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EDITED BY
Liane Brouillette,
University of California, United States

REVIEWED BY
Kate Attfield,
Cardiff Metropolitan University, United Kingdom
Rainbow Rosenbloom,
Live Education Inc., United States

*CORRESPONDENCE
Martyn Rawson
✉ martynrawson@icloud.com

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Translating, transmitting and transforming Waldorf curricula: one hundred years after the first published curriculum in 1925

Martyn Rawson[1,2]*

[1]Hsinchu Teachers College, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, [2]Waldorflehrerseminar, Kiel, Germany

The first Waldorf School was founded in 1919 and the first curriculum was published in German in 1925. Since then, this curriculum has been translated into many other languages and transmitted across geographical space to other cultural contexts while maintaining the character of Steiner Waldorf education. For much of the past 100 years it has been a taken-for-granted source of inspiration for Waldorf teachers. However, Waldorf education faces a number of challenges to its curriculum. In many countries it is increasingly forced to explain and justify itself to the state and comply with educational policy requirements for standardisation and testing. It is challenged to adapt to the digital age and it faces calls to modify its original Western focus and become more attuned to local cultures, while retaining its universal humanist aspirations and its intrinsic character and function. Given that the curriculum is one of the best-known features of Waldorf education, it is surprising that there has been so little research on it. Drawing on the relevant literature, this review paper explores the fundamental concepts of curriculum within Waldorf education: its primary characteristics and functions. It tracks the historical development and the way the curriculum has been adapted both to requirements within schools and to external factors. Along the way there have been differing understandings of the status and function of the curriculum, including whether and in what sense it is universal and essentially unchangeable and/or how it can be adapted. This paper highlights a number of areas in which further research is needed and reports on important new developments, which promise to sustain the viability and relevance of the Waldorf curricula.

KEYWORDS

Steiner, Waldorf, curriculum, translation, dissemination, development

Introduction

Waldorf [1]education is a serious alternative to mainstream education. It has truly international credentials, as it is practised in 70 countries worldwide (Friends-Waldorf-Education, 2023).[2] Despite all the challenges facing those who wish to start new schools both in the private and public sectors—such as financing, finding suitable property and of course, finding qualified teachers—the number of Waldorf school is increasing steadily. It is not possible to say with certainty what accounts for this continuing success, but anecdotal evidence suggests that factors such as the focus on the whole person, the emphasis on creativity, the breadth of a curriculum that includes practical and artistic learning alongside academics, and the lack of pressure are certainly factors. Recent alumni research from Australia and New Zealand (Haralambous and Carey, 2022) aligns with previous research done in the US, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland [summarised in Rawson, 2021], in suggesting that graduates feel confident, resilient, creative and capable of meeting the other. These are certainly the aims behind the Waldorf curriculum.

For teachers, the opportunities to be creative and innovative within a collegial working atmosphere—often with distributed leadership—is certainly an attractive alternative to what are perceived as strictly regulated, hierarchical, high pressure mainstream working environments. Waldorf schools appear to be places where people with educational ideals feel they have more freedom. They tick many of the boxes that resonate with middle-class, educated, ecologically and spiritually minded people who value the development of the person at least as much as academic success for their children.

Despite its long-term success, Waldorf education has been one of the least-researched fields of education. Rittelmeyer (1990) notes that in Germany, where there are the most Waldorf schools, few academics would risk their reputations being associated with the theory behind Waldorf education because of its esoteric nature, he himself being a notable exception. Ullrich (2008, 2012) has long argued that Waldorf education should drop its association with Steiner's esoteric ideas and focus on its successful contemporary practice. As Steinwachs (2019) points out there has been even less research on the Waldorf curriculum. My inquiries have identified three academic accounts in German (Gögelein, 1999; Zech, 2016; Steinwachs, 2019; translated into English, 2023) and four in English, one detailed (Pountney, 2019), the other three as part of overall surveys of the education (Ashley, 2009; Stehlik, 2019; Rawson, 2021). In researching this review, I have also had to draw on references in the Waldorf literature and my own long experience.

Academic attitudes to Waldorf are changing, as evidenced by the present *Frontiers in Education* special edition, and two dedicated special editions of the peer-review journals, *Scenario: Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning and Research* (Vol.16/1) in 2021 and *Humanising Language Teaching* (Vol. 25/2) in 2022. This is partly due to the academicization of Waldorf teacher education and there are now some 15 higher education institutions internationally that offer Bachelor, Masters and even PhD programmes in Waldorf education.[3] There is a peer review journal, *Research on Steiner Education* (RoSE) and mainstream publishers like Routledge/Taylor& Francis now have several publications on Waldorf education (Nicol, 2016, Nicol and Taplin, 2017, Rawson, 2021, Schieren, 2023).

For the first time in the English-language literature, this paper reviews the origins, transmission and adaptation of curriculum across multiple cultural contexts and discusses the challenges this has brought. It highlights a number of important areas for future research and offers insights into significant new developments. Understandings of Waldorf curriculum are surprisingly culturally situated, even though many practitioners believe that there is an single original and definitive Waldorf Curriculum. The article briefly summarises the 'travels' of Waldorf curricula across the globe as Waldorf education has been taken up in many countries. The more visible Waldorf has become, the more it has been necessary to explain to state authorities how it compares with national curricula, which increasingly reflect neoliberal education policies of standardisation, prescribed outcomes and testing regimes (Ball, 2012, 2013, 2016). The second part of the paper explores the tensions involved in the process of re-visiting and re-aligning curriculum in the response to changing societal landscapes and the needs of learners. These include challenges to some core assumptions about the links between curriculum and child and youth development and about how curricula can be adapted and modified within Waldorf parameters. In the final section a model is outlined that provides a framework for ensuring a coherent and common framework for all schools, while enabling local cultural variations and adaptations.

Characteristics of Waldorf curricula

All Waldorf schools follow a common curriculum, though this varies according to the national, cultural and geographical context and is modified over time as society changes. The main common feature is a developmental structure of age-sensitive activities, themes and content, which are organised on a year-to-year basis. It would be fair to say that grade 3, or grade 7, in any Waldorf school around the world will be doing recognisably similar things. In contrast to many other curricula, Waldorf is not primarily focused on mapping out subject-disciplinary knowledge that has to be learned by a specified stage.

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[1] Rudolf Steiner founded the Waldorf School in Stuttgart, Germany in 1919 at the request of the entrepreneur Emil Molt, who wanted a school for the children of the workers in his Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory. Some of the schools that follow this educational approach are called Waldorf, others Steiner, and other again are named after other notable people. In this article I use the term Waldorf and this includes Steiner education, schools and curriculum, whether in public, state-funded or private schools. Steiner himself spoke out in the strongest terms against schools being called after him personally, and he also objected to the name Waldorf for other schools following his educational ideas because of its association with the cigarette brand, "one always smells tobacco when one hears the name Waldorf." The first school in Hamburg-Wandsbek was called The Free Goethe School. The author's current school is named after the poet Christian Morgenstern. Steiner also envisioned his education being practised in non-Waldorf schools (see Frielingsdorf, 2019, p. 68–9).

[2] To date there are 1,857 kindergartens in 70 countries, 1,092 schools in 64 countries.

[3] https://www.inaste-network.com/

With its equal emphasis on arts, crafts, practical work and academics, it seeks to support the development of the whole person.

As Henry Barnes put it: "What characterizes Waldorf education is not primarily its content, although this may be interesting and innovative, but the spirit out of which the curriculum and methods grow" (Barnes, 1979, p. 4). This spirit is an attitude of inquiry, one that seeks to 'read' the personality of each student and "to recognize it, to respect, protect, and encourage it. Our work as educators in the broadest sense is to further its inherent development, to free it from encumbrances, to challenge and stimulate, but also to offer the resistance that it needs in order to grow independent and inwardly sturdy and strong" (Barnes, 1979, p. 5). It is this challenge that seems meaningful to many talented and highly qualified young people, who could follow other more lucrative careers than being a Waldorf teacher.

Most presentations of the curriculum (e.g., Richter, 2006; Rawson et al., 2014) are organised in a horizontal and vertical structure:

> The horizontal curriculum is an attempt to describe the didactic coordination of the different subjects in a certain period of the child's and young person's development. However, behind the individual teaching acts, the child must always be seen, who creates the actual 'curriculum', the actual 'educational programme' for the teacher. The teacher has to orientate himself on the child (Richter, 2006, p. 41).

The horizontal curriculum traces a loose matrix of themes across all the subjects in a given school year. The vertical curriculum gives a more detailed progression of the content in each disciplinary subject, such as math, first language etc. These subject strands often unravel from a single 'nature study' strand into separate strands for biology, zoology, geology, astronomy etc. As Steiner Education Australia points out:

> The curriculum in a Steiner school reflects the developmental theory and philosophy on which it is based, namely an emphasis on the whole development of the child—spiritual, physical, moral and academic. At each stage of development, the curriculum is designed to engage the abilities of the growing child… In this way the Steiner curriculum responds to the developmental needs of the pupils at each level. It has proved to be a relevant and contemporary curriculum…, largely because it is broadly based, integrated, interdisciplinary and comprehensive. (cited in Stehlik, 2019, p.44, but available on the SEA website)[4]

Unlike most state curricula, which are prescribed, the Waldorf versions are generally understood as a framework for orientation. As Zech (2023/2017) has observed, from the German perspective, the curriculum is understood as offering a non-binding orientation of options and perspectives for teachers. However, as Stehlik (2019) notes,

> There is a conundrum here in talking about a curriculum that is not prescriptive however [the curriculum] offers an approach that is nonetheless descriptive and indicative and provides examples, resources and ideas, formats and strategies that established schools and experienced teachers can share with pioneering schools and beginning teachers. It was an important step in documenting and validating the curriculum towards the process of accountability for state education authorities and regulatory bodies, for example in the process of seeking school registration; and ultimately led to the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework which was ratified in 2011 by ACARA—the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. At the time of writing, this is the only Steiner curriculum in the world to be recognised by a 'mainstream' national regulating body (Steiner, 2019, p 50).

Stehlik's last comment overlooks the fact that in a number of European countries (e.g., the Czech Republic, Finland, Flanders, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ukraine) the Waldorf curriculum is officially approved for Waldorf schools in those countries. However, Stehlik is right to point to the paradox of a recommended orientation and an officially approved curriculum. The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education currently has a project to design a core curriculum framework for its 28 member national federations. For many years Waldorf schools were largely ignored by the state authorities, but ministries but with the advent of standardised curricula and high stakes testing regimes, the focus on Waldorf has sharpened. This means that Waldorf school national federations must produce curricula in a language that the state can understand and they also have to ensure all their schools follow this. They may also have to accept all or part of the state curriculum and try to teach this in a 'Waldorf' way. This, of course, contradicts the Waldorf assumption that schools are autonomous regarding curriculum.

Waldorf education has been characterised since its inception by the assumption of teacher autonomy (Steinwachs, 2019; Zech, 2023). Although Rawson (2011, 2021, 2023) has argued that the level of autonomy that was originally intended was at the school level, since it is the school that ultimately must assure the quality of the education and be accountable for it to parents and the state, it is nevertheless also true that Steiner assumed that teachers would individually be creative regarding the curriculum.

Despite the trend towards global education policy alignment and convergence towards a singular version of 'best practice' (Ball, 2012), education is still highly culturally situated. Because common educational terms such as education, pedagogy, learning, competence and curriculum (Horlacher, 2018) vary in meaning between cultures and this also changes over time (Nieke, 2012; Nieke, 2023), it is necessary to agree to a specific definition for a Waldorf curriculum. This is compounded by the fact that Waldorf education has, been primarily translated (in all senses of the word) from the German, and second hand, as it were, from English. Many terms used in Waldorf discourse, which are taken-for-granted by insiders, need to be explained to 'outsiders': these terms include *main lesson*, *class teacher*, *lower*, *middle* and *upper school* (or high school), *pedagogy*, *college of teachers* and *curriculum*.

To establish commonality Rawson (2021) suggests using the following characterisation that Dahlin has offered. The curriculum includes:

> everything that children or students in a Waldorf school or preschool may experience or are supposed to experience,

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[4] https://www.steinereducation.edu.au/curriculum/steiner-curriculum/

> consciously or subconsciously, during their school day. Thus, not only the contents of teaching and learning, but also the way the teachers teach, and the teachers themselves as persons are included in 'the curriculum'. Even the aesthetics of the internal and external architecture of the schoolhouse are part of it because, in an ideal Waldorf school, this aspect of the external environment is consciously designed to support children's development. All aspects of the curriculum are related to potentials for the learning that children have in different ages and phases of development (Dahlin, 2017, pp. 77–78).

This characterisation reflects traditional Middle European understandings of *Lehrplan,* which include the whole pedagogical approach (Horlacher, 2018) and contrasts with the Anglo-American notion of curriculum as what should be taught and learned (often specifying by when it should be learned). However, Dahlin's description has the advantage in that it takes a holistic perspective and is more focused on the self-formation and development of the whole person than on learning in the narrower sense and is closer to the intentions of Waldorf education. It also implies relationships between teachers and students and learners and the world, which is transactional and transformational. In Biesta's words, which also express the spirit of Waldorf education, the point of education is that students should be "learning *something*, that they learn it *for a reason* and that they learn it *from someone*" (Biesta, 2022, p.43, italics in original). In Dahlin's definition teachers are also part of the curriculum.

The historical background and origins of Waldorf curricula

Rudolf Steiner never published a curriculum during his lifetime. In the course for the teachers of the Waldorf School in 1919 Steiner outlined a curriculum for class teachers. In gaining permission to start the school, Steiner and Molt, the owner of the Waldorf Astoria Company, agreed with the education authorities that the school would match the state curriculum expectations by class 3, 6 and 8, the end of obligatory schooling, though Steiner was in favour of secondary education for all (Zdražil, 2020). At that time in Germany only about 1% of school students went onto secondary education and in most federal states, pupils left school after 7 years of schooling (Frielingsdorf, 2019). High school classes were added in 1920/21 year by year until grade 12 in 1923/24, without any selection, which was unique in Germany at the time.

In the First Teachers' Course Steiner, gave some curriculum examples and three lectures on the curriculum were held on the final day (6.09.1919, Steiner, 2020). Over the course of the next 5 years, while Steiner was able to regularly visit the school and have meetings with the teachers, many curriculum innovations were introduced, many at the suggestion of individual teachers, with the tacit or explicit approval of Steiner. Some of the first cohort of teachers were already familiar with Steiner's work and chose topics on which they knew Steiner had carried out spiritual research. Thus, they drew on some of these themes and brought them into the curriculum, and these included aspects of Steiner's Christology, his interest in Nordic and Germanic legends and Egyptian and Greek myths, Grimm's fairy tales, certain figures in German history, the literary works on Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parsifal, Goethe's Faust, and so on. Steiner gave the teachers considerable free space to innovate and, indeed, he expected the teachers to be creative. Thus it come about that Steiner's minimal suggestions about the history curriculum ("the students should learn real historical concepts in grade 5") were interpreted to include his theory of cultural epochs, that have become canonised in the Waldorf tradition and which today are highly problematic (Zech, 2020).

Following the first school inspection by the authorities in 1922 it was noted that the teachers had no formal curriculum, and it was agreed that this would be remedied (Zdražil, 2019, p.335). Prior to the inspection the teachers had to submit lesson plans explaining what they were going to teach and why. Steiner advised them to be 'laconic', arguing that the less the authorities knew the better. In fact, he noted that if the ministry knew what the actual aims and methods of the Waldorf School were, the school would not exist (cited in Zdražil, 2019, p. 328). Following the inspection, Steiner advised the teachers to publish short accounts of the main aspects of Waldorf education in clear accessible language, especially explaining those aspects that differed from mainstream education (such as the class teacher principle, the main lesson, how reading and writing are introduced, the methods of foreign language teaching, eurythmy, etc.). By implication, these accounts should avoid anthroposophical terminology and be comprehensible to school inspectors, parents and presumably journalists.

The lack of curriculum was also something the teachers themselves were concerned with, since they were relying on word of mouth and notes made by teachers on Steiner's recommendations. The discussions in the teachers' meetings show that there was a need to bring together Steiner's 'scattered' references (Zdražil, 2019, p. 329). Walter Johannes Stein published a paper on the curriculum in the magazine *Die Drei* in 1922. Zdazil comments that Stein's account was very theoretical and sought to offer an epistemological founding of the Waldorf method. It may be that this was its weakness with regard to a publication for the general public. At any rate, another teacher, Caroline von Heydebrand was delegated the task of compiling a curriculum.

The work was to have been presented at a conference at Easter 1925, but this was delayed due to Steiner's death at the end of March 1925. In a special edition of the *Newsletter of the Waldorf School Association* in October 1925, von Heydebrand published a 60-page document entitled *Vom Lehrplan der Waldorfschule* (From the Curriculum of the Waldorf School). This documented what was being taught in the Waldorf School since the school had been founded. It was very brief and contained only minimal indications of what was taught. It certainly met the requirement of being 'laconic', if we consider that the most recent German Waldorf curriculum book (Richter, 2019) has over 700 pages. In 1955 Ernst Stockmeyer, another of the founding teachers, who carried out the functions of educational manager, published the collated references, subject by subject, that Steiner made to curriculum across his lectures. These two books remained the main source of curriculum until the 1990s.

International dissemination of curricula: rhizomic and arboreal perspectives

The first Waldorf schools in non-German speaking countries were founded in the 1920s; 1922 and 1925 in England, 1923 in the

Netherlands, 1926 in Hungary, Portugal and Norway, 1928 in the United States and Prague, which was then in Czechoslovakia (Göbel, 2019a, b, 2020). This means that the curriculum had to be translated into other languages and adapted to other cultural contexts. This process was relatively conservative and for many years Waldorf education orientated itself closely on the Stuttgart model with minor changes. Ida Oberman (2008) for example, in her history of the Waldorf movement in the US, noted how remarkably loyal schools had been to a Middle European model of curriculum: "It is all the more remarkable that this innovative venture, with its heavy Teutonic freight, made it across foreign waters" (Oberman, 2008, p. 70). In the UK Eileen Hutchins published a translation of the Heydebrand curriculum in 1966 with additional notes making a few suggestions for the British context (e.g., stories of King Arthur, Shakespeare).

Rawson (2021) has given more details of this process around the world, but the overall impression is that very little modification occurred anywhere until the 1970s in Australia. Even today that adaptation, with some local exceptions, has been modest. Rawson writes,

> until recently the basic assumption has been that the curriculum used in Waldorf schools is based on an assumed historical 'original' core curriculum and where necessary, equivalents are sought in the local culture…Equivalence implies that something has the same or similar value in relation to a standard or norm. In these translations and adaptations, an assumed norm relating to content and a body of practice is taken for granted and is referred to as *The Waldorf Curriculum*, with a definite article, indicating uniqueness (pp. 147–8).

As mentioned above, the trend to standardisation in national curricula has posed problems for Waldorf school federations. Neither the von Heydebrand nor the Stockmeyer texts, or their translations met the expectation of school authorities. The International Forum for Waldorf Education (also known as the Hague Circle) initiated a process of documenting the curriculum used in the German speaking world in 1992 and this was published in manuscript form, edited by Tobias Richter. Seven years later a much-revised official version was published in German (Richter, 2002). At first there was strong resistance to the idea of a detailed curriculum.

The controversy surrounding the original Richter (1995) manuscript version led to reflection and a clarification of the status and function of curriculum in the German-speaking world. In an article explaining the nature of the curriculum in Waldorf education, Gögelein (1999) formulated a set of criteria for a new consensus (though he presented these ideas as if they were already widely accepted). He suggested that schools should be protected from dogmatic definitions based exclusively on Steiner's statements that have not been evaluated in practice, though they should also be protected from arbitrary innovations. The curriculum and pedagogical activities should respond to current changes in society, in particular in the science curriculum. Parents and the general public should be informed about the education in comprehensible language. He also added that teacher education needs to be so organised that student teachers learn how to review and evaluate their practice and develop curriculum. It is unclear to what extent these criteria have been implemented in Germany. The Steiner Waldorf Schools' Fellowship in the UK, following a series of school closures due to failed inspections, have introduced an accreditation process for teacher education courses to ensure that teachers are equipped to understand and implement the criteria for passing state inspections, which involve teachers being able to explain and justify their lesson plans and show evidence that they can monitor student learning and adjust their teaching accordingly.

In 1997 the New Labour Party in the UK contacted the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) with a view to including Waldorf schools into the maintained sector. Once Tony Blair was Prime Minister this process was actively pursued by the Ministry of Education and the SWSF. This led to a comparison between the English National Curriculum and the Waldorf curriculum used in the UK at that time (Mepham and Rawson, 1997). Another curriculum for the class teacher period was also published in 1997 (Rawson and Masters). In 2000 a curriculum was published (Rawson and Richter, 2000) called the *Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum* (published in revised edition in 2014). This curriculum took account of all previous published Waldorf curricula, including the Richter (1995). It differs from all previous curricula by including early years, an overall presentation of the education, chapters on assessment and minimum learning outcomes for literacy, numeracy and second languages, which had never been published before. It was also written in a language that could readily be understood by education authorities.

Since 2000, this version of the Waldorf curriculum has been translated and adapted, to varying degrees, into over 20 languages and has become the *de facto* Waldorf curriculum for the international Waldorf movement and is still used as a standard resource. Since the publication of Rawson and Richter (2000, revised in 2014) other countries have developed and published their own Waldorf curricula, some based on the German original, some on the English version. Waldorf UK (formerly SWSF) has produced a revised curriculum for grades 1 to 8 (Bransby and Rawson, 2022), which included cross-curricular skills and knowledge and uses the potentialities framework developed by Rawson. In 2016 Götte, Maurer and Loebell published a competence-based curriculum in German.

Bransby and Rawson (2022) have described the growth of the Waldorf movement in the self-understanding of those involved as, metaphorically speaking, akin to the careful transport and planting of the fruits of the original Waldorf idea in other countries. However, these authors judge that the actual dissemination has been more rhizomic in character, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari (2004) well-known metaphor. In botany and dendrology, a rhizome is an 'invisible' (i.e., below the surface) network of stems from which roots and shoots grow, wherever conditions allow, in contrast to an arboreal tree, which has a single trunk growing from its root system. Bransby and Rawson extend the botanical metaphor to contrast a single 'arboreal' centre disseminating 'exotic' seedlings (i.e., the transplantation of an original curriculum from Middle Europe in other cultures) with a rhizomic growth of emerging 'native' plants from a global network of ideas (i.e., emergent Waldorf schools with a curriculum that reflects local cultural and geographical qualities).

The character of a Waldorf curriculum

Since the founding of the first Waldorf School in 1919, the assumption within the Waldorf movement has been that teachers have to choose and prepare the teaching material, taking a number of key factors into account and relating these to the ideal curriculum. This comes clearly to expression in the introduction to the first published curriculum (Heydebrand, 1925/1966):

> The ideal curriculum must trace the changing image of the nascent human nature at its various ages but, like any ideal, it must face and fit into the full reality of life. This reality includes many things; it includes the individuality of the teacher facing a class, it includes the class itself with all its particularity of each pupil, it includes the time of history and the particular place on earth with its own school laws and authorities, where the school is located that wants to implement the curriculum. All these conditions modify the ideal curriculum and demand changes and understandings, and the educational task that is set for us by the nature of the adolescents can only be solved if the curriculum itself has flexibility and clarity (Heydebrand, 1925, p. 3, author trans.).

I return to the phrase 'ideal curriculum' below. The point I wish to emphasise was echoed later by Stockmeyer (2015/1965) in the introduction to his compilation of Steiner's verbal references to curriculum content:

> It would contradict the meaning and essence of Rudolf Steiner's art of education if one were to try to squeeze its work into a fixed scheme. [...] A correct curriculum can point the consciousness of the teacher to certain necessities, but it must also be based on the teacher's current perception of the situation and his (sic) creativity and allow adequate freedom of movement. [...] Accordingly, the properly formed curriculum should only be a collection of all the demands based on the objective, general developmental steps, which the educator should respond to in the various age groups. (Stockmeyer, 2017/1955, p. 6, author trans from new German edition).

Steiner himself phrased this expectation in the First Teachers Course in 1919 as follows,

> we must approach this curriculum in such a way that we put ourselves in a position that we can form it ourselves at any moment, so that we learn to read the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th years and so on, and see what we have to teach (2019, p. 643, author trans.).

In some ways one can understand Steiner's reticence to publish a curriculum. Firstly, he gave *examples* for curriculum content and not prescriptions, and he was aware that his followers often took every word he said, literally as 'gospel truth' (in German "*auf Treu und Glauben*"), rather than using the modality of conscious knowledge, "as a botanist looks at botany" (Steiner cited in Kiersch, 2018, p.99), that is, as a scientific method for examining the phenomena in a particular field. In the chapter called 'Anthroposophy as Religion: the effects of a form of life', Kiersch (2018, pp. 99) has documented how Steiner himself was aware of and criticised the fact that anthroposophy was received with religious devotion by many of his followers. Iwan (2007) calls this the 'wooden spoon syndrome' after the fact that Steiner asked the woodwork teacher (Max Wolfhügel) to suggest a first activity for students in that subject. When Wolfhügel returned a week later with the suggestion of carving a wooden spoon, Steiner welcomed this. Since then, Waldorf students all over the world carve wooden spoons in grade 5, although even Wolfhügel himself introduced a range of other options, but a tradition had been established and 'religiously' followed (in Asia they now carve chopsticks in bamboo). This attitude has strongly influenced the reception of the curriculum.

Secondly, curriculum, in Steiner's view, should be generated by teachers in context and therefore should not be fixed. Steiner was also pragmatically concerned that the more the school authorities knew about the education, the more they were likely to raise objections. Steiner told the teachers, "The Waldorf School exists only because the school authorities do not understand our ways and methods" (GA. 300b, 2019, p. 65. Author trans.). He even pointed out ironically that if the Education Ministry starts praising the Waldorf School, or if the teachers start doing what the officials want, then they might as well have not founded the Waldorf School, since state schools can realise the state's educational aims better (GA: 298, p.124, cited in Zdražil, 2019, p.336). Steiner's point about teachers needing to be able to explain the education in plain language is still pertinent today, as is the need to 'translate' anthroposophical ideas and Waldorf terminology for the mainstream educational discourse.

The aspect of Waldorf curriculum that is perhaps best known, is its developmental approach. In 1922 Steiner explained to his audience in England the principle underlying the curriculum and gave an example, which I think explains his whole approach (I have modified some parts of this translation to avoid misunderstandings):[5]

> I believe that the characteristics I have given of the teaching of natural history, botany and animal science show how the Waldorf School-principle attempts to adapt the course of teaching, the curriculum, entirely to the principles of development, to the developmental forces of the child according to the different ages of life. I have spoken of the significant turning point between the ninth and tenth years, when children begin to distinguish themselves from the world. Before that age, in their thinking and feeling there is no sense of separation between themselves and the world's phenomena. Until the ninth year, therefore, we must speak of plants, animals, mountains, rivers, and such in the language of fairy tales, appealing above all to children's imagination. Animals, plants, and springs must speak, so that the same kind of being that children are first aware of in themselves also speaks to them out of the external world (Steiner, 2007, p. 155).

This statement makes the challenge of curriculum clear. The Waldorf School approach assumes that there are principles of development, and developmental forces or processes (*Entwicklungskräften*) that are age sensitive, and that the teaching should align with these. If we tease this statement out, we find several layers of meaning. There is a theoretical level in relation to development—one could say a model. Then there is the recognition by the teacher of the actual developmental processes that manifest in the body and psychological life of the child. The theory helps direct the teacher's attention to the developmental process in the children. The next point is that language plays an important role in prompting learning. Up to the age of 9 years old, the children generally live in a consciousness in which they feel themselves embedded in the world of sentient beings—nature can be experienced as animate. Now the teachers need to start talking to the children (and no doubt engage them in other activities, such as observation and direct experience) using a language that enables them to develop a different kind of consciousness, and thus develop a different kind of relationship to the natural world.

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[5] The English translation speaks of "evolutionary laws and forces they operate through the stages of a child's development" where the German speaks of "Entwicklungsprinzipien...Entwicklungskräften des Kindes nach den verschiedenen Lebensalter...." This conflation of evolution with development seems to be a feature of Anglophone understandings of Steiner.

As Steiner frequently pointed out, the Waldorf School was not to be considered a school with a specific methodology or approach (which he referred to, somewhat confusingly as a *Weltanschauung*), but rather a 'method school'. At Millicent Mackenzie's Oxford conference on Spiritual Values in Education, Steiner pointed out that,

> I have repeatedly said that the Waldorf-School principle is not to establish a school to promote any particular philosophy or educational ideology but rather a method school. What is to be achieved through a method that is based on a knowledge of the human being, is what makes children into people who are physically healthy and strong, psychologically free and spiritually clear (in English Steiner, 2004, p. 116, in German, GA 305, 157, author trans.).

As Wiehl (2015) has argued, Steiner uses the word method in its origin meaning *methodos* in Greek, which literally means the way of pursuing something, a means, a way that leads to a goal,[6] as the term is used in philosophy. Therefore, a pedagogical method is a way of attaining an intended educational aim. In this sense, curriculum is a method because it is a means to achieving a series of pedagogical goals. The curriculum-as-method is based on a dialectic relationship between a model of development and the actual developmental processes in the students, and knowledge about the various pedagogical means, such as language. Thus, a printed curriculum provides an orientation to possible content, possible ways of teaching a given topic at particular times in specific places as a means to realising the educational goals that the teachers have.

Steiner insisted that, "We will only be good teachers, however, if we know the relationship between the ideal curriculum and the curriculum we need to follow initially because of outer demands" (Steiner, 2020, p. 294). This would require imagination and flexibility and the ideal curriculum would provide an ideal-typical point of reference. A day later in *The First Teachers' Course* Steiner added,

> We need to be able to develop our curriculum ourselves at any moment, by learning to read from the children what they need, depending on their age. Tomorrow we will compare the ideal curriculum with the one presently used in Central European state schools. We will be well-prepared for this if we have really internalized what we need to know in order to understand the curriculum (Steiner, 2020, p. 311).

We now have to clarify what Steiner meant by the term 'ideal curriculum' (*Ideallehrplan*). One traditional reading is to interpret *ideal* in an essentialist, idealist way that implies that a particular curriculum has universal validity and is the best possible curriculum, hence all curricula are less than ideal. There is another possible interpretation. Steiner's contemporary, the sociologist Max Weber created the construct "ideal type" (*Idealtypus*, Weber, 1949). Weber sought to establish the social sciences on a sound theoretical footing, equivalent to the natural sciences. The ideal type is an idea based on the best available data that formulates what characteristics a social phenomenon should have for the purposes the concept was designed to explain. Kelly writes,

> As such, Weber stresses, one cannot claim validity for an ideal type in terms of a reproduction of or a correspondence with social reality; rather, one has to look to the resonance of ideal types with lived experience, guiding the social inquirer in their consideration of real-life cases to reveal what is 'possible and adequate'(Weber, 1970, p. 323; Kelly, 2013, p 7).

The ideal type provides the researcher with a model that can be used as a heuristic to judge the extent to which an actual phenomenon relates to the theoretical model (Kelly, 2013; Serpa, 2018). We do not know if Steiner was aware of Weber's construct, though they both shared a wish to establish the *Geisteswissenschaft*en or humanities complementary to the positivist natural sciences, in order enable the scientific study of human beings and human society. Thus, the task of the teacher is to seek resonance between the ideal curriculum and the lived experience of the children and young people.

Zech (2012) has introduced the term ideal-type into the academic Waldorf discourse, where it serves an important function along with the growing tendency to see Steiner's ideas not as given facts but as heuristic hypotheses (see Rittelmeyer, 1990; Rawson, 2021).

The construct of 'developmental tasks' is another example of an ideal type that is very relevant to the theme of curriculum. This construct refers to the typical challenges facing people at key moments of transition in the lifecourse that have to be successfully negotiated in order to take the next developmental steps. The term was coined by Havighurst (1953, 1982) in relation to the phases in the life course. It was subsequently taken up by Hurrelmann (2012; Hurrelmann and Bauer, 2018; Hurrelmann and Quenzel, 2018) in his analysis of identity work in the lifecourse. In Hurrelmann's analysis, the process of socialisation and individuation involves a dynamic interaction between inner and outer realities through which the individual produces and reproduces a self-identity. Götte et al. (2016) adopted this term in the context of Waldorf education.

Rawson (2021) has extended the concept in terms of Waldorf curricula by identifying four sources of developmental tasks:

1. the inherent biological and psychological patterns of maturation and individuation,
2. extrinsic social and cultural expectations, including state curriculum requirements,
3. the biographical interests (Grotlüschen, 2004) of the person,
4. school curriculum.

The biographical interests include the learner's ability to recognise opportunities for personal development in educational settings. From a Waldorf perspective this includes the latent potential that each individual brings with her, and this expresses itself in the individuation process, which involves responding to inner and outer developmental tasks. The Self, as spiritual core of the person, expresses itself in how it engages with these biographical tasks (Loebell, 2012). The task of the teacher is to read the developmental tasks facing the children and young people they teach. This new perspective is being discussed and gradually gaining traction within the German Waldorf discourse.

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[6] Methodos literally means a way, a pursuit of knowledge, an investigation, a mode of prosecuting such inquiry, or system (Kluge, 2002).

Some problematics of the Waldorf curriculum

The reception of the first published curriculum within Waldorf practice across the world has been and remains problematic. As we have seen, Heydebrand's text was titled *Vom Lehrplan der Waldorfschule*. The little word *vom* (meaning from or deriving from) implies that the content was not '*the*'(der) *Lehrplan*, but only a part of the overall educational approach of the Waldorf School. What her text described was curriculum-in-use in the school at that time. In her short introduction Heydebrand herself makes it clear that this is not the ideal curriculum, but one that was a response to the actual situation of the Waldorf School, the needs of the children, and by implication, the requirements of the ministry, the expectations of the parents and the capacities of the teachers at that time. Historically, however, this text has been canonised as *the* Waldorf Curriculum (with a definite article and capital letters).

Part of this canonization of the 'origin' curriculum is the widespread view that the curriculum is a work of art. The recent publication of an English translation of the 2016 Richter curriculum was titled 'Tapestry' (Richter, 2020), suggested by the structure of interweaving horizontal and vertical strands, though technically a tapestry is a picture made by using threads on a warp. This essentialist and idealist notion of curriculum as a work of art is evocative but also seductive. In stark contrast to curricula that are functional tables with lists of contents and outcomes, continuously being updated by the Ministry, the Waldorf curriculum is widely believed to be unique, complete and universal and as such, cannot be 'updated'. The author has been told several times that *The Waldorf Curriculum* is a gift from the spiritual world to the children mediated by an initiate and that any substantive change could only weaken its healing power. The curricula used in Waldorf schools are certainly distinct and remarkable but are not, in my view, set on tablets of stone.

This sacred view of curriculum may reflect an interesting tendency for Waldorf education to be received in ways that reflect the interests and aspirations of the host culture. The pioneers of Waldorf education in the US may have felt affinities between Steiner and the Transcendentalist movement of Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman (McDermott, 2012) and the reception of Waldorf has certainly reflected the emergent quest for spirituality experienced by many Americans. I suspect that similar specific cultural influences can be found in other cultures who have adopted Waldorf, though this has yet to be investigated.

The canonization of curriculum is part of the wider phenomenon of Steiner's charisma that was first highlighted by Uhrmacher (1995) and which has been analysed by Kiersch (2018) in relation to the Anthroposophical Society. Kiersch notes that many pioneer anthroposophists, including Waldorf teachers, saw themselves as recipients of a revelation, an elite summonsed to do good in the world and bring light into the darkness of materialistic modernity. Not only did these pioneers transmit Steiner's charisma and base their authority on the dual claim of "Herr Doktor hat gesagt" (Dr. Steiner said) but they were also able to radiate the sense, "we are the real deal" (Kiersch, 2018, p. 102).

Oberman also addresses the wider issues of the founding of the first Waldorf School being perceived by many of Steiner's followers as a significant step in the salvation of civilization. She writes that the,

> original German cultural context posed a liability, as did the social interaction model of 'Stuttgart 1919' itself. "Teachers can't innovate, because they are constantly obsessed with the 'miracle of Stuttgart'" one Amsterdam Waldorf teacher put it nearly eighty years later, in 1996. The adaptable pedagogy itself had the potential to become frozen in preconceptions born from turn-of-the-century Stuttgart. A school, conceived amidst the disintegration following World War I, derived from nineteenth century German philosophy, with the aim to teach a curriculum for civilization preservation, had taken form. The question became whether it had the inner malleability and authentic vitality to be transported outside of this unique historical circumstance (2008, p.71).

Fortunately, the phase of charisma has faded in wide parts of the Waldorf movement, and the reality is that many Waldorf teachers today are likely to have accepted (unknowingly) the advice of the German academic Heiner Ullrich (2008, 2015, 2021), that Waldorf teachers would do well to focus on their excellent practice and drop the unscientific and esoteric anthroposophical theory. While Schieren (2023) argues that Steiner's epistemology is the basis for Waldorf education, except for Sijmons (2008) and Amrine (2019), few academics outside of the Waldorf movement have tried to understand Steiner's theory of knowledge. As Dahlin (2013) shows, Ullrich's own attempt to understand and represent Steiner's philosophy of knowledge is superficial and does not recognise that "inner spiritual activity is necessary in order to understand Steiner's philosophy" (p. 206). This, of course, is the nub of the problem; one cannot really understand Steiner or Waldorf education from a detached, spectator stance.

The next problem with the reception of Waldorf curriculum is the somewhat idealistic assumption that teachers have the skills and knowledge to develop their curriculum *in situ* based on their 'reading of the child', as Steiner imagined. This is a very demanding expectation of pedagogic-diagnostic skills even for experienced teachers, almost impossible for beginners and for the many teachers who have not had a full-time Waldorf teacher education. In my experience most teachers follow the curriculum traditions in their own schools or use the range of secondary literature that is available, much of it out of date. The aim of having teachers, who are autonomous enough to generate a situated pedagogy, drawing on general principles is worthy but, in many schools, unrealistic. Steiner's answer to this conundrum was to establish the teachers' meetings. These meetings are supposed to be,

> a living 'higher education'[7] for the college of teachers—a permanent training academy, as it were. They are so-called indeed, and for the reason that every practical experience gained by the teacher in school becomes, in turn, part of her own education. And she who derives such self-education for herself from her teaching work, gaining on the one hand a profound psychological insight into the practical side of education and on the other side into the different qualities, characters and temperaments of the children, will always be finding something new, for herself and for the whole college of teachers. All the experience acquired from the teaching should be 'put into the pool' at these meetings (Steiner, 2004, p. 198, gender modified by author).

Today we would call this evaluation and practitioner or action research. The primary function of the college of teachers is to develop a better understanding of the education and induct new teachers into this community of practice. Much depends on teacher education, which in turn depends on there being adequate concepts of how teachers can learn the necessary teacher dispositions and skills (see Rawson, 2020) and of course adequate funding.

Another problem is the assumption that the ideal curriculum is a fixed and detailed model of developmental phases and stages that is universally valid, a concept that has long been questioned outside of the Waldorf discourse (Burman, 2017). At the World Teachers Conference at the Goetheanum in 2012 Remo Largo, one of the world's best known and respected experts in child development made the point that what characterises development is not conformity with norms but individual variation, "A child's individuality is an expression of this great diversity" (Largo, 2012, p.18). He went on to state,

> The teacher with a class of twenty, six-year-olds will see differences of up to three years in the children's developmental ages. Some children will have a developmental age of 7 to 8 years and will read at the age of six, whilst others have a developmental age of 4 to 5 and struggle with reading. Before children reach the upper school, the differences between them tend to increase markedly- At age 13, the developmental ages of the furthest and least developed children diverge by at least 6 years. In addition, boys – as a group- tend to lag behind girls by 18 months on average. Dealing with such 'inter-individual variability' can be a challenge for parents and teachers (2012, P. 18).

The implications of this are that school readiness tests for the transition from kindergarten to grade 1 are not meaningful and statements that describe typical class 3 or class 7 children are misleading and may lead parents and teachers to identify children as backward or precocious, leading to forms of discrimination. Thus, presentations of the Waldorf curriculum that suggest that children and youth universally make annual developmental steps synchronously, are simply false. However, the impression is widespread and informs teachers' unconscious assumptions about students, and these may even be culturally, or gender biassed. Idel (2014) who studied the biographies of Waldorf students during the class teacher period found that one in four pupils felt misunderstood by their class teacher if they failed to conform to the unconscious assumption of the teacher as to what an ideal student should be. He found that some teachers in the Waldorf schools in Germany he investigated had what he called a romantic view of young children, meaning that they were open, innocent, seeking authority and malleable. If the actual children did not match this unconscious expectation, they might be labelled as difficult. 25% of students is a very worrying statistic.

This has led some Waldorf researchers such as Michael Zech (2011) to question the status of what is understood as the 'ideal curriculum'. Zech writes that,

> from the perspective of the heterogenous developmental situation of the individuals in a typical Waldorf class, we cannot assume that age-specific stages are the norm. Rather they are set by the teaching. General developmental phases such as seven-year-stages or changes around the age of 10 or 12 that can be observed, do not simply occur, but are brought about by the pedagogical approach and originate themselves on the one hand on ideal-types, and on the other, on the actual situation of the pupils (Zech, 2017, p.70).

It is widely believed that the Waldorf curriculum reflects the changing consciousness of the child and that this reflects the evolution of human consciousness over cultural history. An example of this is Mazzone:

> … one of the fundamental ideas in Anthroposophy is the evolution of consciousness, and this underlies much of the humanities curriculum. The theory of recapitulation, which claims that each child in his or her mental evolution passes through all the great culture epochs that have marked the development of the human race is fundamental in the organisation of curriculum content from year to year. The story curriculum parallels the cultural epochs and from class to class the cultural history, including the major myths and legends, are studied (1995: 5–6, cited in Stehlik, p. 51.)

Stehlik comments on Mazzone as follows,

> This is reflected in the primary school curriculum in the study of great epochs of human civilisation at the corresponding age at which the child's individual consciousness is unfolding. For example, Norse mythology is introduced in Class 4 when the children at around age 9 are able to identify the moral and ethical issues arising from the great sagas of the Norse gods as they battle with the forces of light and darkness... In Class 5 the study of Ancient Greece introduces the allegorical and metaphorical nature of the characters of the Greek gods, and by inference the children are made aware of the influence of these archetypes on the collective psyche of modern society and culture. Within this epochal chronology, Roman times are dealt with in Class 6, giving a picture of the origin of the modern-day State and a highly regulated and martial society, at an age when the children are beginning to question authority structures (Ibid. p. 51–2).

Apart from details such as the fact that children in most Waldorf schools in grade 4 are 10 years old and not 9, which is important if each year counts in the sequence of story material, (grade 3 is traditionally stories from the Hebrew tradition), and it is not clear that children's attention is drawn to the allegorical and metaphorical character of Greek Gods, this kind of parallelism, though attractive, is itself a myth. Are we really expected to believe that children in grade 5 transition through the consciousness of a series of ancient cultural epochs from Mesopotamia to Ancient Greece (even if we were able to generalise this—which Greeks are we talking about, Aristotle or a Spartan hoplite?). Or can be that students have a Roman and /or Germanic consciousness because the Romans and 'Barbarians' are a major theme in grade six, even though grade six also includes geology, chemistry and physics approached in a phenomenological observational way that could not be further from the beliefs of classical times in these fields?

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[7] The origin word is *Hochschule*, German for a university or higher education institution.

Though it is true that Steiner made generalised references to the individual child today recapitulating significant stages in human evolution—uprightness, language learning and the development of cognition in his anthroposophical lectures before the founding of the Waldorf School (e.g., the lecture given in Penmaenmawr, in Wales on 30th August, 1923, Steiner, 1979), he did not take up this idea in his education lectures in such detail. In fact, he specifically made the point that this level of recapitulation is not intended:

> Can we find a parallel between human spiritual and soul development and this biogenetic law? We can do so only if we can say that at the beginning of his or her earthly life, a small child goes through the various stages of humanity and moves through later periods of human development as he or she grows. Thus, the development of a child repeats the development of humanity as a whole. We could certainly create such a fantasy, but it would not correspond to reality. In this area we can approach reality only through spiritual science. When we follow the development of the human embryo from the second or third week until it matures, we can see hints of a continuously more perfect form in the developmental stages, the form of a fish, and so on. However, when we observe the early developmental years of a child, we find nothing that indicates a recapitulation of the subsequent stages of human development. We would have to attribute fantasy forces and processes to the child's development to find something like that. It is just a beautiful dream when people like Wolf [Friedrich August Wolf 1759-1824, author comment] try to demonstrate that children go through a period corresponding to wild barbarians, then they go through the Persian period, and so forth. Beautiful pictures can result from this, but it is nonsense nevertheless because it does not correspond to any genuine reality (Steiner, 2001, p.73–4).

This misunderstanding about recapitulation brings significant problems with it. Firstly, the narrow linkage of age and stage of consciousness and the corresponding assumptions about human cultural evolution are both naïve and unrealistic. The second problem is associated with the assumption of an evolutionary sequence of so-called cultural epochs and the essentialist notions of culture that go with these, if they imply a predetermined progression from lower to higher levels of development (with the implication that other cultures did not make the transition). Such un-examined assumptions about universal stages and phases are problematic today. As Burman has pointed out,

> Comparison between child, prehistoric 'man' (sic) and 'savage' presupposed a conception of development, of individual and of evolutionary progress, as unilinear, directed steps up an ordered hierarchy. This confirmed the intellectual superiority of the Western male, while non-Western (male or female) could be figured as less important than his or her evolutionary predecessor (Burman, 2017, p.15).

Postcolonial critics of developmentalism, such as Lesko (1996) see the construction of the phases of childhood and adolescence as part of the colonist project, by overlaying notions of development with recapitulation theory; primitive-as-child and child-as-primitive. In Lesko's terms, "concepts like development, acculturation, modernization, and urbanisation carry the evolutionary imagery and social relations of lower species and higher species" (Lesko, 1996, p 459).

Angelika Wiehl (2015) has engaged with the question of child development supposedly recapitulating historical cultural development in detail, as has Dahlin (2017), showing that the idea was common in German educational discourse at the beginning of the 20th Century notably through the work of the followers of the influential educationalist Herbart (1776–1841). They both point out that Steiner's distanced himself from this position and insisted that there should be no matching of the year class/grade to any cultural chronology (Wiehl, 2015, p. 146). At the same time, however, the influence of the Herbartian cultural-stages approach was so pervasive that even Waldorf teachers unconsciously adopted it. A number of recent academic critics of Waldorf education (e.g., Prange, 2000, Zander, 2007) have asserted this recapitulation theory is part of Waldorf education. Despite Steiner's disavowals, the reality is that this idea still lives in Waldorf practice, notably in the class teacher period. Both Professors Michael Zech and Volker Frielingsdorfer (both personal comments) have suggested that Stockmeyer, who had considerable experience as a state school teacher, introduced this idea both in his time as school leader and later in his collation of curriculum references.

If certain key assumptions about Waldorf curricula are contentious, such as the recapitulation theory, the deconstruction of fine-grained developmental phases where does that leave Waldorf education?

New developments

In recent years a new approach to Waldorf curriculum has emerged that goes hand in hand with an epistemological shift. Until recently, as we have seen above, Waldorf teachers based their work on trust that Steiner was right and what one might call practice-based validation (i.e.it seems to work). Rittelmeyer suggested back in 1990 (and has elaborated this more recently, 2023), that since we have no way of verifying the results of Steiner's spiritual research, his ideas should be treated not as facts, but as heuristic hypotheses used as a lens to explore pedagogical phenomena. The criteria for their validity would lie in their fruitfulness in shedding light on these phenomena and the possibility of verifying such hypotheses through other research, perhaps using other theory to complement Steiner's. Furthermore, as Steiner (2011) himself suggested, working with such ideas as 'boundary concepts' (see Kiersch, 2010; Rawson, 2021), teachers can develop dispositions to pedagogical insight, thus extending the boundaries of their knowledge-in-practice. Together with the introduction of practitioner research into teacher education (in Germany at least) a new basis for Waldorf theory is being established and documented.

A layered curriculum

Using this heuristic approach Rawson (2021) was able to develop a new interpretation of curriculum by interpreting Steiner's notion of an ideal curriculum in Weber's sense of an ideal type (see above). A curriculum is therefore a pedagogical construct that offers a framework of ideal typical developmental themes as orientation. Using the notion of developmental tasks (see above), the curriculum is structured to provide a sequence of developmental learning opportunities across the life course of childhood and youth. The developmental sequence is a pathway laid down by Waldorf education to prompt and guide the development of learning groups (e.g., Waldorf classes) and individual student's actual development can be assessed in relation to this. This is not intended as a normative set of prescribed outcomes to be tested with high stakes consequences but rather as roadmap and diagnostic tool.

As Bransby and Rawson (2022) have shown, this developmental framework can be seen as common to Waldorf schools anywhere. They call this the macro level of curriculum in analogy to Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological approach. The developmental sequence is pegged to Waldorf classes as a convenience but this not a necessity. As Rutishauser and Stolz (2018) have shown in the field of emergency education, the child's actual developmental sequence can be delayed through trauma, but with adequate learning opportunities, children can 'catch up'. The sequence is more important than the specific age group. Since few children are at the same developmental stage at any specific age, the developmental sequence can be seen as a harmonising instrument.

At the meso level, each country, federal state or even school can identify the sequence of skills and knowledge relevant in their context and at the micro level, the teacher draws on the macro and meso level curriculum and adapts this to her particular class or group of students. This would enable teachers anywhere to develop Waldorf curricula locally, while retaining a rhizomic and coherent link with Waldorf education everywhere.

The overall ontology of curriculum can be iterated as follows; as Rawson (2021) has elaborated, Steiner's pedagogical anthropology gives rise to a number of generative principles relating to learning and development (e.g., learning benefits from a rhythmical structuring, children should first have experiences then make sense of these before coming to any concepts etc.). Steiner never formulated these as such but rather implied them in his suggestions for practice. Using these generative principles teachers can then plan and implement their practice by shaping the learning process accordingly. The ontological sequence can be shown in the following formula: Figure 1.

Waldorf education can learn from other approaches. This new interpretation of curriculum as a sequence of age-sensitive learning opportunities was also inspired by a Vygotskian perspective. The learning opportunities in the layered curriculum offer zones of proximate[8] development (Vygotsky, 1986, 2017). As Barrs (2022) has shown, new translations show that Vygotsky's interest in the ZPD was to highlight the role of pedagogy in children's development. The activities, tasks and challenges and the developmental themes they are linked to, prompt children's learning. Learning is thus the motor of development when it enables the learner to experience challenges beyond her current abilities. As Vygotsky says,

> The very lines of school education awaken inner processes of development. …Most important about this hypothesis is its position that developmental processes and learning processes do not coincide, that the former follow the latter, creating zones of proximate development (2017, p.370).

Future research

Since there has been so little research on Waldorf curriculum, research on almost any aspect would be useful. Even accurately documenting the development in each country, separating myth from historical evidence, would be vitally important, if only to create awareness of the processes and dynamics involved. However, there are some more specific questions that I think would be particularly interesting to explore. Bearing in mind Said (1979/2003) view that when an idea travels from one culture to another it not only changes through translation but it 'adopts' some assumptions of the new culture, and the problem is, the new culture often does not realise this. This may also apply to the ideas of Waldorf education. Alexander (2001), writing about comparative pedagogy, notes that pedagogy is always embedded in a culturally, situated discourse. The theory informing the field of comparative education in the mainstream could be applied to Waldorf education. This is an area of research that could be fruitful for understandings of the transmission and transformation of Waldorf practice over time and space.

Another area of research would be to explore how Waldorf curricula have responded to state requirements, in particular where Waldorf education is applied in maintained schools (e.g., academies in the UK and charter schools in the US). It would be interesting to see to what extent aspects of Waldorf curricula are transferable to non-Waldorf schools, notably the focus on interdisciplinary themes.

Conclusion

The Waldorf curriculum has come a long way since 1925. It has been at the heart of the worldwide success of Waldorf education. Though it has remained relatively static for a long time, it has gradually adapted to changing times, to places and circumstances. In its most recent iterations, it continues to provide teachers with orientation and inspiration while allowing innovation and creativity. Like many aspects of Waldorf education, it has emerged from a long period of faithful loyalty to its founder Rudolf Steiner and the founding myth of

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[8] I follow Barrs (2022) in adopting proximate simply meaning the next, instead of the tradition translation of Vygotsky's construct, proximal.

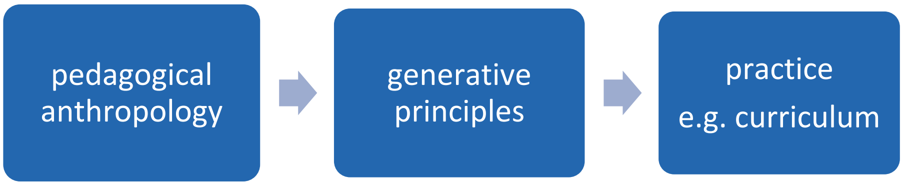

FIGURE 1
The ontological origins of curriculum.

the first Waldorf School. This led to an asymmetrical relationship between its German origins and the rest of the international movement. This long incubation has provided it with deep roots and the arboreal metaphor of a central, original master-curriculum gifting its (exotic, i.e., imported) fruits to the world, is now in the process of transforming into a rhizomic network without a centre, linked by a growing interwoven substructure that enables it to sprout and take roots anywhere the conditions permit.

Like Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo (2012) notion of globalectics, one can envisage the Waldorf curriculum as distributed across the globe, with no particular version of curriculum or place of origin more central than any other. All growth points would be connected and in decentred contact and in multiple dialogue, not only between the centre and the periphery, as it has been and partly still is, but between Waldorf schools and scholars everywhere. Every Waldorf curriculum that shares the macro layer developmental structure and builds on the generative principles of Steiner's pedagogical anthropology, is of equal value. As in Deleuze and Guattari (2004) original metaphor of the rhizome, it is a network with no centre, in which all points are in dynamic balance. As Ngugi says, "central to the pedagogical enterprise is the practice of translation. Translation is the language of languages. It opens the gates of national and linguistic prisons" (2012, p.61). The art of curriculum is therefore a question of translation, which means returning to the original pre-linguistic source and intentions.

The Waldorf movement- if not all its practitioners -has grown out of the phase of faithful imitation and in many places, it has already developed its distinctive character. It is now at the phase in which it can draw its influences from multiple sources, and not just the singular one of Steiner and the Waldorf tradition. It needs to develop its own local voices while maintaining family resemblance. This may be difficult for institutions that feel they have the task to preserve and cultivate certain traditions, but if they do not participate in the process they will be hollowed out and have ever less influence.

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