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Leiden

The Netherlands

Globalization of Waldorf education: an ethnographic case study from the Philippines

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Citation

Schie, T. J. van. (2026, February 6). *Globalization of Waldorf education: an ethnographic case study from the Philippines*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4289509>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4289509>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Globalization of Waldorf Education

An Ethnographic Case Study from the Philippines

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden

op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr. S. de Rijcke,

volgens besluit van het college van promoties

te verdedigen op vrijdag 6 februari 2026

klokke 11.30 uur

door

Thijs Jan Romero van Schie

geboren te Haarlem,

in 1980

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ISBN/EAN: 978-94-6536-017-1

Foto voorzijde

S.F.N. Westhoff, Utrecht

Foto achterzijde (onder)

www.gamotcogon.org

Fotografie

door de auteur, tenzij anders vermeld

Vormgeving

E. Hoving, Amsterdam

Druk

Proefschriften.nl, Deventer

Financiering

Promotiebeurs voor leraren,
NWO (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek),
<https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/023007026>

**A healthy social life is found only,
when in the mirror of each soul
the whole community finds its reflection,
and when in the whole community
the virtue of each one is living.**

R. Steiner



Baguio •

Quezon City •

• MANILA

• Santa Rosa

• Batangas

Iloilo •

• Cebu

Puerto Princesa •

• Davao City

Gamot Cogon Waldorf School

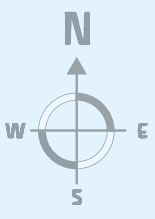


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Preface

The background of the page is a photograph of a forest floor covered in green moss and ferns. Several large, open umbrellas are scattered across the scene, their canopies creating a pattern of geometric shapes. The umbrellas are in various shades of brown, tan, and grey, blending with the natural setting. The overall tone is soft and naturalistic.

At a close friend's wedding, I struck up a conversation with his father, who regularly visited a Waldorf school in the Philippines in an advisory role. He spoke vividly about his experiences, and I was fascinated. I had not realized that Waldorf schools existed outside Europe and began to wonder what Waldorf education might look like in a different cultural and social context. In the Netherlands, I could always recognize a Waldorf school the moment I walked in – the atmosphere, the wooden furniture, the scent of beeswax and wool, the sound of recorders and children reciting in chorus. Would I find that same feeling in a Philippine Waldorf school? What would have to be adapted to make it meaningful there? And how different would Philippine Waldorf education be from what I knew in the Netherlands?

As I listened and asked questions, a quiet thought formed: this might be a compelling theme for future doctoral research.

I had already been considering a PhD. At the time, I was teaching at Marecollege, a Waldorf secondary school in Leiden, and lecturing at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University – the very institute where I had trained as an anthropologist. That moment at the wedding brought both worlds together: my everyday life as a Waldorf teacher and my academic identity as an anthropologist. Until then, they had run parallel without really intersecting.

As an anthropologist, I had worked in Malawi and Vietnam, helping to establish and shape anthropology programmes. As a teacher, I deeply valued the creative, meaningful work with adolescents. Pursuing a PhD became a natural extension of both roles – perhaps best described as becoming an educational ethnographer. I hoped to bridge these two previously separate worlds, to bring them into dialogue and to see what new perspectives might emerge from their connection.

What a privilege – and a beautiful challenge – it was!

That said, the journey was not without difficulty. Balancing teaching with research is demanding; each role requires a different kind of energy. Teaching calls for flexibility and creativity; research demands reflection and time – something not always easy to find. All of this unfolded alongside major life events: I got married, we had children, we bought a house. A global pandemic struck. And my dedicated supervisor, Sabine Luning, passed away. Each of these moments marked and shaped this journey.

But – I did it! The dissertation you have before you is the result, and I am proud of it. What began as a personal learning trajectory is, I hope, clearly relevant to others as well. I hope it inspires teachers to engage in research themselves – something still made possible by the wonderful NWO Promotiebeurs voor Leraren (*Doctoral Grant for Teachers*). And I hope this work contributes to a deeper understanding of Waldorf education – emphasizing a living, contemporary approach in which all students, regardless of background, feel at home.

Above all, I hope this work strengthens our motivation, as educators, to keep working with energy and dedication – day by day and hour by hour – for and with the students entrusted to our care.