

Differentiating Reading Instruction by Phase

Jennifer Militzer-Kopperl

In the middle of reading tutoring, Nora climbed into my lap, curled into a ball, and began to sob. I held her until she had cried herself out. Then I asked her what was wrong. In a small voice she said, “The kids in my class say I’m stupid. Are they right?”

There are two ways to teach: by grade or by phase. Teaching by grade means every student in the class is taught the same pre-determined reading and spelling curriculum for that grade. Teaching by phase means teachers assess and differentiate instruction in reading and spelling based on students’ skills so all students meet benchmarks. Nora needed the latter approach, but she had received the former. Now she was enrolled in fourth grade, but her reading and spelling skills tested at a public school first grade level.

No, Nora, you are not stupid. You are at a very early phase of learning to read and spell. For three years, your school failed to provide instruction and practice at your level.

Nora’s is not an isolated case. A Waldorf school I once observed conducted reading fluency assessment in grades 3–8. One third to one half of each class qualified for remedial reading (Militzer-Kopperl 2022, 3). By way of comparison, teachers who use assessments created by educational testing groups to differentiate and inform instruction can get up to 95% of students to read and spell at grade level (Hall 2005, 3).

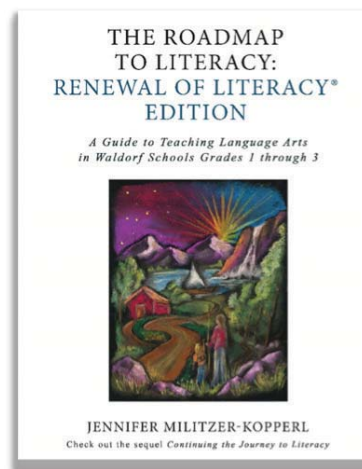
I co-wrote *The Roadmap to Literacy: A Guide to Teaching Language Arts in Waldorf Schools Grades 1 through 3* (Langley and Militzer-Kopperl 2018) to show teachers how to achieve that level of success in a Waldorf classroom. The central tenet is to teach reading and spelling by phase, not grade. However, post-publication the co-author of the book unilaterally decided that Waldorf teachers were not ready to differentiate instruction by phase and started offering training by grade. Then the pandemic hit. Over the last two years, the need to teach by phase has grown. Students missed a lot of school. Teachers report that they have students whose skills are all over the map, and they do not know what to do.

The answer is simple: Use the original intent of *The Roadmap to Literacy*: teach reading and spelling by phase, not grade (i.e., differentiate instruction by phase of learning to read and spell). This process will help

teachers get students caught up post pandemic and get up to 95% of future students reading and spelling at grade level. The basic process contains seven steps:

1. Acknowledge the Elephant in the Room (The Parallel Curriculum)
2. Recognize the Phases of Learning to Read and Spell (and Their Implications)
3. Assess
4. Group
5. Teach
6. Re-Assess
7. Begin a Remedial Process

The material for this article comes from *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* (Militzer-Kopperl, forthcoming in late 2022) and an online video for the book entitled “Little Jenny’s Journey through the Phases of Learning to Read and Spell.”



The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition by Jennifer Militzer-Kopperl (forthcoming late 2022)

Step One: Acknowledge the Elephant in the Room (The Parallel Curriculum)

This article charts new directions offered to Waldorf education. The recommendations align with the

zeitgeist and with Steiner's indications; however, many of them will not receive due consideration until Waldorf educators confront the parallel curriculum. I use the term 'parallel curriculum' to refer to teaching practices that developed in Waldorf classrooms in the last 100 years that are unmoored from Steiner's original indications and intentions. The parallel curriculum is a big obstacle to charting new directions in Waldorf education.

Christof Wiechert, former head of the Pedagogical Section of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum, gives pertinent advice in the 2011 article, "Rethinking the Threefold Division of the Main Lesson":

It is important that we within the Waldorf movement examine and assess how we practice Waldorf Education. If there are elements that need to be changed or eliminated, researchers from outside the movement will sooner or later identify and criticize them. ...

After over ninety years of Waldorf education, we need to examine the way it has developed in order not to damage it, but rather to renew it and reinvigorate ourselves. I have formed the conviction through the years that the source, or spring, or renewal lies in the original indications and intentions of Rudolf Steiner. If this spring begins to bubble up in us, we will become viable for the future.

The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition is designed to be a source of such renewal by including Steiner's indications alongside information about the parallel curriculum. Familiarity with Steiner's indications reveals new directions in reading and spelling.

Step Two: Recognize the Phases of Learning to Read and Spell (and Their Implications)

The Waldorf movement is grounded in the awareness that there are stages to child development and how these stages relate to learning. What is less well known is that there are phases of learning to read and spell. These phases are related to education, not to child development. Working consciously with students in different phases is the key to educating all students and teaching in freedom.

Rising first-graders are all in the same stage of human development, but as a group, they can span two to four of the five phases of learning to read and spell. Students whose parents followed Steiner's indications to the letter by not introducing any elements of reading (e.g., letters) are at the beginning of the journey to literacy,

whereas other classmates may begin school knowing the letters of the alphabet—or even how to read. It is thus necessary to recognize the phases of learning to read and spell to make sure all students get their needs met. They are as follows:

1. Emergent Phase
2. Phonemic Awareness Phase
3. Pattern Phase
4. Syllable Phase
5. Latin/Greek Phase

These five phases are presented in *The Roadmap to Literacy*. They are based on the work of Donald R. Bear and others in *Words Their Way*¹ and my work as a remedial reading instructor and teacher trainer of 23 years. These five phases provide a roadmap so teachers can guide every student on the road to learning to read and spell. The italicized vignettes included in this article are from my own childhood; they aim to illustrate the journey so teachers can consider the phases from two perspectives: a teacher's and a student's.

Phase 1: Emergent

Little Jenny's parents did not believe in pre-school literacy education, similarly to Waldorf parents and teachers who follow Steiner's indications on delaying children's introduction to reading until a later stage of their elementary school years. Jenny began school without knowing the alphabet. She was at the beginning of the Emergent Phase.

On the first day of public-school kindergarten, Jenny's teacher asked the class to play a classic phonemic awareness game: the students were invited to introduce themselves and to name one thing they liked that began with the same sound as their names. "Hi, I am Tina, and I like tigers." "Hi, I am Michael, and I like monkeys." When it was Jenny's turn, she did not hesitate: "Hi, I am Jenny, and I like cats." Her teacher corrected her, "No, it has to be something that starts with the same sound as your name. You could say, for example, that you like jumping." Jenny was puzzled. Cats were her favorite thing. As for jumping, she was indifferent to it. She felt rejected by her teacher. The experience ruined her first day of school.

The reason for the miscommunication was simple: Jenny was in the Emergent Phase. The introductory game required skills in phonemic awareness and letter knowledge that result from education that Jenny did not (yet) possess.

¹ See *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (Pearson, 4th Edition, 2008).

As the teacher taught the alphabet, Jenny learned that letters represent sounds: Aa, /a/, apple. As a result, she began to develop awareness of individual sounds (or phonemic awareness). One day, she had an epiphany: her name starts with the letter J, which stands for the sound /j/ as in jumping. Jenny had just completed a key milestone in the Emergent Phase. The introductory game now made sense. Several months after the fact, she was ready for the first day of kindergarten.

This vignette illustrates what happens to Waldorf students who enter first grade without any prior knowledge of the elements of reading when they are presented with an activity that calls for skills above their phase. I have watched several such students respond in anger, depression, and/or despair when they could not do what their teacher was asking.

In the Emergent Phase, students are not aware of separate speech sounds, or phonemes. They are not aware that reading and writing are a code, where letters represent sounds. Instead, they process whole words as pictures. To move forward, they must realize that words are not pictograms of the objects they represent but rather a code based on letters that represent individual phonemes. The key to this development is education, specifically learning the alphabet, and the key to the alphabet is developing phonemic awareness for the first sound in words so students can make the connection between letter, phoneme, and key word (e.g., Jj, /j/, jumping).

Phase 2: Phonemic Awareness

Once Little Jenny recognized that letters represent sounds, it was easier to learn the rest of the alphabet; however, she soon encountered a new problem: spit-and-grunt phonics.

Once the alphabet was introduced, the teacher expected students to be able to decode simple CVC words, or consonant-vowel-consonant words such as 'Mat'. No matter how many times Jenny sounded out the letters, she struggled to blend the sounds into words. Jenny ended public-school kindergarten the way she began it: frustrated.

Fortunately, Jenny's first-grade teacher assessed all the students at the beginning of the year and realized that Jenny was missing key early literacy skills in phonemic awareness that accounted for her inability to decode. She assigned phonemic awareness exercises and taught kid writing. Jenny was told she could write about anything she liked, and she chose cats, rabbits,

and dinosaurs. She did not know how to spell these words, but her teacher told her to write down any letters she heard and then read her writing to a class parent who would help her correct the spelling. These two practices helped Jenny segment words into separate sounds and blend sounds back into a word. Through encoding, Jenny was developing the skills she needed for decoding.

The second phase is the Phonemic Awareness Phase. In this phase, students must develop phonemic awareness, or the awareness of individual speech sounds and the ability to manipulate them. Phonemic awareness is a special type of capacity that requires education to develop fully. Until students develop phonemic awareness, phonics instruction is ineffective.

Phase 3: Pattern

By the end of first grade, Little Jenny had completed the Phonemic Awareness Phase and was at the beginning of the Pattern Phase. She could segment a single-syllable word into its sounds and blend them back into a word. She could decode simple words. Her teacher also taught sight words, or common words that are taught as whole words because they are hard to decode.

At the end of the year, Jenny's teacher held up the sight word 'read' and announced that it could be decoded. She said, "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking." What did that mean? Jenny quickly segmented the word into its three sounds: /r/, /ē/, /d/ and noted the two vowels that were walking together. Only one vowel was talking: the first. The phonics rule made sense.

Jenny's second-grade teacher provided further instruction in phonics. The phonics rules helped Jenny progress through the Pattern Phase, where patterns of letters represent sounds such as EA in 'read,' TCH in 'pitch,' and EIGH in 'weigh.' This required her to process larger and larger numbers of letters and to improve her symbol imagery. Jenny learned to decode and encode with these patterns of letters. Then, one day, it happened: Jenny cracked the code. She could read.

The third phase is the Pattern Phase. In this phase, students become readers. The key to helping all students crack the code is phonics, phonemic awareness, and symbol imagery. Phonics instruction shows students how to expand the 26 letters of the alphabet to cover the 40+ sounds (or phonemes) in the English language. Some students figure out the code by themselves, but

I use the term 'parallel curriculum' to refer to teaching practices that developed in Waldorf classrooms in the last 100 years and that are unmoored from Steiner's original indications.

many require direct instruction in phonics. Phonics in turn depends on phonemic awareness and symbol imagery. Students must recognize the individual phonemes (sounds) and learn to recognize the symbols (letters) that represent them.

Phase 4: Syllables

Now that Little Jenny had cracked the code, she loved to read; however, she kept pestering adults to tell her what the long words said. One day, her third-grade teacher said, "Jenny, you know how to decode these words." He then re-explained how to split a word into syllables and used his fingers to isolate each syllable. Something clicked. From then on, Jenny broke long words into syllables and read them by herself.

By fourth grade, reading instruction stopped. Jenny jumped into the study of subjects with enthusiasm. Big words such as 'photosynthesis,' 'latitude,' and 'longitude' did not phase her because she was in the middle of the Syllable Phase. However, her spelling skills lagged. Jenny did not realize that she could spell words by syllable. As a result, Jenny attempted to memorize every word by chanting, the same way she had memorized the spelling of the word 'Mississippi' on the playground in first grade: M-I-S-S / I-S-S / I-P-P / I.

Jenny soon found herself in trouble. It was very difficult to memorize 15-20 spelling words a week by chanting. She had to practice incessantly to drill the chants into memory. Spelling took the bloom off the rose. In a few months, Jenny was frustrated with school and anxious.

The Syllable Phase is the phase in which students gain the decoding and encoding skills to read and spell just about any word in the English language. In this phase, it is not uncommon for encoding skills to lag 3-5 years behind decoding skills. That is what weekly spelling words are for: to revisit the phonics rules so students can bring their encoding skills up to the level of their decoding skills and master grade-level words that do not play fair. However, students need to learn a process for spelling words by syllable. Otherwise, they can spend hours each week attempting to drill the words into memory, a process that is both unhealthy and stressful.

Phase 5: Latin/Greek

Once Jenny was in seventh grade, her English teacher started talking about the meaning behind the spelling. For example, what do the following words have in common: 'cacophony,' 'phonics,' 'microphone,' 'symphony,' and 'telephone'? Answer: They all contain the Greek

root 'phon,' which means sound or voice. The spelling provides a clue to the meaning.

The final phase is the Latin/Greek Phase. In this phase, students learn that words related in meaning are also related in spelling. Students learn the Latin and

Greek elements that are embedded in English words. For example, *telephone* is distance (tele) sound (phone). They also learn to use related words to discover the meaning and spelling of words. For example, the word *disposition* sounds like it should be spelled with the letter U: *DISPUSITION*. Since the word is related to the word *dispose*, which has a long sound for the vowel O, the word *disposition* is also spelled with the letter O.

To summarize, there are five phases of learning to read and spell. These phases are the roadmap to literacy referred to in the title *The Roadmap to Literacy*. They provide an optimal order for teaching literacy skills.

Step Three: Assess

A key aspect of teaching by phase is proper assessment. Assessment allows teachers to test key reading and spelling skills so they can determine each student's phase(s) and provide appropriate instruction to help every student master early literacy skills. It is not uncommon for a group of students in one classroom to be in two or three different phases. Furthermore, a student may be in one phase for reading but in an earlier phase for spelling.

Steiner Supports Assessment

Assessment has received a bad rap in Waldorf education because some of Steiner's indications have been taken out of context. A close reading of Steiner's indications reveals nuance: Steiner opposes final examinations for subjects but supports assessment to determine students' skills and capacities.

The misunderstanding about assessment comes from Steiner's indications about final exams. Steiner says:

Ideally we should have no examinations at all. The final exams are a compromise with the authorities. Prior to puberty, dread of examinations can become the driving impulse of the whole physiological and psychological constitution of the child. The best thing would be to get rid of all examinations. (1997, 25-26; italics added)

Steiner explains his opposition to final exams in subjects by stating the following:

It is best and most in line with the ideal of education to let the congested learning that precedes final examinations fall by the wayside—that is, drop final examinations all together. . . . *As teachers we might ask ourselves why we should test children at all because we have them in front of us and know very well what they do or do not know.* (1996b, 203; italics added)

The italicized sentences above form a key component of the parallel curriculum: the belief that Waldorf education should not include assessment. However, when the indications are read in context, their meaning becomes clear: Steiner opposes final exams in subjects prior to high school (e.g., final exams in history) because cramming is bad. What does Steiner have to say about assessing students' skills and capacities?

The answer to that question is found in *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner Volume 2: 1922–1924*.

Steiner gives advice about assessing students in foreign languages, advice that could be extended to assessment in other subjects. Steiner says:

You need to create your tests positively and ask each child what he or she knows in order [to] find out the child's capabilities. Always try to determine what a child can do. You should not simply ask questions. Try to determine what a child can do, not what he or she cannot do. (*Faculty Meetings 2*, 625)

In other words, Waldorf teachers should test a student's skills and capacities in language arts to find out what the student is capable of in order to create their curricula.

Assessments Created by Educational Testing Groups

An optimal way to assess students' language skills and capacities is using assessments created by research-based educational testing groups such as Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE) or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

Science has revealed the most important early literacy skills, and researchers have created short assessments with benchmarks so teachers can determine whether students are mastering these skills in a timely manner. These assessments test early literacy skills positively by determining what a student can do, just as Steiner asks.

(The tests contain instructions to stop the testing once the skill level becomes too difficult for the student.)

Both CORE and DIBELS are scripted, which makes them easy to administer: a teacher literally reads a script and records a student's responses. The bigger challenges for Waldorf teachers are determining which assessments to give in grades 1–3, modifying them for off-grade use, and then using them to inform their teaching.

All reputable assessments by educational testing groups contain benchmarks or standards that students are expected to reach in each grade. They are difficult to interpret in Waldorf grades 1–3 because the tests are normed with the assumption that students begin reading instruction in kindergarten, but Waldorf students begin in first grade.

I have adjusted the test recommendations and the standards/benchmarks for both CORE and DIBELS grades 1–3 in *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition*. They are now suitable for Waldorf students. By grade 4, Waldorf students are expected to be caught up with their public-school peers (Steiner 2003, 126), and teachers can administer and score the tests as indicated.

Can Testing Harm Students?

Students are harmed when they cannot do the work expected of them, whether it is during an assessment or in a regular lesson. Teachers who wish to minimize harm are invited to assess, differentiate instruction, and teach by phase.

Teachers who are concerned that assessment may harm students are encouraged to read *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* (Miltzer-Kopperl 2022, chapter 6.1, #6 and 7). It shows how to make assessment a positive experience for students and how to restore balance and health when assessment is stressful. It contains a process I developed to assess all second graders at a certain Waldorf school in basic early literacy skills using CORE assessments over a six-year period as part of the school's accreditation process.

In conclusion, a closer look at Steiner's indications reveals that Steiner wants teachers to test students' language skills and capacities. The question is how can teachers then use the information from testing to guide their teaching?

Assessment has received a bad rap in Waldorf education because some of Steiner's indications have been taken out of context.

Step Four: Group

Once teachers have assessed key skills and capacities, it is important to put students into groups so teachers can differentiate instruction.

Group by Phase

First, identify each student's phase and where the student is at in that phase: beginning, intermediate, or advanced. *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* shows how to do so in chapter 6.2 "What Phase are Your Students In?"

Then consider the class as a whole. Is the class composed of a homogenized group of students, or are there students in two or more phases? Are the students' phases so disparate that providing instruction by grade will harm some of the students, as happened to Nora? The answers to these questions inform how to teach.

Here is a rule of thumb: If <80% of the students are at the same level or a bit higher, it is necessary to differentiate for the entire class. If >80% are at the same level or a bit higher, it is possible to teach by grade, provided a teacher does pull-out work with the ones who are behind and helps them catch up. A good time to do so is in reading groups and/or skills groups (e.g., phonemic awareness, decoding/encoding, etc.).

Steiner's Indications: The idea that Waldorf teachers should always teach the entire class as a group comes from the parallel curriculum. I would argue that Steiner prefers the opposite. He says, "We should see to it as an ideal that we could teach mathematics in one corner, French in another, astronomy and eurythmy in the others, so that the children have to pay more attention to their own work" (1998, 465). Teaching small groups of students forces students to pay more attention to their own work and not rely on the group soul to carry them. I conclude that differentiating instruction by group aligns with Steiner's indications.

Step Five: Teach

Once teachers have grouped the students, it is necessary to teach them to read and spell. Steiner's indications reveal how to teach:

Steiner's Indication for the Emergent Phase: Letter Pictures

Steiner's indication for the Emergent Phase is letter pictures. Steiner recommends letter pictures for beginning students (i.e., students in the Emergent Phase). This initial introduction for the first 8-10 letters illustrates the connection between letter and sound through a key word that begins with a letter and that is shaped like that letter, as shown in figure 1.



Figure 1 Letter Picture: The Letters Ff from a Picture of a Fish. Source: Trostli 2004, 104.

Letter pictures have a short shelf life. Once students recognize that letters represent sounds, they are ready for a more expedited introduction to the rest of the alphabet. Steiner recognizes this fact too. He says, "If we were to base our teaching only on this process of drawing evolving toward reading and writing . . . we would have to keep the children in school until they were twenty" (Trostli 2004, 76).

Note that Steiner himself brings lowercase letters in letter pictures in first grade. The stricture to teach lowercase in second grade is part of the parallel curriculum. For more information, consult *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* chapter 3.1 #14.

Steiner's Indication for the Phonemic Awareness Phase: Kid Writing/Talking on Paper

Once students recognize that letters represent sounds, they can begin Kid Writing (i.e., Talking on Paper, or Invented Spelling). It helps them develop phonemic awareness. Steiner says:

If we proceed rationally, we will get far enough in the first grade so that the children will be able to write simple things that we say to them or that they compose themselves. If we stick to simple things, the children will also be able to read them. Of course, we don't need to aim at having the children achieve any degree of accomplishment in this first year. . . . We should get the children to the point where they no longer confront the printed word as a total unknown, so to speak, and are able to take the initiative to write some simple things. This should be our goal with regard to language instruction, if I may put it like that. (Steiner 1997, 184–185)

For indications on how to teach Kid Writing and further proof that it aligns with Steiner's indications, see chapter 3.13 "Kid Writing: The Key to Early Literacy" in *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition*.

Steiner’s Indication for the Phonemic Awareness and Pattern Phase: Syllable Cards

Steiner tells teachers to provide direct instruction in phonemic awareness and symbol imagery. He says:

As I already mentioned, training in clear listening^[2] is the basis of proper spelling. Training in proper hearing will support proper spelling. Clear hearing, if trained properly, will also train precise seeing. ^[3] The different capacities support one another. If one capacity is developed in the proper way, the others will also have to develop properly. If we accustom ourselves to exact listening, we will tend to

retain the appearance of the word as such, that is, its inner appearance. Exact listening supports exact seeing. For words that appear to have an arbitrary spelling, such as those that have silent letters that make the preceding vowel long, we can support the child’s proper spelling by having the child repeat the syllables of the word clearly and with varying emphasis. (2001, 237)

Science confirms Steiner’s indication: phonemic awareness and symbol imagery—what Steiner calls “clear listening” and “precise seeing,” respectively—are two of three sensory-cognitive functions (i.e., literacy capacities) that support reading and spelling, as shown in figure 2.



Figure 2: The Three Sensory-Cognitive Functions (Miltzer-Kopperl, forthcoming 2022, figure 1.7.1)

Phonemic awareness is the ability to discern individual sounds (phonemes) and manipulate them. Symbol imagery is the ability to visualize the correct spelling of words. Steiner does not say how to use phonemic awareness to train symbol imagery, but his favorite reading methodology contains an exercise that resembles syllable cards, a technique used today.

Steiner’s favorite reading methodology is the spelling method (1996a, 83–84). The spelling method is an old-fashioned reading methodology that dates from the 1600s–1800s. It was used to teach reading in European languages, including English and German. Figure 3 shows a hornbook, the first teaching aid students received when taught using the spelling method. Note that it contains rows of syllables that students are expected to spell before reading: “A, B, ab. E, B, eb. I, B, ib.” This process is identical to an exercise called *Syllable Cards* in the Lindamood-Bell program Seeing Stars®: Symbol Imagery. It is used to teach both

phonemic awareness and symbol imagery and is a prominent part of *The Roadmap to Literacy* program.

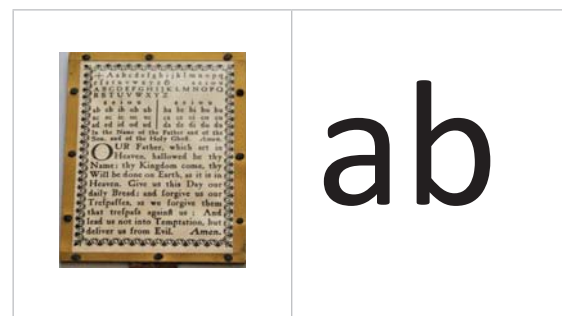


Figure 3: Comparison of Hornbook and Syllable Cards (Miltzer-Kopperl 2022, figure 3.5.5)

The spelling method begins with simple syllables like the ones above, suitable for the Phonemic Awareness Phase and then moves into syllables with silent letters such as *oast*, *speat*, *prake*, etc. that are suitable for the Pattern Phase. Syllable cards conclude with multi-syllabic words suitable for the Syllable Phase such as *notion*, *adventure*, and *impatience*.

2 Author’s note: i.e., phonemic awareness.
 3 Author’s note: i.e., symbol imagery.

Spelling

Steiner’s spelling indications are best considered by phase, as shown in table 1.

Phase	Steiner’s Indications for Teaching Spelling
Phonemic Awareness Phase	Steiner emphasizes the connection between good speech and spelling for students at the beginning of school (Steiner 2000, 173). Students need to accept the correct spelling for words out of authority because “this is the way adults spell the words” (2000, 73–74). (Note: This indication applies to adult writing in Kid Writing, which is done in grades 1–2.)
Pattern Phase	Steiner advises training in listening (i.e., phonemic awareness) for students who have trouble spelling words that have a silent letter. He states that “if we accustom ourselves to exact listening, we will tend to retain the appearance of the word as such, that is, its inner appearance. Exact listening supports exact seeing” (Steiner 2001, 237). (In other words, phonemic awareness supports symbol imagery.)
Syllable Phase	Steiner recommends having students repeat back a word syllable by syllable, changing the syllable that receives the emphasis (Steiner 2001, 237).

Table 1: Steiner’s Indications for Teaching Spelling Organized by Phase
Source: *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* (Miltzer-Kopperl 2022, table 3.9.4)

In conclusion, these are a few of Steiner’s best practices, organized by phase. There is one final thing to note: Skills such as reading, writing, and spelling should never be put to sleep. Students need regular practice to develop language arts skills. If teachers want to get students caught up post pandemic, they need time to teach. Schedule practice classes accordingly. One academic practice class per day is advised so that students get the instruction and practice they need for both language arts and math skills all year.

Step Six: Re-Assess

It is necessary to re-assess periodically to make sure students are making expected progress. Use the same tests and benchmarks from step three.

In grades 1–3, teachers are advised to assess three times a year to make sure students are progressing in key literacy skills. By grades 4–8, teachers are advised to give a basic reading fluency test three times a year to make sure students are progressing in reading fluency. Any student who struggles to read fluently at grade level should receive additional assessment in basic early literacy skills to pinpoint any area(s) of weakness.

Step Seven: Begin a Remedial Process

If students are not meeting benchmarks/standards, it is necessary to begin a remedial process to figure out why and to provide help. For example, use chapter 6.6 “Working with Remedial Issues” in *The Roadmap to*

Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition. This process was summarized in the *Research Bulletin XXVI-2*, in the article “The Remedial Staircase” (Miltzer-Kopperl 2021).

There is one point to highlight post pandemic: students may struggle with mental picturing (concept imagery). Concept imagery, or mental picturing based on language, is the third sensory-cognitive function pictured in figure 2. Steiner claims that mental picturing changes at the change of teeth (1995, 37–38). Steiner recommends that all students in first grade retell stories and that they do so with correct articulation. This indication helps them practice both phonemic awareness and concept imagery. However, he realizes that some students have difficulties with mental picturing and recommends remedial education in *Soul Economy* (2003, 312).

In the last 100 years, weaknesses in concept imagery appear to have become more prevalent. Waldorf educators have long been aware that screen technology undermines the capacity for concept imagery. Now that students have returned to the classroom post pandemic, it is good to assess this capacity informally.

Steiner recommends cold calling students as part of reviewing stories. Steiner tells teachers to call on everyone, including students who do not raise their hands or who are inattentive (Steiner 1998, 662–663). Steiner states that “you should not leave it to the children to decide when they want to say something, as those who are lazy will not speak up. You need to be careful that no one gets by without answering” (ibid., 405). Cold

calling students is an excellent informal assessment to determine if any students are struggling with this vitally important sensory-cognitive function.

For more information about teaching concept imagery and Steiner's indications, consult *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* chapter 3.7 "Concept Imagery: The Key to Comprehension."

Conclusion

The pandemic offers teachers a compelling reason to consider new ways to teach and assess Waldorf education: the need to get students caught up in reading and spelling skills. Once learned, these new ways to teach and assess Waldorf education can be used with future classes. Over the next few years, the Waldorf movement could make the transition from teaching reading and spelling by grade to teaching reading and spelling skills by phase. This change would transform Waldorf education and bring it more in alignment with Steiner's indications.

The interim step will be difficult: researchers have found that "it takes four times as long to remediate a student with poor reading skills in 4th Grade as in late kindergarten or early 1st Grade"⁴ (Hall 2006, 11). Catching students up post pandemic will not be easy.

However, there are reasons for optimism:

- The first hurdle is cleared: *The Roadmap to Literacy* contains a comprehensive program for teaching reading and spelling skills by phase.
- The second hurdle is cleared: *The Roadmap to Literacy: Renewal of Literacy® Edition* introduces comprehensive new research into Steiner's indications for language arts and introduces and explains the origins of the parallel curriculum.
- The pandemic provides an incentive to clear the third hurdle: the need to get students caught up post pandemic provides an impulse to switch to differentiating instruction by phase.
- This article provides a way to clear the fourth hurdle: It is an invitation to reconsider the impulse behind the claim that Waldorf teachers are not ready to make the switch from teaching by grade to differentiating instruction and teaching by phase.

I invite you to help me achieve the full promise of *The Roadmap to Literacy*: teaching in freedom while getting up to 95% of Waldorf students reading and spelling at grade level. It requires teachers who are willing to open their minds to the fact that assessment shows that Waldorf literacy education contains room for

improvement. It requires teachers who are willing to open their hearts to the pain of students like Nora, students who are ill-served by the current Waldorf practice of teaching reading skills by grade. It requires teachers who have the courage to roll up their sleeves, challenge the precepts of the parallel curriculum, and chart new directions in Waldorf education by considering the indications and intentions of its founder, Rudolf Steiner.

The time is ripe for a renewal of literacy. Crisis is opportunity. Let's make the most of the one we have been given.

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4 These school years correspond to Waldorf 1st and 2nd Grades.

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