

## Sexuality, gender and identity in Waldorf schools from the perspective of Waldorf students: a question of developmental tasks.

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### Summary

The paper discusses the outcomes of a qualitative study involving young people aged 17 and 18 who are students at Waldorf schools in Germany and China into how they experience the sex education curriculum in their school. They were asked to review this and make recommendations. They conducted interviews and focus group meetings using video conferencing in English as their common language. They then summarized their findings and made them available to me as researcher. I then discuss their findings in the context of notions about liquid modernity and the imperative of reflexivity. I then relate the changes on attitudes to sexuality, gender and identity from the perspective of anthroposophical anthropology and the process of identity building in youth. The paper concludes with some tentative recommendations for further curriculum research.

### Introduction

It is important to regularly review whether the curriculum on which we base our pedagogy is still relevant and appropriate to the developmental tasks of children and young people. What used to be called sex education has transformed into developing an understanding of gender and relationships and has the task of supporting young people in their identity work. This reflects major changes in the social and cultural understandings of gender and identity that we as Waldorf educators have to deal with. Sex education has never been just about biology, even if this is not always reflected in Waldorf practice.

As the editor of an English language version of the Waldorf curriculum (Rawson & Richter, 2000), which has been translated into many languages, I have followed curriculum developments in the Waldorf movement worldwide. In particular, I have been interested in how the curriculum is adapted to other cultural contexts and to the changing conditions that affect the development of children and young people. For a number of years I have been concerned with redesigning the curriculum so that the work of adaptation can be done qualitatively rather than additively. This has led to the creation of a new curriculum framework (Bransby & Rawson, 2020). In the course of this project, I was approached to contribute to a curriculum project in Germany on aspects on sexuality. At the same time, I became aware that in my own school, some upper school students were in the process of questioning and changing their gender identity. In parallel, I was approached by teachers in another European country to give some seminars on the sex education curriculum. In the course of the online seminars, I became aware of how extremely different cultural attitudes to issues of gender and sexuality are within Europe and how they are dealt with in Waldorf schools. This practical research project is therefore part of a wider investigation into how gender issues are dealt with in Waldorf education.

Some people say that LGBTQ questions and experiences are relevant to a small number of students, usually prompted by media attention to the topic and that schools should focus on classic forms of sexuality and family. Others say that the more the topic of "coming out" is addressed, the more young people are likely to identify with the hype. But what we really know about the phenomenon?

## What do we know?

It does seem to be a fact that more and more people are saying that they do not feel comfortable in the gender they were given at birth, and they are referred to as transgender. As David Martin MD (2021) puts it, trans-identity is more than transsexuality; it is about natural changes in the way you relate to your body, and this can change throughout life and is not necessarily to do with sexual behaviour. For example, more men start to feel like women later in life, while the opposite tends to be true for women, that is, young women feel like men. Gender in English means social sex and therefore transgender refers more to a change in sexual behaviour, which can be underlined by surgical changes to the actual sexual organs and hormone treatment. The fact is that sexuality and gender manifest at different levels of the human being, from the genetic to the emotional, and this is not a stable or static condition. There is no absolute distinction between the sexes.

The fact that it is neither a criminal offence nor a reason for social exclusion to live in a form other than heterosexual has naturally emancipated many people to question their sexuality and gender, even if it is never easy, and the argument that it is a fashion in no way explains the phenomenon. It is also clear that discrimination against all kinds of minorities, including gay people, is still widespread and needs to be addressed. It is also very unlikely that someone who has no inclinations towards a gender other than the one they were given at birth would do so because of something they learned at school. In the United States a survey conducted for Time Magazine found that 20% of Millennials (people born since 2000) identified as "something other than strictly straight and cisgender, compared to 7% of boomers (people born after World War 2)" (Steinmetz, 2017). The same article reports that about one third of young people place themselves somewhere between 100% heterosexual and 100% homosexual and reports that Facebook recognizes about 60 options for gender users and that there are about 200 regularly appearing LGBTQ characters in popular cable Tv and streaming series. There are considerable disparities in public acceptance of sexual difference among the generations, with younger people being significantly more comfortable with the trend. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has been collecting data since 1985 using professional surveying companies.

Until now, it has never been explained with certainty why or how homosexuality, or for that matter any other than the classic form of male/female sexual relations, arises, "only how it does not arise: namely through 'wrong upbringing, through 'seduction' or sexual games among girls or boys in childhood and adolescence" (Gnielka, 2021, p. 49). The same publication offers advice for parents and teachers on how to deal with the issue and what it

means when young people come out themselves. *Hamburg Macht Schule* (roughly translated as Hamburg goes to school), the magazine of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, devoted an entire issue to the topic (May 2021). The editorial closes with a quote from a pupil in class 10, "Love is love. Human rights are for everyone. Gender is a spectrum. Sexuality is fluid. Kindness is everything" (p. 3). This sums up the essence.

In this article I report on a practical research project in which a group of German Waldorf students interviewed other students at a Waldorf school in China about sexuality, gender and identity and how these topics are dealt with in their schools. They were also asked to formulate recommendations for the curriculum.

I summarise the themes that can be constructed from the reported lived experiences of these young people and contextualise and interpret this in the light of the developmental challenges facing these young people and draw some conclusions for curriculum development.

### Perspectives and contexts

The American poet, writer, essayist and researcher Siri Hustvedt also teaches psychology at Cornell University and publishes in academic journals on psychology and neurology. She gave three talks on the topic of *conditio humana* at the Online Youth Symposium Kassel in June 2021. Hustvedt's themes are identity, gender, self but also perception and cognition. To take a perspective on the topic of the condition of being human today, she invented a suitable persona with whom a dialogue was developed over the course of her lectures. This persona was a young person who chose the personal pronoun *they* to show that they did not want to be forced to choose between the binary categories male/female. *They* is attracted to the idea of inclusion and prefers the space in between, not out of a lack of determination or as a weakness, but as a positive choice. *They* served as a cipher for Hustvedt's subject, the in-between position of the imagination, and its close relatives, intuition and the soul, which mediates between the body and the rational mind.

Drawing on science, philosophy and literature, Hustvedt described an historical and seemingly self-evident worldview that is hierarchical and privileges the rational mind. The drive for classification historically ultimately led to notions of higher and lower cultures, races, gender as well as forms of representation (e.g. science has a higher status than art in terms of truth) and explicitly and implicitly assumes a Eurocentric/Western and predominantly male possession of knowledge, culture and power.

Rational classification systems provided the rationale for the colonisation of people, bodies and consciousness and justified racism. Hustvedt also made it clear that the movement towards emancipation and the freedom to construct one's own identity demands a new consciousness and a new epistemology. Feminism, postcolonialism and the new ecological consciousness all employ a holistic view of the meaning of the body and embodiment, as well as a phenomenological and relational understanding of self and world, self and other. Each of these perspectives calls for a revision of the epistemology that sees the mind (and

brain) as an instrument that separates us from the world, that processes "in here" what we assume exists "out there". This perspective promotes a view of the world as an object, in that we comprehend, master, dominate, and manipulate the world so that we can exploit it for our selfish ends. Feminism, postcolonialism and ecological consciousness, on the other hand, seek to cultivate a relational process of knowing, in which we open ourselves to the Other and create a mutually fruitful relationship, dissolving the subject-object schema.

Hustvedt's use of the persona *they* was an effective stylistic device to point to this new and necessary perspective and thus also for this research. The question of gender, relationships and identity in the curriculum takes on new meaning against this background, making it important to adopt a participant perspective on the question. Instead of discussing the curriculum over the heads of the students and treating them as objects of our curricular intentions, it is important to empower them by listening to them. Waldorf students in the Upper School tend to be articulate, socially engaged and aware, and often value the education they have received, although they are not uncritical. They are often more sensitive to gender issues than teachers and they reflect on the education they have had and have. They and *they* complemented the pedagogically experienced perspective I, as a teacher with over 40 years of experience, was able to bring.

### Research methodology

In order to minimise my impact as a teacher and researcher on the students whose lived experiences I wanted to collect, I chose a simple process of presenting my research interests to a group of class 11 and 12 students, without sharing my own views, and asking them if they were interested and willing to share their views with me. After giving them time to consider and informing them of their rights to anonymity, to give their consent to my limited use of their data, I produced a short list of questions that interested me.

The students met with each other, and a video conference was organised in which the group from Germany met with a group from a Waldorf school in China who knew me because I had taught them during a visit the previous year. They then discussed with each other for 90 minutes and follow-up meetings were arranged. The conversations were held in English. About two weeks later, I conducted a focus group discussion (in German) with the German group, which I recorded and then transcribed, and they reported on their own views and those of the Chinese students. The students then send me a text summarize their advice to teachers if a student came out as trans, and what their recommendations for gender education throughout the curriculum were. I repeated this process with the Chinese students as well. I then analysed the interview data and constructed a number of themes, which I formulated in the form of statements (some of which were a composite of several statements and some of which were virtually direct quotes). All the students were able to communicate their ideas in English. After constructing the themes, I provided them to the German students in German and to the Chinese students in English and asked them to comment and add anything they felt had been forgotten, thus validating the analysis by the participants.

### The main themes

The following themes were reconstructed from the lived experiences of the participants using the method of phenomenological hermeneutics. I have grouped the themes into categories and this presentation is followed by a discussion.

#### *Difference is normal*

It is important to show children and young people that the issues of sexuality and gender are normal aspects of life and encompass a wide range of aspects.

Even young children should be taught diverse models of sexuality, gender orientation, family life as part of the normal variation in society. This can be done indirectly in the younger classes, for example in stories, but it should also be explicit in older classes.

Pupils should have access to books or be told stories in which other forms of gender identity and relations are presented in a natural way - and not necessarily as a problem or drama, but as a normal occurrence.

#### *Curriculum*

This is a topic that needs to be addressed not only in biology but across the curriculum, from kindergarten onwards, starting indirectly with stories but becoming increasingly direct or explicit.

We think we first started thinking about sexuality and gender in grade 4/5, when students asked each other if they had fallen in love, if girls had boyfriends and boys had girlfriends. Nobody mentioned that girls can have girlfriends, although some of the girls knew about this possibility.

From there, we think that fourth grade is the right time to talk to the children about the biological aspects of puberty, but then again in sixth grade in an age-appropriate way.

Students should also be taught about different attitudes to sexuality and gender in different cultures and in history.

The struggles of gay and transgender people for the right to express their sexuality should be covered in the same way that we look at other aspects of civil rights and Black Lives Matter.

#### *What needs to be changed?*

None of us have experienced anything in class that suggests that there are other ways of being, other forms of sexuality and relationship than heterosexual. Heterosexual relationships have always been the norm. Other forms of sexual relationships and family forms should be part of any reference to these issues. They just need to be given proportionally the space they actually have in society - no more, no less.

#### *Teachers*

We think that the main reason why sexuality and gender are so little addressed is that teachers themselves are insecure and don't want to say the wrong thing and don't really know the facts themselves and that many young people who are interested in LGBTQ issues know much more. In fact, in our class we were the first to bring this up when two of us gave a talk in grade 9.

We believe that teachers should not take sides, but provide access to relevant information, support the discussion. They should present the facts and be happy to give their opinion.

However, it is sometimes necessary to create safe spaces - even without teachers - where students can open up about their experiences.

In general, we would like to see the topic of identity addressed in all subjects that offer the possibility, but definitely in literature, in social and cultural studies, in discussions about law. Discussions about health and well-being can also address these issues.

#### *Our school (Germany)*

In our class and in our school in general, we have the feeling that there is a very relaxed attitude towards gender issues. When X came out as trans, the teachers all showed interest and accepted this in about 5 minutes and tried hard not to forget his new name. The teachers also seem quite relaxed about their own orientation. It is not a big issue whether teachers are in a same-sex partnership or gay. It's the same with parents - we have a very mixed group of parents with all kinds of one-gender families and patchwork arrangements - it doesn't seem to be an issue in the school community. But we know that this is not the case in other schools and students and teachers are not nearly as relaxed.

#### *Cultural differences*

From conversations with students at a Waldorf school in China, we know that the focus in the curriculum there is limited to one biology lesson. No one has ever come out in their school and they could not imagine anyone being brave enough. The parents would be very ashamed. In fact, the students there have started a project to help the teachers know what to teach.

#### *What to do if a student comes out as trans*

The teachers should establish if the student feels safe with the teacher, but also if this can be discussed with the whole because it would be best if the situation were treated simply as normal. Both groups of students felt this was possible within their own classes. Issues such as which pronouns should be simply clarified and everyone would be tolerant while people got used to it. They felt that they should educate themselves so that they could educate the teachers about it so that "the student does not get misgendered". The important thing was to establish that hetero-cis-normative lifestyles are normal. They recommended that literature and films that deal with gender issues should be discussed in the lessons. They felt that older students could definitely help young students who have questions and doubts. They suggested craft clubs after school during which questions of gender could be integrated.

## Discussion

### School context

The group of German students acknowledged that they experienced a wide range of gender identities and family forms in their immediate environment and that this empowered them to address the issue. The parents they have and know are generally open and tolerant of different gender identities and although coming out is never easy, they felt they could rely on support and understanding. This reflects the metropolitan social context of the school they attend in Hamburg. This is undoubtedly different in other social and cultural groups and perhaps in other places in Germany. Nevertheless, this fact shows how much social attitudes have changed, if not for all, then at least for many young people who attend Waldorf schools.

As the students pointed out, they are aware of LGBTQ issues and are well informed by social media, the internet, literature, art, films and TV series, which in general take up awake positions regarding sexuality and gender. Netflix offers a whole range of LGBTQ series and films because they are popular and often well written and acted. Germany is a country where politicians (although not many footballers) can be known as gay. In many ways, LGBTQ differences are much more accepted, integrated and debatable in society than issues related to racism and xenophobia.

In other countries in Europe the situation is even more open and relaxed, although we know that in other countries conditions for LGBTQ people are actually getting worse.

The students are partly aware of these cultural and historical differences, but could only partly explain or understand this. The German group in particular, as is common in Hamburg schools, has quite a comprehensive political, social and cultural curriculum background through the lessons, which is not necessarily the case in many other regions. In fact, Til Ungefug (2017) has elaborated a whole curriculum strand for social studies, which is at best touched upon in the usual curriculum, but often displaced by other subjects.

### Identity in fluid times

Zygmund Bauman (2008), the Polish-British sociologist coined the phrase liquid modernity to describe the situation in which traditional social structures, forms and expectations have become fluid. It seems a very appropriate way of looking at questions of gender identity today. Identity refers to how people see themselves and how they are seen by others. The central developmental task of the person is to be able to establish and re-establish coherence between the personal or biographical identity one experiences in the continuity of changing social situations and the social identities one receives through positioning by the expectations of others.

The task of balancing these two demands is undertaken by what the German sociologist of health Klaus Hurrelmann (2012) has called the 'I'-identity. As Hurrelmann writes, ego 'I'-

identity is understood not as a "once and for all successful, fixed and reliable possession of the human being, but as a state of self-experience that is constantly subject to new processes of interpretation and negotiation with the external environment and one's own inner nature" (Hurrelmann & Bauer, 2015, p. 44). 'I'-identity arises in the dynamic encounter between inner and outer realities and the subject's ongoing work of making sense of this. Though Hurrelmann speaks of an ongoing resolution of inner and outer realities, from an anthroposophical perspective, it is actually a trialectic rather than a dialectic; there are external realities, internal bodily realities and biographical realities. Social expectations tell a young person one thing, her body perhaps tells her another and biographically, the person has other intentions, which may not be conscious, or not fully conscious. From the side of social expectations come social norms, parental wishes but also what education brings. Traditionally education has generally reflected social norms, but today we can question if that is right. Shouldn't school offer a wider perspective than that of current social norms.

The point about identity work is that it is a learning process and learning is part of the ongoing project of creating a sense of identity, and this is a very social process. Peter Faulstich also describes this learning process:

Human learning is based on bodily encounters with the world that we share with other people and it unfolds and expands through new experiences than continuously require adjustment to the interconnectedness of self and world. In the lived-in-body, mind/spirit and physical body are one; in the community, individuality and sociality are united. Experiences occur in social contexts and they stimulate learning when they break through the old and make what is new thinkable (Faulstich, 2013, p. 214, MR trans).

However, this process is not always easy because body and spirit/mind separate when individual and society fall apart because the relationship between them has been commodified and turned into an economic process and leads to what is referred to as alienation, the loss of resonance in which the human being experiences herself as something recognized and acknowledged by society rather than as its product. As Faulstich puts it, real sense of community breaks apart and is fragmented by competition of consumers with neoliberal capitalism. Thus, learning and school learning is never a neutral activity, it always occurs within the hegemony of political power, which itself serves capitalism- and this is where education comes in. The central educational problem, the perspective of securing identity and the development of the person as agentic subject, is thus tied to gaining sovereignty over one's own life, in expanding our capacity to act and identify the learning opportunities that further out becoming as autonomous subjects. Biographical learning is about recognizing the opportunities to bring our own biographical interests into play. That includes being able to make choices regarding gender, what we do with our body, how we position it and how we accept how others do this too.

Individuality involves two equally important processes: the perception of difference between people (since individual is etymologically synonymous with unique) and the perspective of the acting subject. The person recognises herself as the agent of her own action; "the subjectivity of individuality is fully present in self-evidence: the acting person



knows in the moment of acting... that she herself is the effective agent" (Loebell, 2012, 24). Loebell has described the relationship between 'I'-identity and individuality as follows; "individuality in its subjecthood appears at one time as this identity and at another time as that identity...The subject creates herself for her own experience by acting and observing" (ibid. p. 25). So behind 'I'-identity, as it were, is an agentic subject that we call individuality. No two embodied individualities can occupy the same physical and social space- we are individually positioned, even if we have much in common. We are similar but not the same, which is why generic categories that are used to identify people, male, old, British, Waldorf, teacher, are at best approximations, social roles we play. As Peter Faulstich says, the central educational task is to support people securing identities (i.e. letting them identify as they want and accepting that) *and* supporting the process developing agentic subjectness, because only then will people gain any measure of sovereignty and agency over their lives. I suggest that it is not the task of education to impose identities but to enable the necessary processes of reflexivity.

The second part of this educational task of supporting young people in their developmental tasks is supporting subjectification or becoming subjects. The task of the curriculum is therefore to offer substantive experiences in which events of subjectivation can take place, in which the acting subject emerges, engages with the world, opens itself to transformative experiences and learns in this full sense of the word. This also applies to issues of gender, sexuality, and relationships. Teachers need to provide appropriate and sufficient opportunities to reflect on and understand experiences in this area of life.

What anthroposophical perspectives often overlook in their emphasis on the self and self-development is, as Biesta (2013) has explained, drawing on a philosophical tradition including Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Immanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur, the subject comes into being through encounter with the other. The other in this sense refers to other human beings but also to anything that has the character of a being, that is, that is not simply a cluster of physical properties, in other words to a phenomenon. If young people can encounter being, this calls forth their own being. The task of education is therefore to enable children and young people to encounter phenomena and subsequently be able to reflect on this. The sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2020- by the way also a speaker at the Youth Symposium), refers to this encounter as resonance and he describes it as form of gift, something that is given rather than taken, something that comes towards us that is hard to resist, unless we block it out. He makes the important point that resonance is the opposite of instant availability, which post-modern neoliberal society makes us desire; to have power of the things we desire, so satisfy our desires as quickly as possible, at the touch of a key pad, in the technical mastery of the world, which is at the same time a desire to optimise the self, of getting what we think we deserve. This is a very important perspective in relation to gender.

Rosa explains that the problem of being incapable of resonance takes two contrary forms; we always give in to our own desires and thereby lose our own voice and ability to discern what is actually important (such as what is good for the environment, what restricts other people's freedom) irrespective of whether we desire it at that moment and thus become unaccountable to ourselves and others. This results in alienation from ourselves and our

own will. The second form is desire something that we know in advance is never fully reachable, though rewarding to engage with. This means we must know somethings of the other but not everything. The first form makes the object of our desire into something we can fully possess, the second is the desire to enter into a relationship with the other, which is open in terms of what comes out the process, that is fundamentally unpredictable. Translated into the question of sexuality and gender, is to recognize that both are essentially about entering into a relationship which is open in its outcome and therefore desirable in a resonant way. Anything we can do to prevent early closure on questions of sexuality and gender can help the person form her own relationships to her body, to others and to the world. But this is not blind, it requires knowledge in the form of knowing that is open and can grow.

### Identity and gender work in the essential bodies

Anthroposophical anthropology offers us ways of understanding the human being from different perspectives, including the physical body, the life body, the sentient body and the "I" body. Relationship and sex education and gender issues need to address each of these areas in specific ways.

Our physical body provides us with a foundation for our identity as it grows and changes over time, and most importantly, how other people react to us and position us through our bodies. Bodies are different, which is why we can recognise individuals just by looking at them. Development is highly individual, and yet we are often conditioned to relate to certain body types in different ways. Children can learn from an early age that bodies are special and need to be cared for. They need to understand how to care for them through healthy living and age-appropriate nutrition. They need to understand that the body grows and changes, especially in terms of gender, but that the male-female binary is not absolute. Children and young people need to know their bodies and what they do and feel like, how physical intimacy is expressed and where and when it is appropriate and when physical distance is appropriate, what feels good and what does not.

In the realm of the life body (also called the etheric body) and life processes, children learn dispositions, habits, behaviour patterns and body images in the course of their socialisation and enculturation. Education must continue this process in a healthy way. Healthy habits include getting to know the rhythms of the body and this is not only a task for girls and their monthly cycle, boys and men can also get to know the rhythms of their bodies and those of women. This includes developing a sense of transformation and transitions between phases in the life course, including menopause and ageing.

The realm of the life body also includes the life processes, which can be understood as aspects of the totality of the life forces. The life processes that Steiner (1996) describes in his work on the senses play a very important role in our lives and are not commonly known. He identified a sequence of life processes which he called respiration, heating, nutrition, secretion, maintenance, growth and regeneration, which can be seen in the digestive process of absorption, analysis, assimilation, regulation, self-activity, regeneration, growth

of organs and reproduction. These processes are transformed into processes in our process of absorption, processing and assimilation of sensory experiences. These processes are also closely related to our sexuality, although this has not yet been explored.

If the function of human sexuality is not primarily to produce babies, but to express our 'I'-identity and enter into meaningful, intense relationships with others and celebrate the powers of our bodies, then understanding the processes associated with the life forces can help to enrich this experience. We can assume that the life processes are archetypal in nature, but also have gender-specific accents. We can apply the seven life processes to the area of sexuality to make us aware of the stage of engagement. The first life process is receiving. We open ourselves to the feelings and processes in our own bodies, experimenting, sharing, comparing. Likewise, we allow others to explore our bodies as we explore theirs. The very act of opening becomes a rhythmic exchange between two people in which we observe and become aware of the other body and person. In the third life process we make decisions about what we like and what we don't like. Up to this stage we may be unclear about our sexual orientation and preferences. At a certain point, called separation or individuation, the person settles on a gender role: what is right for me? The following phases are about developing and living this role.

In the area of the sentient body and soul, the developing individual has to deal with drives, desires, longings, emotions and feelings, attractions, being in love (and out of love), striving for ideals, especially in relation to relationships and partners. It is also in this area that the young person builds his or her self-image and personality. Within the soul are the three activities of thinking, feeling and willing. Willing is closely related to our will, our desires, motives in life and our striving for change. Emotions, which are best understood as our reactions to and expressions of physical states, and feelings, which are usually closely related to our mental images, memories and thinking. Thinking, which spans the spectrum from intellect and rationality to imagination and intuition, obviously also plays an important role in our relationships and sexuality. In this area, children and young people need to be able to distinguish between friendship and sexual attraction (to both opposite sexes which is quite normal), to recognise the characteristics of friendship, soulmate-ship and the clash of opposites. The spectrum of feelings that can arise between people is very broad and having a language to distinguish them is important.

In the dimension of the 'I'-body, the person has an interest in others and in the world, forms judgements and seeks shared awareness and meaning in relationships. At the ego level, love can be altruistic, selfless, and directed towards humanity in general, but it can also be religious and take other forms that we can call "higher love". The saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi seems fitting: "There are beautiful wild forces within us. They shall turn mills in us and fill sacks that feed even heaven".

The phenomenon of human attraction (and its opposite), for example, takes many forms and operates at different levels of the human condition, from allure, fascination, charm, appeal, personal magnetism, etc., there are different levels of physical and biological drives,

sexual chemistry, pain and pleasure, the experience of power and control. Attraction also includes social similarities and differences, emotional connections, shared consciousness, alignment of thought and selfless love.

Disregard for the above four dimensions of sexuality and relationships can be summarised as:

- at the physical level, shame of one's own body, obsessions with physicality, pornography, abuse, violation of another's body, violence.
- at the life body level: unhealthy habits of excessive behaviour, disgust with one's own body or other people's bodies, self-harm, eating disorders, positioning, manipulation, and inscription by others into certain behaviours and attitudes, denial of pleasure,
- at the level of the sentient soul, uncontrolled desires and unhealthy and repressed longing, desire to possess or control others, seeing people as objects, fear and anger at others, especially those who are different,
- non-recognition and non-acceptance of the other, self-denial and submission to the will of others.

In one form or another, these forms of disregard for healthy relationships are unfortunately commonplace and therefore need to be addressed in a way that is age-appropriate and yet understandable to the child or young person. In particular, the question of what is appropriate and what to do to protect oneself and others from abuse must be explicitly addressed. It is clearly an educational task to prepare children to be able to recognise what is healthy and what is not.

### Curriculum

Building on the work with Kath Bransby (Bransby & Rawson, 2020) on a three-tiered structure for curriculum, it becomes clear that many aspects of the subject touch on our common humanity, our common biological growth and development and thus belong to a universal macro-level of curriculum. However, since we live in a globalised age and questions of sexuality and gender have an international dimension, questions of identity have an individual-biographical relevance, the scope of pedagogy and curriculum in this area of life is very large. At the same time, this development is interpreted very differently culturally. Therefore, at the meso or national level, the positions of teachers and parents, the prevailing cultural values have to be taken into account. At the micro level, teachers decide how best to work with these issues with their respective students. Detailed curriculum suggestions have been made elsewhere, but it can be said that according to the model of media pedagogy the topic of gender and identity is mostly addressed indirectly until shortly before puberty (beginning of grade 5) and explicitly thereafter. I have offered detailed considerations on the curriculum in a separate paper (Rawson, 2021).

### Conclusion

Even though many young people are well informed about topics such as gender and transgender, it is a topic that is probably not widely discussed in class. If Waldorf education

aims to address young people biographically and in their self-education, then it cannot marginalise such topics.

There is certainly concern among some teachers that we should not change the traditional gender roles in stories and myths because they are archetypes. This is a complex issue. However, a few things should be noted.

1. First, the traditional stories we have in books, including folk tales, fairy tales, legends and myths, were often collected, written down and edited in the 19th century and often reflected the values, cultural and often nationalistic and even colonial intentions of the men who published them.
2. Secondly, as author Ben Okri put it, the stories we tell reflect the society we want. Narratives have always been used to convey the values we think are important. Therefore, the stories we tell should reflect the values we think are important, and Waldorf education has a strong tradition of 'meaningful stories'.

After thousands of years of discrimination and oppression of women and hundreds of years of colonialism, it seems justified to change the stories to reflect a more socially just and representative distribution of characters - both good and bad.

My personal view is that the phenomenon of transgender interest among young people is a manifestation of gender work, which is a branch of identity work. As Zygmund Bauman (2008) put it, we live in fluid, flowing times where most traditional structures are no longer stable, and each individual must be an artist of their own life, not by choice but by necessity. Being open about one's gender orientation is a process of coming to terms with historical, cultural, societal, and individual expectations. Finding one's own gender orientation may be an ongoing process for some people, for which we can only have respect. It is not an easy path to follow, but it is certainly not an aberration.

Sexuality and gender manifest on all levels because the human being is an embodied being. What distinguishes human beings in all areas of life is variation, adaptability, flexibility, the capacity for lifelong learning, growth and development. Social and cultural structures reflect this variation, and one should not make the mistake of assuming that the traditional cultural binary of male-female with fixed roles is the only possible way things can be. We live in a time when most people can and should aspire to social emancipation and personal identification. Young people should be supported in their aspirations and explorations by having access to relevant information and being guided in developing their own judgement. Specific recommendations for changes or additions to the curriculum have been made elsewhere (Rawson, 2021).

Obviously, a study of this scope cannot be the basis for any factual claims. However, the study is informative in that it adds a dimension to the author's subjectivity and experience. It is consistent with my core pedagogical belief that we can trust and learn from the insights of our students.

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