

Rediscovering Childhood and Humanity: Waldorf Educators Training in Iran

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In recent years, a trend has taken hold in Iran in which educational programs for children are designed to meet the needs of adults. This approach, however, neglects the natural and fundamental needs of young children. An endless array of classes—ranging from origami and chemistry to math and theater—fills children’s schedules, leaving little room for them to simply be children and discover the world in their own way. These children are pushed directly into skill acquisition and intellectual advancement without experiencing a natural developmental process or exploring the world around them independently. This deprives them of the chance to learn through observation and natural exploration, to experience the world with all their senses. In many educational settings, attention is focused solely on the children’s performance outcomes.

In this context, the Waldorf educational training project was launched at the end of 2019 with the goal of creating a safe framework for the growth and development of children. Realizing this goal was only possible through a deep understanding of child development psychology and the adults’ commitment to self-education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most project activities were conducted online, which was a significant achievement for us as it allowed us to bring together educators from across Iran. Some participants in these courses were mothers who were not only interested in their own development but were also seeking ways to better support and guide their children. As a result, the course content was designed to be enriching and useful not only for educators but also for mothers and the home environment.

In the introductory phase, which was dedicated to providing a general understanding of Waldorf education, more than 180 people participated. After the introductory phase, participants were asked to



deeply reflect on the thoughts and experiences gained through this new approach in Waldorf education and consider whether it could be an answer to the aspirations they held for their children's future and their own path of personal development. This process gave rise to a smaller, more dedicated group determined to pursue the path of Anthroposophy and a deeper understanding of humanity.

Since 2021, the introductory sessions have been held annually to welcome new participants, while advanced groups continue their work in a sustained and deepened way. In addition to the online sessions, the group meets once a year in a rural area of Iran, away from urban settings and immersed in nature, to reconnect with each other and the natural environment. Finding a suitable place that is accessible and free from environmental and human pollution poses a significant challenge. However, these trips provide an opportunity to rediscover a part of our country, experience cultural and ecological diversity, and root ourselves again in nature. After these trips, participants return to their workplaces re-energized, bringing positive experiences back into their communities and educational settings. Many of the educators who regularly attend these trips work in kindergartens with other pedagogical concepts. For them, applying what they have learned through Waldorf in other settings is a significant challenge, yet the profound impact is unmistakable.

The Waldorf project has continually sought to balance the theoretical content of Anthroposophy, child developmental psychology, and practical activities such as handicrafts and artistic practice, providing participants with an experience of both intellectual and practical "inhalation and exhalation." This endeavor, supported over several years by educators, mothers, and Waldorf enthusiasts, has gradually created a community dedicated to the growth of children and advocating for a future our children need.

In light of social conditions and restrictions, the format of the training sessions has often needed adaptation to ensure they can be held in accordance with local regulations and limitations. We continue



our efforts to develop and strengthen the Waldorf community so that this seed may take root in Iranian soil and bear fruit in the not-too-distant future.

We welcome anyone interested in joining us as instructors in various educational topics or supporting us financially to help continue our journey. Any support allows us to carry forward this important work and to foster the growth of the Waldorf community in Iran.

Arefeh Rezvanmanesh is a Waldorf educator and co-founder of the "Garden of Childhood" kindergarten in Iran. She has over 11 years of experience working with children in early childhood education. She organizes Waldorf introduction courses for educators in Iran. Currently, alongside managing the kindergarten, Arefeh is pursuing a master's degree in psychology.

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