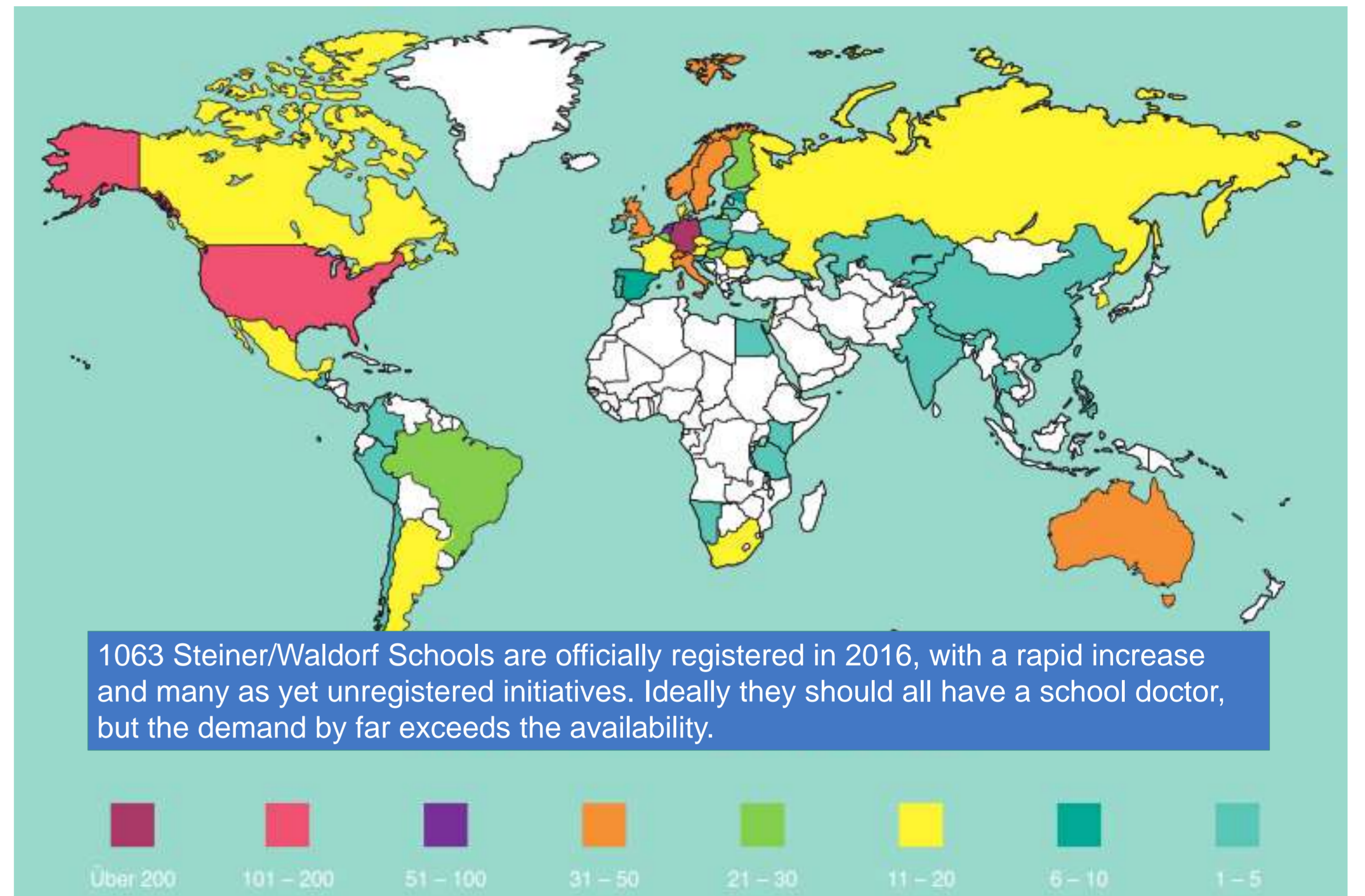
Steiner/Waldorf Schools see their main task in enabling healthy, individual, free development to the utmost of each child's intellectual, emotional and volitional capacities. All subjects are taught artistically. The school doctor is part of this concept.



Rudolf Steiner, PhD
1861-1925
Author of "The Philosophy of Freedom" and Founder of Waldorf Education

Methods

A questionnaire was devised and sent out in Germany, Austrian and Switzerland via the Medical Section at the Goetheanum. Based on the *first round of feedback* a further questionnaire in languages was devised and spread internationally via the International Postgraduate Medical Training (IPMT)-network, leading to the *second round of feedback*. The „Freunde der Erziehungskunst“ network was used to assess how many schools have a doctor. Answers were evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively.



Results

So far we have received 85 responses from 16 countries.

There are more than 1000 Waldorf schools in over 60 countries around the world. Many are currently without a school doctor or were not reached by the the mailing networks used to date.

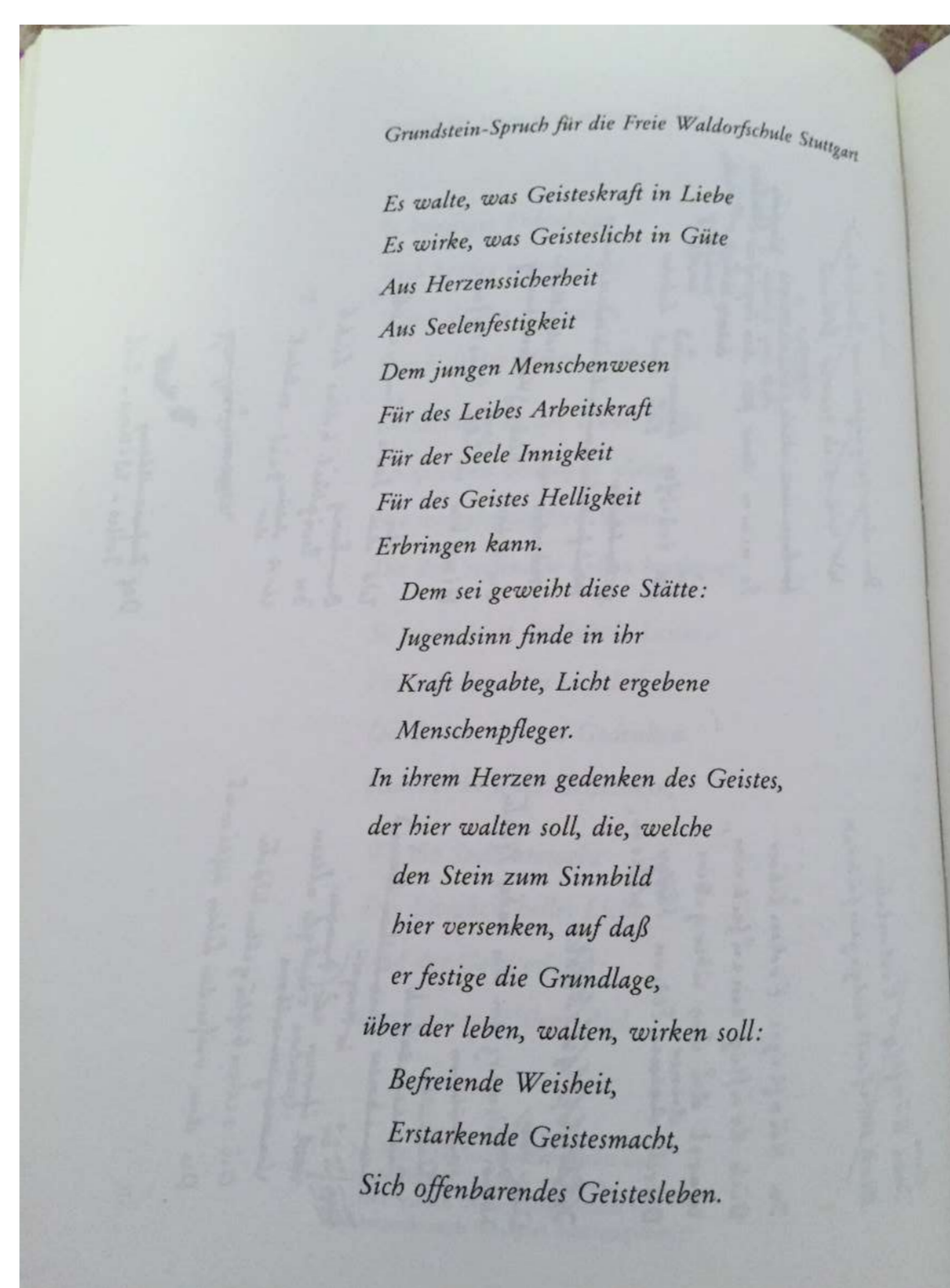
"In Columbia we haven't school doctors. Currently we support Indirectly Several Waldorf Schools in Cali and Medellin,, (L.M., Columbia)

Reported Tasks:

Kindergarten and school entry investigations, consultations for pupils, parents and teachers, consultation and exchange with the school therapists and eurythmists, lectures on selected health topics for parents and teachers, contributions to parent-teacher and teacher conferences, working groups, inclusion groups, individual studies, shadowing teachers to assess children in class-room situations, teaching various topics to the pupils, including whole main-lesson blocks, columns in school newspaper, parent-school, hygiene instruction, cooperation with public health departments, phone and email advice.

Difficulties mentioned by some of the school doctors:

Low salary, heavy social work, little time, uncertainties about legal protection, confidentiality issues, missing a professional society and network.



Extract of the Foundation Stone Meditation for Waldorf/Steiner Schools

Spirituality:

For many school doctors the school doctors Meditation „It was in ancient times [...] education was considered equal to the healing process [...]“ (Rudolf Steiner; Complete Works, Book 316) belongs to daily life, while the foundation stone meditation for Waldorf/Steiner Schools is largely unknown.

Work satisfaction and meaningfulness:

„I love the work (...) it inspires me, gives me joy, touches me and I find it wonderful to foster the free development of children and youth. Thankful, heartfelt feedback continually gives me strength.“ (S. H., Germany). Work satisfaction was generally very high.

Demographics:

66% of school doctors are 50 years and older. Only 7% of school doctors are under 40.

Conclusions

“Educating (...) is subtle healing.” Rudolf Steiner Complete Works, Book 316

Many Steiner/Waldorf schools incorporate mini health institutes enabling much salutogenic and therapeutic work to the benefit of the children, the community and the future. **This work is felt to be very rewarding and meaningful, yet it is threatened in some schools and countries due to poor pay, heavy social work, legal uncertainties, a lack of network and professional association and, especially, aging school doctors and a lack of school doctors worldwide.** Sustainable models of school-doctoring urgently need to be further developed, alongside with enlarging the professional network and the international training courses. The network created by this study is a valuable step towards addressing these challenges.

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