

Waldorf teacher education in Vietnam

Contribution by Thanh Cherry, Vietnam

History:

The Waldorf education movement in Vietnam only appeared on the scene quite recently. Only in 2018 did it formally become a movement, that means a cohesive, organised movement with a teacher education programme, a unified curriculum and in which teachers try to work together toward a common goal.

In fact, Waldorf education existed in Vietnam in a loose form a long time before that. It started with the first kindergarten, in 2000, in a Buddhist orphanage. Half of the 30 or so children were orphans, half were street kids from poor, disadvantaged families. In 2002 & 2003, two more kindergartens for disadvantaged children were opened. The parents were mainly factory workers, farmers, street vendors etc. These kindergartens worked strictly with Steiner Waldorf principles although the parents, where there were any, had no time for and showed no interest in Waldorf, or any other form of education for that matter.

2012-2015: the first three-year part-time early childhood teacher training course was organised for the 12 pioneering teachers in those three kindergartens. It was run once a month at weekends. The training was partly supported by the Melbourne Teacher Education Seminar in Australia. Waldorf education received some publicity at the Graduation ceremony in 2015 with press and TV exposure. This led to enquires and requests for similar training programmes

In 2016, the first class 1 opened at one of the kindergartens. At the same time, the first early childhood teacher education course was organised in Ho Chi Minh City with the participation of experienced international tutors of recognised qualifications, and a training programme recognised by IASWECE (International Association for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education). It satisfied all the requirements for a part-time early childhood teacher training programme: around 468 hours of direct tuition plus assignments, mentoring and practicum. In 2017, the second early childhood teacher training course took place in the city of Hanoi.

Current situation:

- **Kindergartens:**

Vietnam is quite a small country. Currently we have 56 early childhood initiatives – from playgroups and nursery classes to kindergartens and pre-school classes.

- **Schools**

There are four schools with classes 1-5 only, and seven primary/high schools up to class 11.

Teacher education courses

- **Two three-year, part-time kindergarten training courses** – the average number of students in each course is 40-50. The number has decreased somewhat in the last year to

35-40. A third training course in Danang had to close down in 2025 because the numbers went down to 20 which could not guarantee financial feasibility.

- **A birth-to-three training** (two-years, part-time) has just been completed.
- **A primary teacher training course** (three-years, part-time) – Classes 1-5.
- **A high school teacher training programme** began in 2024 and is continuing.

Further training courses

- **A fulltime eurythmy training** to train eurythmy teachers for classes. The students will graduate in November 2025.
- **A speech and drama course** for teachers.
- **Two courses for special needs education** for teachers who will assist children with additional needs in class.

Beside these, there are short courses and workshops on specialised subjects such as painting, drawing, Bothmer gym, music, maths teaching etc. throughout the year for teachers' professional development. A Bothmer gym training is being planned for the coming year to train physical education teachers for the schools.

Challenges:

I was impressed with Dr. Porn's presentation in September in which he described the fragility of children today and their parent's over-protection. Speaking from Vietnam, I can agree; the phenomenon seems quite universal.

In Vietnam, we are facing two kinds of challenges:

1. The political situation – Vietnam is a one-party (communist) state. This brings particular challenges for the schools, especially in terms of obtaining a license and conforming to the prescribed curriculum.
2. Changes facing a new generation of children and teachers. These include
 - Today everywhere, teachers have to deal with children's fragility, parents' over protection, lack of movement, little contact with nature, too much intellectual learning too early, parents' ambitions and expectations: extra coaching, extra-curricular activities and inappropriate education.
 - Socio-economic factors influencing methods of child rearing – richer parents, children are indulged with consumer goods, unhealthy foods, unsuitable toys...
 - Technological devices – TV, mobile phones, iPads, laptops, computers, electronic games...
 - The loss of good traditional and cultural models and principles
 - Obsolete methods of education, especially those which depend too much on technological and digital devices, over-emphasising intellectual training and employing materialistic teaching methods.