

# A holistic theory of child and youth development for Waldorf education

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## Abstract

This paper argues for a further development of Steiner's theory of developmental psychology that informs Waldorf education. It shows that there are some issues with the current interpretation of this theory, both in terms of the fact that the actual development of children and young people is characterized not by set milestones of development but individual variation, and in terms of the current rejection of universalist claims to Western middle-class models of phases and stages. Relying on such normative systems run the risk that individual children and youth who do not conform to norms are seen as problematic and deviant. The idea of new perspectives on Steiner's model, especially if they are well-intentioned, benign and respectful, can be seen as part of a *bienveillant* (benign) *avant garde* movement within the Waldorf community, that is as a new development within the field. This term implies that there is also a conservative, conventional and traditional end of the spectrum. The article suggests that a new Waldorf developmental psychology could be supplemented by social, cultural and ecological perspectives. It identifies that this would require a new, critical relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy and concludes that this could enable Waldorf education to have a much greater impact on education than it currently does and would equip it to make greater contribution to the healthy learning and development of many more children.

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## Introduction

Waldorf education is known for its developmental, age-appropriate approach (see Introduction to Weiss & Willmann). As these authors note,

The connection between developmental theory and pedagogy is essential to the self-understanding of Waldorf education. However, some educational scholars view its concrete manifestation within the Waldorf educational theory and practice, as well as the underlying understanding of development, critically (2023, p.1 author trans).

This is not new. However, Waldorf education seems to be at a turning point, that may in some place manifest as a crisis of identity and direction. Negative media attention, critical academic studies (e.g. Knight, 2024, Hoffmann & Buck, 2023, 2024 a & b) and a lack of qualified young people wanting to learn the profession of Waldorf teacher, are all symptoms of this crisis. Perhaps less visible is the widespread sense among practitioners that Waldorf is losing a living connection to its anthroposophical roots, as with so many aspects of the Waldorf movement, though we have no research on this. This phenomenon is not confined to Germany, where much of the criticism is made public. Conferences on this theme have taken place in Norway (May 2024), Taiwan (May 2024) and China (October, 2024) attended by the author.

At the same time there are signs of an emergent *benign avant garde*, in the sense of a loose alignment of scholars and practitioners who are pushing the boundaries of the consensus of what Waldorf education has been up until now. This *avant garde* is not seeking to make a break with the past, but to re-envision aspects of Waldorf education, such as curriculum with a view to opening up new possibilities for growth and development that nevertheless grow from the roots of Steiner’s anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology. This *avant garde* is benign because it is critically reflective in a well-intentioned way. It is not for me to name other actors within of this *benign avant garde*; each should identify themselves as such, as I unambiguously do here. One of the areas that is in need of urgent review is the theory of child and youth developmental that underpins Waldorf pedagogical practice. The term *avant garde* also implies that there is a conservative, conventional and traditional ‘wing’ of the Waldorf movement. People in this group will see no need for a further developmental of Steiner’s approach, with leaders regularly calling for a return to the original model, which correctly understood and implemented should be adequate to all situations.

The problem with this option is that Steiner since did not offer a systematic, structured or evidence-based account of child development, but gave lectures frequently using his own terminology with implicit reference to the wider body of anthroposophical ideas and because Steiner is using ideas that lie well outside of the main scholarly discourse, it is difficult to make comparisons with other approaches (for an overview of the academic discussions in Germany about Steiner's theory of child development, see Schmelzer, 2023). Ullrich (2012, 2021) is in one sense right, when he says that the ideas behind Waldorf education are unscientific. In their original form they are difficult to compare and analyze. It doesn't mean, however, that these ideas can't be articulated in terms that the academic community can relate to. However, to be scientific (i.e. from Masters' degree level upwards) means critically interrogating the assumptions behind a theory and looking for evidence to support that theory. Prange's (1985) general critique of anthroposophy as a whole, highlights just this lack of criticality. He wrote, "It 'proves' what it already knows and 'observes' what it thinks is so" (cited in Schmelzer, 2023, p. 120). As I discuss below, this problem is particularly acute when Waldorf education claims that it is based on the whole of anthroposophy.

Reviewing a recent collection of chapters on Steiner's developmental psychology (Weiss & Willmann, 2023), Ulrich (2021) notes that,

It must be said in advance that none of the authors critically discusses Rudolf Steiner's developmental theory in terms of its validity and genesis; it is taken as the underlying basis for all the ideas and practices, which is not further questioned in the contributions themselves (2021, p. 2).

Ullrich sums up the problems inherent in a 'phases-and-steps' model of development; it can tend to be normative and thus limit the originality and individuality of students and it disregards the interactive participation of other actors in the education process. Whilst Waldorf scholars (e.g. Zech, 2011) may acknowledge such criticism, most practitioners worldwide are either unaware of these problems or assume that this holistic, spiritual approach is simply right because it feels right, or because they accept Steiner's authority. Some of the contributions in Weiss & Willmann's book, go out of their way to point out that Steiner's child development approach should not be presented as a fixed system, delineated into seven-year cycles, with subcycles, that individual students should be individually understood and that teachers have to develop special capacities to do this. This has been pointed out frequently over the years (see Schmelzer, 2023) but it seems that the desire of parents and teachers for milestones, clearly delineated age-specific characteristics of children and young people (which is amply met by countless parent-targeted websites) is greater than their willingness to identify the subtleties among Steiner's multiple references across many texts. Even academics who read many of Steiner's works may overlook the references here and there that relativize the main impression of seven-year developmental stages. There are exceptions, as Schmelzer (2023) points out, such as Heiner Barz (in his 1984 discussion of Waldorf kindergarten practice), who sees close similarities between Piaget's and Steiner's accounts of development, especially in their emphasis on the interplay or synergy of the child's learning and the learning opportunities provided and that what is important is recognizing and enabling the child's dispositions.

### A pedagogical anthropology- a problem of terminology

Today Waldorf school education is fairly unique in having a developmental approach, since most educational approaches today are pragmatic, focused on the acquisition of knowledge and generally do not take developmental psychology into account. This is *least true* of early years' education, which still has

a strong developmental basis, but elementary and secondary education rarely takes development into account, except in special and remedial education. Even puberty, which is a major developmental factor in young people's lives, plays very little or no role in curriculum or didactics. Nevertheless, as Göhlich, Wolf & Zirfas (2014) explain, theoretically there can be no pedagogy of teaching and learning without some idea about the nature of the human being.

Furthermore, as in many aspects of Waldorf education, translations from German to English can be problematical. The German anthroposophical term *Menschenkunde* (knowledge of the human being) is often translated as pedagogical anthropology. If googled, the main references to pedagogical anthropology are to Maria Montessori's book of the same title, originally published in 1913. In German scholarship, the term *pädagogische Anthropologie* refers to the understandings of the human being that inform educational practice (e.g. Zirfas, 2021), but in English educational science this term is not used- developmental psychology being the usual term. In English, educational anthropology or anthropology of education usually refers to the study of the practices related to cultural practices of bringing up children, cultural transmission and uses primarily ethnographic research methods. It often studies non-Western cultures and indigenous communities, such as the Arunta Aborigines, or non-mainstream groups such as the Hutterites in North America. An example the classic work of George and Louise Spindler (2018, *Fifty Years of Anthropology and Education*).

Development is another word with multiple meanings. Daniel Wagner's book (2018) *Learning as Development* understands development as the study of how,

humans grow, adapt, create, and seek wellbeing and happiness- the central concern of all cultures...at its core is learning, since learning is the very process through which individuals progress or develop from one stage of life to the next. Learning is a complex, necessary and ubiquitous human behaviour- something we do every day of our lives, in both formal and informal contexts (p.2).

Wagner then highlights how in postcolonial situations, learning is the key to societal change in the context of multiple conflicts, climate change, the scramble for essential resources, the North-South divide, the realignment of geopolitical structures. He explores the risks and opportunities for international development in the fields of early years and youth education, literacy programmes, access to education, teacher education, standardization and measurement as drivers of education, learning and thus of development of the person and the impacts of new technologies. This perspective reminds us that child development cannot be seen in isolation from the wider socio-economic-cultural contexts.

My suggestion is that teachers and researchers should simply refer in English to a Waldorf theory of holistic child and youth development. Since Waldorf education uniquely takes the spiritual dimension into account and explores how this manifests in the whole human being, the adjective holistic (which of course is not exclusive to Waldorf) is explanatory. There is a long tradition of theories of development named after their founders, Freud, Vygotsky, Piaget, Erikson, Skinner, Gesell, Bowlby, Bandura and so on. We could use the term Steinerian or Steiner's theory of development, but Steiner is inseparable from the whole of anthroposophy and I have argued elsewhere (Rawson, 2024a) that Waldorf education needs to identify itself with the application of *some of* Steiner's anthroposophical ideas. What I am proposing here is a theory for Waldorf education that has grown out of Steiner's *Menschenkunde* but has incorporated other compatible perspectives (see below).

### What are the problems with Waldorf developmental theory?

As Rittelmeyer (2023a) discusses, all anthropologies are culturally situated and therefore the idea of a universal 'nature of the human being' is unsound. Steiner's own claim, in his book *Education of the Child* (1996) and repeated in numerous variations, is that anthroposophy offers a *true* anthropology, and that

education just needs to orientate itself on this. This has led to phrases such as the “nature of the child”, the “essential nature of the child”, the “being of the child” that were scattered across Steiner’s works, and also classical anthropological texts, have been adopted in an un-reflected way in much Waldorf literature. Such phrases and what they imply, are, Rittelmeyer points out, untenable. An *Allgemeine Menschenkunde*- a general or universal knowledge of the human being-, which is the title given to Steiner’s First Teachers’ Course, is a misnomer. From the perspective of contemporary developmental psychology, many taken-for-granted assumptions made by many Waldorf teachers and reproduced in Waldorf literature and on school websites, can be contested. I will highlight some of the issues involved.

At the World Teachers Conference at the Goetheanum in 2012, the well-known Swiss pediatrician Remo Largo held a lecture in which he emphasized that what characterizes child development is individual variation. He made this point at the beginning of his lecture, using the following example:

A teacher of a class of twenty six-year-old children will see differences of up to three years in the children's developmental age. Some children have a developmental age of 7 to 8 years and can read at the age of six, while others have a developmental age of 4 to 5 years and have difficulty reading. Before the children reach high school, the differences between them usually increase significantly... By age 13, the developmental ages of the most and least developed children differ by at least 6 years. In addition, boys, as a group, are on average 18 months behind girls. Dealing with this ‘inter-individual variability’ can be challenging for parents and teachers (2012, p.18, author trans.). He illustrated this with the following graphic.

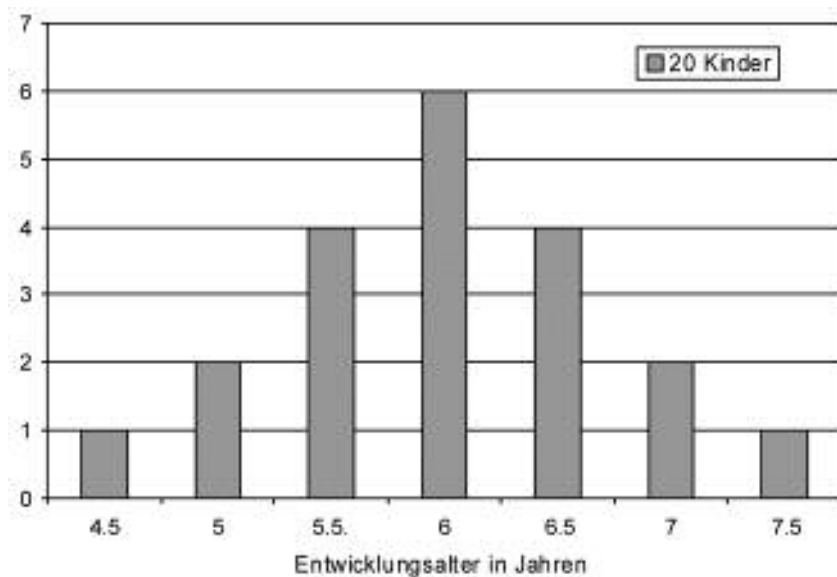


Figure 1 The spread of developmental ages in a class1. The vertical axis shows the number of children, the horizontal axis their developmental age.

The implications of this for Waldorf education can be summarized as follows. For the nature of child and youth development,

- individual variation and diversity are normal,
- heterochronous development is normal,
- learning groups are always heterogenous.

What Largo (2017) also highlights is the intra-individual variation. This means that an individual can have a developmental age in their cognitive development that is many years ‘older’ than their social development. Gardiner’s (2018) theory of multiple intelligences has sensitized us to the different ways

people relate to the world, though Waldorf education generally works with temperament theory, since no one to date has offered a multiple intelligence perspective within the Waldorf discourse. Perhaps Gardiner's use of the term intelligence has hindered this. People positioned within the construct of the autism spectrum may vary considerably in their language development, motor skills, perception of their environment, social awareness, empathy and executive functions and are often positioned outside the spectrum of normal development (Brownlow, et al, 2023, Milton & Ryan, 2023).

The suggestion in the statement "the yearly milestones of development and their resonance in the Waldorf curriculum" (Glöckler, 2020, p.121), can be contested. Depictions of the 'typical' grade 3 or grade 7 child that provide the possibility of seeing "the child differentiated according to their 'essence' at each age (Ibid), which are still common in presentations of Waldorf education, are at best misleading, at worst harmful because they are normative and may lead to the assumption that a child not conforming to the developmental description is somehow abnormal, leading to perceptions of 'problematic' or 'difficult' children (see Knight, 2019, Dyer, 2019). Studies by Idel (2013, 2014) show that around a quarter of former Waldorf students (of some schools in Germany), who were interviewed, felt that their class teacher did not recognize and accept them. Based on an analysis of the class teachers' texts in student reports, the researcher concludes that they had a view of childhood described as 'idealizing' and 'romantic'. One of the students' biographies is interpreted as showing the ideal model of student. Franziska (the name has been changed) embodies the school's education myth; from the perspective of the class teacher, as expressed in the texts of annual reports, she personifies the ideal of a pupil personality with an affinity for school culture.

Three subject qualities or school value preferences can be identified, which Franziska gives expression to: curiosity, devotion, modesty. She corresponds to the romantic ideal of a child's nature - on the one hand outwardly orientated with a thirst for knowledge, on the other hand inwardly orientated with her wealth of imagination - and from a Waldorf educational or anthroposophical perspective is on the age-appropriate, i.e. correct path of development, namely the unfolding of her ego-consciousness. The year report thus presents a harmonious fit between the school and the pupil's self, whose ideal moments of fit are located on different levels by the class teacher...This exemplary teacher-pupil relationship reveals key structural moments of the teacher-pupil relationship that is decisive for all pupils in Franziska's class: the asymmetry and heteronomy based on the teacher's knowledge advantage and moral authority, as well as the affective closeness to the pupil resulting from his comprehensive responsibility and care...according to the teacher's attribution, Franziska is on the *ideal development path of harmonising her personality* (italics author).

Idel notes that even for 'ideal' students, this 'fit' between teacher expectations and student can be a problem.

The ambivalences of these fits remain hidden in this construction; the costs of such idealisation in the school environment can be spelled out in thought experiments: Firstly, the danger of an over-adaptation of the family to the school and vice versa of the school to the family; secondly, the emotional ambivalences in the close relationship with the class teacher and differences between the world knowledge presented by the teacher and other cultural interpretations of the world; thirdly, the social competition within the we-image of the class community; fourthly, the pressure to prove oneself that weighs on Franziska as a standard-setting pupil, including the danger of over-focussing on the school (Idel, 2012, author trans).

Those children who did not conform to this ‘romantic’ notion of development, may have been unconsciously seen by their teachers as problematic or difficult.

Finally, Largo’s simple graphic calls into question the use of so-called school readiness tests, in which children are examined using an extensive catalogue of criteria and judgements are made whether children who are chronologically ‘borderline’ (i.e. their birthdays are within 3 months of the starting date for the school year) are deemed ‘ready’ to transition from kindergarten to grade 1. A study (Kaiser and Boedekker, 2007) conducted in Berlin, into the transition from Waldorf kindergarten to school, highlighted, among other things, that kindergarten and school teachers using the same observation questionnaires and criteria came to different conclusions about the children’s readiness. Clearly early years practitioners, school doctors and school teachers interpret the same data differently, which may reflect their different expectations and institutional cultures.

### Other critiques: ideals and archetypes

Another aspect of the developmental approach of Waldorf education has been recently challenged by researchers Wilson (2014) and Knight (2024). These authors explored assumptions about childhood in Waldorf early years’ and elementary education. Using observations and conversations in Waldorf settings and drawing on classic Waldorf literature, these researchers identify assumptions about a particular type of child and childhood. Wilson writes,

Through a child-centred model that views the individual needs, desires and actions of the child as central to the pedagogical process, Waldorf education ...reifies the Western, White, middle-class ideal of the ‘mythic, walled garden’ of ‘Happy, Safe, Protected, Innocent Childhood’...Waldorf education romanticizes the young child as vulnerable and in need of protection, particularly from the dangers of media, cognitive overstimulation, and adult sexuality. While Waldorf education may appear to be child-centred in the sense of retaining a focus on play, in reality only certain types of play are sanctioned and viewed as evidence of ‘normal’ development...As Steiner...constructed childhood in universalizing ways, they missed the complexity of childhood and the right of children’s voices to be heard alongside those of adults.

Waldorf education, while claiming to be child-centred, ultimately relies on more teacher-directed methods than they would originally appear to proclaim. Child-centredness in this case...is ultimately not about child empowerment and liberation. Instead, it is about creating and reifying a particular type of child, and then regulating children in a way that fits the white, middle-class version (Wilson, 2014).

Waldorf practitioners may take issue with this account, but the researcher’s analysis of both the Waldorf literature and the settings and educators, certainly raises legitimate questions.

More recently, the scholar Hunter Knight has addressed a similar issue from a post-colonial perspective. Waldorf has only recently engaged with postcolonial questions (Rawson & Steinwachs, 2024, in German, Rawson, 2023 and Boland, et.al, in print) and a consciousness for these issues has barely appeared in teacher education and thus is represented only sporadically within Waldorf practice. Knight addresses assumptions among Waldorf practitioners in North American early years settings about where children ‘naturally’ belong that reinforce colonial productions of what it means to be human. She identifies explicit and tacit assumptions among practitioners that the Waldorf kindergarten is the ideal space for children to develop, yet this space reflects sets of settler-colonial values and geographies. This approach reflects Knight’s previous work on those children who are ‘evacuated’ from childhood because of their behaviour, background, race – factors that predispose them to being labelled ‘problem children’. As she puts it, “Across Turtle Island, Indigenous children, Black children, and children of color are disproportionately likely to be given a stigmatizing disability label, drop out of school, and/or enter

juvenile prison” (Knight, 2019, p.81, Turtle Island is the Haudenosaunee name for North America and is widely used in indigenous contexts).

Knight characterizes her impression of the Waldorf kindergarten space by citing the following description, “‘Little House on the Prairie went to Stockholm on vacation’... This captures the ways in which the wooden, light-filled room draped in pink fabric has what might be called an elevated settler aesthetic”. She goes on to comment on this.

The fancy-log-cabin feeling illustrates the ways in which this space organizes a pedagogy for a child can experience progressive growth from nature into the white settler-coded space of the Waldorf kindergarten-as-home. The Waldorf kindergarten’s evocations of nature, family, and home are a visual evocation of a very specific story of childhood. This space feels intuitively true not because of objective facts about where children naturally belong, but because it matches how the child is temporally and geographically figured into a progression of Man. This space intentionally evokes a North American construction of identity in a manner that it reiterates narratives of settler dominance in facilitating movement through uncivilized space beyond (Knight, 2024).

Even if Waldorf practitioners in Europe may not recognize this problem because Europe’s postcolonial challenge is not about settler-colonialism in Europe, they would have to acknowledge the question of whether Waldorf spaces are constructed to take account of the demographics of voluntary and involuntary migration. In the city I work in, Hamburg, 50% of children and youth in educational institutions have a migration background<sup>1</sup>. Some other European cities do their best to prevent this with rhetoric of ‘fortress nations’, free of LTGBQ+ people and the forced re-migration or deporting of ‘uninvited foreigners’<sup>2</sup>. The question Waldorf practitioners in Europe should answer is, “how are you ‘producing the image of child’ in your pedagogical spaces” and “what does that image comprise”?

One of the challenges in Waldorf education that has been inadequately addressed in many countries is the extent to which the curriculum needs ‘de-colonizing’ (Rawson, 2020, 2023), that is, critically reflecting on ways in which the curriculum reinforces one-sided, Eurocentric perspectives and adequately informs students about the real effects of colonialism. Given the huge importance of storytelling in Waldorf education, it has not been easy for teachers and publishers to redress the imbalance in traditional stereotypical gender roles and the absence of people of colour. As someone who has raised this issue, I can testify to the frequent responses that can be described as ‘white fragility’ (El-Mafalani, 2023) within the Waldorf discourse.

Shalaby’s (2017) book *Troublemakers* describes the children in her study as ‘canaries in the coalmine of public education’ but it should also be a wake-up call for all educators, including Waldorf. Likewise, Dyer’s (2019) use of queer theory to challenge assumptions of childhood innocence by suggesting that “the child’s emotional illegibilities, queer intimations, and affective intensities [can be] quickly marshalled to do the work of social norms” (2019, p.1). Dyer shows how important it is that children (of all ages) can express their ‘otherness’ aesthetically through art and play. This perspective raises questions about the extent to which children are encouraged in Waldorf education to be creative in art and express *themselves*, rather than being channeled into certain specific form of artistic expression, in imitation of the

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://ifbq.hamburg.de/2024/01/05/schuelerinnen-und-schueler-mit-migrationshintergrund/>).

<sup>2</sup> Jones, O. (9.10.2024). On the streets of Vienna, I saw Austrian’s rage at the march of the far right- but I also saw their helplessness. *The Guardian*. [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/08/vienna-far-right-austria-progressives?utm\\_term=.67060348fd31c429ea1364514045ed74&utm\\_campaign=GuardianTodayUK&utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_medium=Email&CMP=GTUK\\_email](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/08/vienna-far-right-austria-progressives?utm_term=.67060348fd31c429ea1364514045ed74&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUK&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUK_email)



teacher. Does Waldorf education offer sufficient opportunities and encouragement for self-expression, and does it value it? This depends on what notion of development informs pedagogy. Does it give opportunity for student voice and does it listen to these voices? This should not be confused with allowing young children to determine what they do and what they learn, because education is a relationship in which a more experienced person directs the student's attention towards things the teacher feels are important and then invites and enables them to engage with it. As Biesta (2020) puts it, education is about someone teaching someone else something that is meaningful. This involves subjectivities all round, but these are based on personal relationships to what makes sense and is meaningful for those people. Only when children learn to appreciate the nature of this offer, will they learn to make such offers to others (see also Benner, 2020).

### Eurocentric and individualistic perspectives

Developmental psychology has undergone a significant process of reflection and deconstruction in recent years (Shute & Slee, 2015, Burman, 2017, Wagner, 2018) and Global South perspectives (Menon, 2022) have increasingly offered alternative ways of seeing children and youth and development. Indeed developmentalism, or what Appadurai (2013) refers to as 'trajectorism', shows the inextricable entanglement of European metanarrative of Humanism, Universalism with Colonialism, whose central image is that of progress from primitive to civilized, from darkness and irrationality to light, from childhood to maturity. Burman (2017) has shown in detail how the science of developmental psychology is only beginning to emancipate itself from this conflation. Even Steiner (1996, p10) in his foundation text on education used the analogy of the Self (das Ich) *civilizing* the "uneducated savage" in the other 'members' of the human being (the body and its life processes and the soul with its unconscious dimensions). Feminist writers such as Silvia Federici have shown that with the emergence of Modernity, the sensuous body, the innocent child, the native, and the wise, intuitive female were identified as threats to masculine rationality and capitalism, in her classic study *Caliban and the Witch* (2004).

The point about these postcolonial deconstructions of mainstream child development models is on the one hand to show that the models that have been dominant in the past centuries strongly reflect the values of those who designed them (mostly men)<sup>3</sup> - but also reflect certain epistemologies (mostly positivist). On the other hand, we now have evidence that children and young people do not follow the milestones that supposedly mark the pathways of 'normal' development. As Burman puts it, "The presentations of a general model depicting development as unitary irrespective of culture, class, gender and history has meant that difference can be recognized only in terms of aberrations, deviations- that is, in terms of relative progress on a linear scale"(Burman, 2017). These considerations emphasize how important it is that Waldorf teacher education ensures that all teacher students have a comprehensive understanding of the main theories of child and youth development and postcolonial critiques of these. As Zimilies (2000) explains, the universalistic, totalizing, quantitative basis for the models of child development has been most contested by postmodern perspectives, which have questioned the essential categories of childhood, as imposing normative concepts on what, in reality is a far more complex, individual and unique process. Postmodern approaches tend to value "difference, particularity and cultural relativity" (p.242).

The individualist focus of many child development models which tend to see *the child* independent of their context has also been challenged by socio-cultural approaches that look at children embedded in their environment. Research into child and youth development by psychologists from a cultural historical perspective that build on the work of Vygotsky and Dewey, such as Rogoff (2004) and Dreier (2008) see development as changing participation in everyday domestic and social and cultural practices,

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<sup>3</sup> There were exceptions such as Clara Stern, Charlotte Bühler, Maria Montessori, Martha Muchow. They all tended to emphasize the transitions rather than the developmental stages and took a holistic position against the emphasis on cognitive development.

whilst Hedegaard (2012) Fler and Hedegaard (2010) highlight the importance of changing practices across institutions in shaping children’s development particularly through institutional transitions (e.g. from kindergarten to school, where children experience significant changes in expectations and ‘classroom culture’). Biesta and Tedder’s (2007) notion of ecological agency, highlights from a biographical point of view that agency cannot be seen as a trait of the individual subject alone, but rather involves the person’s ability to read the opportunities afforded by the social and educational environment and be able (and be allowed) to respond to these in individual ways. Learning cultures (Hodkinson et al, 2008) provide opportunities for the development of individuals embedded in learning communities or communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Philosophically, engagement with non-Western educators, including Asian, Chinese and Indigenous teachers raises new questions about our underlying understanding of being and living (Julien, 2024). Julien argues that Western philosophies and thus understandings of human development have been preoccupied with states of being, whilst Chinese traditional philosophy (Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism) is concerned with ways of living. As Julien’s translator comments, this divergence of views is in danger of being lost if all thinking on the matter is reduced through globalization to a single model, namely that of a universalism under the sway of the hegemony of Western ideas” (Richardson and Fijalkowski, 2019, p. 2, Translators’ Introduction in Julien 2019). According to Julien, in Chinese traditional philosophy, development is understood as the ability to realize the potential in a given situation, following one’s inclination and disposition in an ongoing process of transition. In development, the person should be receptive to the affordances of what emerges in the situation. These few examples show how fruitful and review of other ways of understanding development could be for Waldorf educators.

### Hebdomatic systems and recapitulation

Steiner mapped out the key phases between birth and adulthood in seven-year cycles, that are each subdivided into three periods in which willing (volition, motivation, agency), feeling (including affect and emotion) and thinking (as cognition generally including memory, mental imaging, conceptualizing and consciousness) are the main focus.

will	feeling	thinking	will	feeling	thinking	will	feeling	thinking	
0	2 1/3	4 2/3	7	9 1/3	11 2/3	14	16 1/3	18 2/3	21
„Rubicon“									
physical birth			birth of life body			birth of soul body			birth of “I”
WILL			FEELING			KNOWLEDGE			
learning based on imitation			learning based on authority (rhythm and aesthetics)			forming independent judgments and concepts			

Figure 2 Table showing Steiner’s phases of development (after Zech, 2012)

Michael Zech (2012) has made a strong case that Steiner's hebdomatic (seven-fold) system was not intended to reflect reality but were ideal typical structures that have been modified over history, but is an idea that provides orientation for holistic, harmonious and healthy development. The same applies for Steiner's multiple three-fold, four-fold, nine-fold or 12-fold systems, which can all be seen as heuristic or methodological models of delineation and classification to enhance understanding, rather than as essentialist realities. This is something academic critics often overlook.

Steiner introduced various aspects of cultural evolution into his developmental model, including the problematical description of race, folk souls and the essentialization of language (see Rawson, 2023). He suggests parallels between cultural evolution, which proceeds in phases or epochs, during which distinctive forms of consciousness emerge and manifest, which reflect the changing relationships of the Self to the body, and to the material, cultural and spiritual worlds. These states of consciousness manifest in works of art, artefacts, social and cultural forms, myth and religion, an idea that is not dissimilar to mainstream cultural anthropology, which also recognizes sequences or periods referred to as cultures or ages (e.g. new stone age, bronze age, iron age, etc.). However, Steiner's descriptions of the various cultural epochs and the dates he gave do not reflect the current state of knowledge (see Zech, 2020). This is important to acknowledge since there would be no foundation for teaching history based on Steiner's descriptions, which is still a widespread practice. There are various problematic aspects of this (not least the exclusion of East Asia, Africa and the Americas from Steiner's classic cultural evolution, and the lack of correlation with the known history of Ancient India, Persia and China), but the main one in this context is the assumption that child development somehow mirrors the stages marked by the cultural epochs. This is a widely held assumption in Waldorf education (one that provokes responses expressions of 'anthroposophical fragility' when challenged).

Steiner often referred to the analogy of the recapitulation of the key early stages of human evolution of becoming upright, learning to talk and think in the evolution of the human species and in the development of the child. There is no doubt that in the evolution of the human species, upright, bipedal locomotion, the development of language and symbolic behaviour and cognition were centrally important, as they are in the ontological development of every child. The idea of cultural and individual recapitulation was by no means unique to Steiner but was a widely held view in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century among people such as the Philosophers Johann Gottfried Herder, Georg Friedrich Hegel, Herbert Spencer, and it influenced early models of developmental psychology by G. Stanley-Hall, and even Sigmund Freud.

Steiner is seen within educational science in Germany as one of the last representatives of a long line of people promoting a naturalistic pedagogy. Müller and Müller write:

The last representative of recapitulation thinking, as far as the authors can see, in the cultural-educational field is the founder of anthroposophy, RUDOLF STEINER. STEINER, incidentally a supporter of the biogenetic law (see STEINER 1900, p. 12f.), in a lecture from 1917, he compares various stages of human life with the post-Atlantean, primeval Persian, Egyptian-Chaldean and Greek-Latin ages. For the assessment of both lines of development, the relationship between physical and mental development, which arises from STEINER's mysticism, is crucial. Today's human being, says STEINER, is already physically mature at an early fully grown physically at an early stage; his 'spiritual soul' develops freely and independently from then on. A diachronic comparison now seems to allow the following conclusion: 'The strange thing is that when you look into these things, you cannot speak of humanity growing older, but, curiously enough, you have to speak of humanity growing younger, is regressing.' (STEINER 1917/1964, p. 15). In a future age, STEINER estimates, people will be 30, 40, 50 years old and have the life maturity

of a person of 17, 16, 15 years. Although the author interprets this development as an increase in human autonomy, his design is also overtaken by the unbroken continuity of 'biological' recapitulation (201, p. 782-3, author trans.).

Steiner was certainly a recapitulationist in his theosophical and anthroposophical writings, though in his educational lectures he was significantly more cautious, warning teachers on numerous occasions that the Waldorf School was not to teach anthroposophical dogma (e.g. *First Teachers' Course*, 2020, p. 17). Furthermore, he specifically warned against naïve recapitulationism,

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 Wolff 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, 2002, GA 301,1920, lecture 4, p.73-74).

### A theory of theory

Following Habermas' (1986) theory of knowledge interests, there are three modes of research, each seeking a different kind of knowledge, which applied to education have the following aims.

1. Explanatory or technical knowledge interests look for causes, seek generalizations and tends towards control and instrumentalization.
2. Understanding or practical knowledge interests seek to generate knowledge through interpretation with the aim of understanding and to build capacity in the practitioner/researcher.
3. Emancipation interests seek to identify how understandings are distorted or constrained by power through critical reflective on unexamined and tacit assumptions.

As Biesta (2020) suggests, pedagogical theory should not be primarily concerned with causal explanations because the price of reducing complexity for the purposes of control is a loss the significance of individual difference. It is also a lazy way of working to allocate students to prescribed categories and tends to unconsidered judgements based on superficial data (such as student grades) without looking deeper at the multiple factors that operate in any educational context. Because understandings of social phenomena can be distorted by socially structuring structures that produce certain ways of seeing (*habitus* in Bourdieuan terms) in ways that cause people to deny this determining influence (Marx' notion of false consciousness), theory also has to be critical and reflexive. Therefore, a Waldorf theory of development should have the purpose of being a conceptual tool for interpretation and emancipation.

The purpose and nature of the theory of child and youth development I am proposing is to offer orientation towards understanding and is therefore heuristic. It is a kind of descriptive statement in Gregory Bateson's (1969) sense of a script, a master code, a set of rules, a syntax, a primary generative principle underlying a system that maintains its identity. Bateson (1904-1980), who was an anthropologist, biologist and helped to create cybernetics and systems theory, makes the point that any descriptive statement carries epistemological and ontological implications (1979). He uses the terms network and matrix, from the Latin *for womb*, to characterize the generative nature of descriptive statements, "the network of ideas or matrix has been fertile, not in the sense that it has given birth to ideas separate from itself but in the sense that it has given birth to more parts of itself..." (Bateson, 1978, p.41). He cites Goethe's archetypal plant as an example of a descriptive statement, which designates neither actual forms nor historical origins and causes but describes potential which manifests in multiple ways modified by context. Goethe's notion of type is also pertinent here because of the underlying idea

of a living movement running through the organism linking the parts with the whole as a transformative process rather than as a series of fixed stages (Brady, 2011). The key term in Goethe's description of morphology- the science of form- is *Bildung*.

But if we consider Gestalts [shapes/forms] generally, especially organic ones, we find that independence, rest, or termination nowhere appear, but everything fluctuates rather in continuous motion. Our speech is therefore accustomed to use the word *Bildung* pertaining to both what has been brought forth and the process of bringing-forth. If we would introduce a morphology, we ought not to speak of the Gestalt, or if we do use the word, should think thereby only of an abstraction — a notion of something held fast in experience but for an instant. What has been formed is immediately transformed again, and if we would succeed, to some degree, to a living view of Nature, we must attempt to remain as active and as plastic as the example she sets for us (Goethe in *Bildung und Umbildung* (Formation and Transformation), cited in Brady, 2011, p.11).

This is an important facet of the descriptive statement of development, it describes a process of ongoing transformation. And yet, just as the plant can be analysed in terms of root, stem, leaf, stamen and so on, so too child development needs to identify distinct phases and it is important to bear all aspects in mind, process, parts and the whole. Thus, our theory of development need to borrow Max Weber's notion of the ideal-type. I suggest that we take Steiner's theory of development as a heuristic model that provides the practitioner with an ideal type as point of orientation, akin to an Archimedean point in geometry. The term *ideal type*, coined by the sociologist Max Weber (1949), does not refer to a reality but is an analytic idea that sums up the intended exemplary features of a given phenomenon. This can provide us with a point of reference for making judgements about real situations. The ideal type focuses attention on what are deemed (by the creators of the construct) to be the essential or typical aspects, rather than the average or common features. An ideal type of developmental stages offers us a framework to compare the actual developmental situation of children and young people. The ideal typical developmental steps are not based on the average developmental ages of a group of children or young people but offer a point from which the development of individual children or the learning group (the class) can be assessed. We can show this relationship in the following graphic.

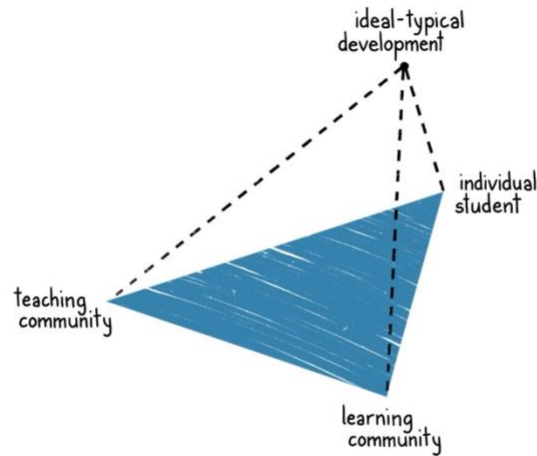


Figure 3 Graphic depiction of the role of the ideal typical descriptor in relation to the actual development of the individual or group. Some individuals may be nearer to the ideal typical descriptor, but this does not have a normative function.

The ideal typical descriptors (see below) are based on Steiner's various descriptions supplemented by the published developmental accounts by Waldorf-related authors (e.g. Lievegoed, 2005, Müller-Wiedemann, 2017, Glöckler, 2020, Wiehl & Auer, 2022). Taken together these constitute a 'best fit' model of development, but not one that is set in stone, nor one that claims transcultural validity.

### Methods of pedagogical anthropology

A theory of development, as Biesta (2020) emphasizes, is the basis for educational research, which is why its epistemology and ontology is so important. As I have argued (2021) an essential knowledgeable skill that teachers need in practice- what I call learning-in-practice, and which Max van Manen (1991) calls pedagogical tact, and Peter Kelly calls knowing-in-practice, is the ability to read the pedagogical situation, interact with it meaningfully and learn from this process. Biesta (2020) links this to Aristotle's notion of phronesis (practical wisdom). Put briefly, I argue that engaging with Steiner's theory of development and pedagogical anthropology using hermeneutic methods can lead to the growth of teacher dispositions that enable the teacher to read the pedagogical situation through the lens of this anthropology. Through ongoing teacher learning (Kelly, 2006), which involves practitioner research and critical reflection, teachers can develop pedagogical insight and capacity. John Hattie (2023) identified one of the most powerful principles in student learning is when the teacher can observe the effects of their teaching on the learning behaviour of the students, and be able to modify their teaching if necessary. This 'noticing' involves the research method of participant observation.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold (2018) has written an important book on the relationship between anthropology and education, in which he makes the case that they share – or should share – a common methodology, namely participant observation and have the same defining characteristics “of generosity, open-endedness, comparison and criticality” (p.59). He addresses the apparent paradox that one cannot participate and observe and reflect at the same time, but one can do this successively and iteratively. Observation and participate generate different data, one is epistemological and is about knowing the world, the other is ontological and is about ways of being in the world by attending to what is salient. Thus, both *this kind* of anthropology and this kind of pedagogy are both about the teacher/anthropologist transforming themselves because the classroom and the field are locations in which we can grow in knowledge, skills, wisdom (Biesta, 2015, calls this virtuosity) and judgement. Ingold cites Dewey’s principle of habit (1974), or continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938), in which each significant experience enacted and undergone changes our possibility to having significant new experiences. Thus, both professions are a form of *Bildung* for practitioners, when they enter into correspondence or conversation with their field. In this sense both professions can be an art, as well as a craft and science. Ingold describes this as follows,

Anthropologists and pedagogical anthropologists [i.e. teachers as researchers] become correspondents. They take into themselves something of their hosts’ ways of moving, feeling and thinking, their practical skills and modes of attention. Correspondence is a labour of love, of giving back what we owe to the human beings ...with whom we share the world, for our own experience. If anthropology, then, is a science, it is a science of correspondence. Two centuries ago, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe proposed just such a science; one that demanded of practitioners that they should spend time with the objects of their attention, observe closely and with all their senses, draw what they have observed, and endeavour to reach a level of mutual involvement, in perception and action, such that observer and observed become all but indistinguishable. It is from this crucible of mutual involvement, Goethe argued, that all knowledge grows” (2018, p.70).

## A holistic theory of child and youth development for Waldorf education

Underpinning any description of child development is a set of assumptions about development, what in anthroposophy is often referred to as the ‘image of man’(sic), which is a gendered translation of *Menschenbild*. Steiner’s account of the nature of the human being, referred to in German as *Menschenkunde* (and still sometimes given the gendered translation *Study of Man*<sup>4</sup>), is the basis for Waldorf education.

What distinguishes Steiner’s theory of developmental from most others is that he takes the spiritual dimension fully into account. The epistemology and ontology behind this account was outlined in his early philosophical and epistemological works (*A Theory of Knowledge* (1886/1986), *Truth and Knowledge* (1892/1981), *A Philosophy of Freedom* (1894/1963)). In the first chapter of his book *Theosophy* (2011), Steiner gives a precise account of the nature of human being from a spiritual perspective, including the core of a theory of learning (Rawson, 2021). In the book *The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy* (1907/1996), he outlines his main thesis on child development and in the *First Teachers Course* (1919/2020) he develops this more fully. Further references to aspects of development can be found distributed throughout the rest of his works.

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<sup>4</sup> It seems pedantic to continue using the term *man* as a translation of the German *Mensch*. 30 years ago, around 1995, the journal *Child and Man* (from Wordsworth’s line “The Child is father of the Man” from his famous 1802 poem *My Heart Leaps Up*) in the UK changed its name to the more prosaic *Steiner Education*. The transition was relatively painless but an important signal.

we can identify a number of descriptors for Steiner's theory of development. I summarize what these are (a much more detailed and fully referenced account would be necessary).

- Development is understood as a process of incarnation and exarnation of a spiritual core of being (the Self- *das Ich*) over the course of multiple lifetimes.
- The pre-natal spiritual experiences of the Self are a factor in development (as discussed below, teachers have to develop methods and capacities to interpret these). I refer to them as the biographical interests a person brings with them that usually remain unconscious).
- Over the life course, development is a process of transformation in which the Self engages with and individualizes the body and its life processes through *embodiment*, through *socialization* in a family, language and social context, through *enculturation* in a given cultural context, through *qualification* in education and lifelong learning, through self-development. This whole process is referred to as *individuation*. The active agent in this process is the Self, which engages with the internal biological and external socio-cultural-historical processes. This ongoing dynamic process accompanies maturation and the production of identities. Whilst bio-social development has a telos of dynamic equilibrium, the development of the person is a movement towards greater autonomy, freedom and wellbeing, all of which are influenced by cultural ideals as well as personal goals.
- Individuation is seen as a sequence of births. Steiner uses this metaphor to point to key stages of transformation; physical birth, the transformation of natural life processes into psychological processes (marked by the second dentition), puberty through which the Self, begins to construct a personality.
- Steiner took a specifically psycho-somatic, even embodied, view of development that was and still is, distinct. He saw that the changes in the body bring about psychological changes over the course of maturation, and this implied that a psychological balance, for example in well-being, would have corresponding effects on bodily experiences. His three-fold and differentiated association between the head and nerve-sense system and cognition is less surprising, but his link between the trunk and respiratory and circulatory processes and the feeling life and emotions and his link between the will and the limbs and metabolic system is still unusual and offers significant new perspectives. His alignment of three modes of consciousness with thinking (waking consciousness), feeling (with dreaming or distributed consciousness) and willing (unconscious states of consciousness, including intuition) is also relatively unique. His less frequent references to the organic life processes and their transformation into learning processes is also unique. Thus, Steiner's approach to development is holistic in a more comprehensive sense than most other approaches.
- Steiner saw the healthy (in the sense of holistic and balanced) development of the child and youth in a pedagogical context based on relationships between students and educators. These relationships are characterized by a pedagogical attitude. In the first phase the educator should model 'the world is good', in the second, 'the world is beautiful' and after puberty show that there are paths to truth. Steiner's specific pedagogy for youth was historically innovative. By the early 1920's little had been done to identify youth as a specific life-phase requiring a distinctive pedagogy, so Steiner was one of the first (see Zech & Wiehl, 2017). His term *Erdenreife* – maturing to the earth- at puberty and in adolescence is an important spiritual perspective on a key phase in the changing relationship of the Self to the body and world in general. The maturing to the earth marks a separation of the young person after puberty from their being (unconsciously) embedded in the holistic totality of the spiritual world, in which the experience their unity with that dimension their experience of it as a source of intuitive meaning and renewal in their unconscious and when they are asleep. Thus, the quality of a young person's sleep is different after puberty. Sleep no longer automatically "knits up the troubled sleeve of care" or is "chief nourisher at life's feast" (to quote Shakespeare). The young person



unconsciously (and perhaps in some cases consciously) feels cut off from a source of spiritual belong to a greater whole (Hay and Nye, 2006, speak of “the social destruction of spirituality” and this may be part of the process.) Along with the ‘Rubicon’ developmental phase, in middle childhood (or juvenility) between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> years, which Föllner-Mancini and Berger (2023) have argued is now a recognized phase in child development, and ‘earth maturity’ and the significance of the second dentition, Steiner has set three important accents for a spiritual developmental concept.

There are a number of additions I would like to suggest to the overall descriptive statement of child development.

1. A preamble to any such account of child and youth development could show the similarities and divergences of this approach to other major theories. As Loebell (2023b) has shown in his discussion of Waldorf learning theory, which is closely linked to developmental theory, the Waldorf approach has some behaviourist elements (e.g. its emphasis on imitation), it aligns with Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, it aligns with theories of neurodiversity and plasticity and theories of sensory integration, it is constructivist in its approach to knowledge, supports self-activity and autonomous learning, and it aligns with Holzkamp’s subject-scientific approach with its emphasis on expansive learning. It would be very helpful if a detailed analysis of the relationships were made available in a readily accessible form.
2. As part of the background, a short history of the development of Waldorf education from 1919 onwards, in particular how the pedagogical practice has changed (or remained basically the same) over time and geographical space.
3. Transformative learning (Rawson, 2021) is the driver of the holistic development of the whole person. This happens in educational environments but not exclusively there.
4. Steiner’s developmental theory needs to be supplemented by research since done on Steiner’s ideas, for example, the work done by Lutzker (2018) on the sense of language and the research published on its application in Waldorf foreign (L2) language teaching and teacher education (e.g. see Scenario: Journal for Performative Teaching Learning and Research, Volume 16/1, and Humanizing Language Teaching Volume 25/2, Bryden & Rawson, 2022) and other fields that have generated practitioner research data and living theories.
5. Steiner’s theory can also be supplemented by ideas drawn from other compatible theories of development. ‘Compatible’ here means that these elements can be incorporated into a coherent theory of development in ways that do not contradict the basic Waldorf epistemology, ontology and understanding of the nature of the human being, for example the results from explicitly materialist, reductionist science should be treated with caution, when building an extended understanding of the developing child. Compatible theory could potentially be enhanced an anthroposophical approach.
6. I would like to include in the descriptive statement the idea that the development of the individual is never seen in isolation but always as embedded in a social and cultural context. The next point offers a differentiated range of views on this. In this connection ecological perspectives on development are important, in particular Biesta and Tedder’s (2006) notion of relational ecological agency. In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1958) makes the point that human beings are only thinking and reflective beings but above all beings who act; it is their nature to act (as Marx also argued). For Arendt action takes three forms, labour, which involves applying the life processes of the body to sustaining the organism, work, which transforms the materials and energies in the world into human artefacts and action, which is social because it involves social

interaction. It is human nature, unless this capacity is suppressed or perverted, to take the initiative to realize the potential (natality) of doing something through our words and deeds that has never been done before. As Biesta (2022) explains, through this action, we bring ourselves as agentic subjects forth. Because whatever we do is afforded and enabled, and quite often hindered in ways that require more action to overcome, by the social and material world we are embedded in, we cannot “act in isolation. My activities only exist if they are taken up by others. In order to act, ...we need others who respond to our beginnings” (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p.23). Massumi’s (2002) distinction between the possible and the potential is also instructive here; potential is the immanence of a person, possibility is the (re)direction of potential that has emerged. The potential of a person, which is both a property of all human beings and takes unique form in each person, requires the contextual possibilities to develop. This view aligns with Julien’s (2015/2019) divergent relationship between potential and initiative, in which potential is contingent on the situation, which initiative can take hold of, in order to learn or develop.

7. Various forms of social learning theory are related to development because following Vygotsky (1987, 1997, see also Eun, 2010 and Barrs, 2022, among others), learning is the motor of development because what the learner learns through participation in social practices is internalized and supports development, as Piaget also showed. Among the theories that are compatible and add something to the Waldorf theory of child and youth development are – and for space reasons these are merely named here- Bourdieuan theory of social practice (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), social learning theory (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), cultural-historical theories of development (Whiting and Whiting, 1975, Rogoff, 2003, Tomasello, 2019), ecological theories of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), expansive learning theory (Holzkamp, 1995), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972), critical psychology (Dreier, 2011).
8. As already noted, van Manen’s (1991) account of pedagogical tact and Kelly’s (2006) notion of teacher learning leading to knowing-in-practice make important contributions to a Waldorf understanding of teacher skills
9. There are strong arguments for a Waldorf theory of child and youth development taking account of current psychological theory of development, including the outcomes of Pulkkinen’s (2017) major empirical study on development from childhood to adulthood in relation to the development of personality and social development, which looks at issues related to personality, identity, well-being and behaviour. Pulkkinen draws on McAdams (McAdams and Olson, 2010) theory of personality, which looks at the developing individual through the lens of three basic constructs; the person as actor and agent (dispositions, temperaments, personal traits and social roles), the person as motivated agent (refers to the persons striving, motives, plans, values and will and is related to self-determination) and the person as autobiographical author of their own narrative. Waldorf education is never going to be in a position to either undertake such empirical studies or seriously contribute to professional psychology. On the other hand, Waldorf education can learn from and interpret the findings of psychological science, using Steiner’s core developmental concept as a lens.

Steiner’s approach to child and youth development is based on his spiritual science, which, as Rittelmeyer (2023) has pointed out, does not fall within the current spectrum of understandings of science, because it lacks verifiability and thus far, can be considered a one-man-science, since no one has yet been able to verify claims made by Steiner based on his spiritual science alone. This does not make it invalid, but it does make it currently ‘unscientific’. It should not be impossible for scholars who take a benign stance towards Steiner, as Rittelmeyer does, to begin to build a scientific basis for Waldorf education, even one that takes the spiritual dimension into account. This would involve a change of terminology, an account of the epistemology underpinning the approach, it would need to develop a

theoretical approach, by which I mean an account of the ideas and assumptions about Waldorf education and its view of development that could form the basis of scientific inquiry using qualitative, hermeneutic, phenomenological, idiographic, mixed methods and empirical quantitative approaches- in other words, the full range of methods available to the human sciences. Spirituality is widely accepted as a legitimate field of inquiry, as the number of peer review journals dedicated to this testify.

As I have argued elsewhere (Rawson, 2024b), I would not recommend applying this approach to the whole of anthroposophy- this would need to be done and no doubt could be done if the field of Steiner studies is expanded and perhaps if there are professorships in Steiner studies<sup>5</sup>, but is, in my view, *not* the task of Waldorf education. Likewise, the other fields of applied anthroposophy, such as medicine, the arts, agriculture, economics, would need to develop their own methods of research. Perhaps in the long run, these approaches might lead back to a verification of aspects of anthroposophy, though much of it will remain accessible only to metaphysics and direct experience.

Steiner often distanced himself from most other educationalists, psychologists and philosophers of his time or before him, often not even naming them, but closer examination (see Föllner-Mancini & Berger, 2023) shows that Steiner was keenly aware of the field of psychology, as the many annotated books in his private library indicate, even when he did not often refer to this in his pedagogical works. At any rate, the combined effect of Steiner's method of developing and presenting his ideas, which makes this at best opaque to scholars, combined with the reception of this by subsequent generations of Waldorf teachers, who have tended to treat Steiner's work in a hermetic way, as if nothing could be added or subtracted to it, has left us with a problem.

### The pedagogical implications of this holistic Waldorf theory of developmental psychology

From his book *The Education of the Child* (1907/1996) and throughout his education lectures before and after the founding of the Waldorf School, Steiner made it clear that the pedagogy and curriculum should be based on the development of the children. The way a subject such as natural science or history should be taught depended on the child's development, consciousness and relationship to the world (e.g. *The First Teacher's Course*, 2020). In its most radical form Steiner stated that "we need to develop our curriculum ourselves at any moment, by learning to read from the children what they need, depending on their age" (2020, p. 311). This statement is not only challenging but also ambivalent in the light of Steiner's notion of the ideal curriculum being the ideal development of the child. Should the teacher 'read' the actual children and construct curriculum accordingly, or the ideal development, or use the ideal typical development as a heuristic model?

If we look at Caroline von Heydebrand's explanation of the relationship between Steiner's developmental theory and pedagogical practice, including curriculum, made in her introduction to the first published curriculum, this reveals both the problem and, I believe, part of the solution. She wrote:

He [Steiner] derived all the details of methodology and didactics, the art of teaching and education, from this spiritual scientific based anthropology [*Menschenkunde*]. Only the developing human nature and its laws could initially determine what the child had to learn at each age level. The nature of the growing human being determined what was appropriate for this nature at each age level. What Dr Rudolf Steiner said about the way in which the so-called teaching material should be distributed to the individual classes of the Waldorf school was always the final conclusion of considerations that had the nature of the individual stages of child development as

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Sagarin (2019) offers the view that he hopes there be no university degrees in anthroposophy. We already have Masters' Degrees in Waldorf education and one can do a PhD in it. A professorship in Steiner Studies would at least signal that this is a legitimate field of research, whether its occupant was an anthroposophist would be irrelevant, since I agree with Sagarin, anthroposophy is an activity, a way of thinking. My detailed response can be seen in Rawson, 2024b.

their subject...The ideal curriculum must reflect the changing image of the emergent human nature at its various age levels...(von Heydebrand, 1925/ 2020, p.1, author trans.).

The development of the child is the basis for curriculum, but the *ideal* curriculum needs to be modified according to many factors, which she subsequently lists, including,

the individuality of the teacher who faces a class, it includes the class itself with all the characteristics of each individual pupil, it includes the world-historical time and the particular place on earth with its applicable school laws and school authorities where the school that wants to realise the curriculum is located.

That is the solution to the question of the content of curriculum, which has not always been practiced (see Rawson, 2024a), namely that it must be adapted to the context, but the problem remains in the assumption of the essentialist, fixed nature of child development and its year-by-year progression, which we now know is not universal. Even though the Waldorf scholars I have cited above, argue that Steiner never intended the seven-year model and its annual developmental tasks to taken as set in stone, there is still widespread belief that the curriculum matches the development of *'the child'* on a year-by-year basis, which is not surprising given von Heydebrand's statement,

In every school that works with anthroposophical education, the eternal image of the true human being prevails, effective as the archetype, but changing in the details of how the art of education is shaped, depending on whether the school is located in Germany, Holland, England, Switzerland...(Ibid).

Michael Zech (2011) made the point that,

It is often overlooked, even within the Waldorf school movement, that Steiner did not follow this [...] ideal-typical evolutionary concept, with which he never sought to describe reality as it appeared, a second concept, to which he attributed that every development becomes an individual one [...]. The individual consciousness does not form itself biographically in a chronologically regular way, but in principle according to its inherent intentionality (Zech 2011, p. 19).

As I have argued above, there are problems with the notion of an eternal image of the true human being. We know from Largo (2012, 2019). However, if we see individuation as a process over the life course in which the Self seeks to bring itself ever more into presence and thus take steps towards autonomy and self-responsibility, we can take Steiner's model as an ideal type, rather as a norm, and use it for orientation. Apart from his descriptions of the seven-year cycles and the sub-cycles within these, Steiner made a number of implicit assumptions about development in relation to the teaching methods and so some extent the content of the curriculum. Over the years the authors/editors of the various versions of the curriculum that have been published (Rawson & Richter, 2000, 2014, Richter, 2006, 2019) have drawn up developmental descriptors of the situation of the student in each grade, partly drawn on Steiner's descriptions but also based on observations authors such as Carlgren (1972), Lievegoed (2005) or Glöckler (2021)- among many others. We know that such descriptions are not reality. This does not mean that such descriptions are invalid. The point is that we need to use them with caution, ensuring that we don't make essentialist statements or simply adopt assumptions about 'universal children' that in fact reflect certain cultural assumptions. Certainly, the *Revised Waldorf Curriculum for Classes 1-8* (Rawson &

Bransby, 2024) makes it clear that it was written from the perspective of the UK. It offers an orientation for curriculum designers in other places.

In the real world it is essential for Waldorf schools to have a curriculum, even one that has the character of a recommendation or orientation, as Zech (2023) suggests all Waldorf curricula should have. Parents, new teachers and educational authorities and school inspectors need orientation and possibly comparison to state curricula. Therefore, any Waldorf curricula have to be commensurate with mainstream curricula, showing progressions, the growth of skills, dispositions and competences across the disciplinary subjects. They can be functionalist in this sense whilst at the same time retaining a developmental character, though they must avoid establishing either developmental norms or normative standards. This does not prevent Waldorf curricula from formulating outcomes in core subjects if required though this can be done through learning descriptors (see Bransby & Rawson, 2024).

This can be achieved by using a layered curriculum (Bransby & Rawson, 2022). At the micro-level, the task of the teacher is to empathically understand their students and develop pedagogical *knowing-in-practice*<sup>6</sup>, form a meaningful relationship to them and structure inclusive learning paths for individuals and groups. The *learning community* as a location for development operates at the micro level and teachers structure formal learning processes as *participation in learning practices*. Teachers create learning situations with low thresholds of access to include all learners within the learning community and invite them to engage with the curriculum themes, but have no ceiling for individual levels of engagement (e.g. by posing open questions).

At the meso level, the curriculum maps out the steps in learning essential cultural techniques, skills and dispositions and subject knowledge and general competences and these reflect the requirements of time and place and context. The meso level maps out progressions of learning across different subjects in ways that take account of the logical progression of skills and understanding, whatever external requirements have to be followed and the macro level developmental themes. The craft of teaching is to have all three levels in mind when preparing lessons- the micro level of including all the students in a learning community, the next step in skills and the overall developmental theme.

At the macro level, the curriculum describes a sequence of developmental themes that reflect the idea typical path of the Self in relation to body, other people, the cultural and natural environments ( see appendix 1). This sequence is designed to offer a generally valid pathway of individuation as orientation- *not* as normative structure. The fact that non-selected heterogenous groups of students of the same chronological age (birthdays within a year of each other) are invited to follow this pathway in a *learning community*, is a deliberate developmental choice on the part of Waldorf education. The underlying assumption- unproven as yet empirically- is that by following a similar path, it provides a developmental structure that for the process of individuation. An important and urgent field of research is to establish if the developmental themes already provisionally identified are relevant in different cultural contexts, in China for example. It is also important to note that in the most recent version of these themes (Rawson & Bransby, 2024), they are not pegged to specific classes but to loose clusters (e.g. early years and pre-school, grades 1 and 2, grades 3 to 5, grades 6 to 8/9)

Once students reach a certain level of individual maturity, they may no longer need or want to follow this pathway, which is why high school teachers have to be sensitive to this process and handle the developmental themes in the curriculum with a light touch. Just as children of different ages can listen to the same story but relate to it in individual ways – and good stories have an intrinsic range of levels of meaning- so too the developmental pathway of the curriculum can always be accessed at different levels. Every experienced teacher can observe Largo's six-year-plus span of developmental in students after

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<sup>6</sup> Italics here indicate supplementary aspects of the revised Waldorf theory of development.

puberty in the same class and can observe how they respond to the themes in individual ways. If the themes and the material that mediate them have depth and substance, students will respond in their own ways, and this should not be confused with cognitive or linguistic ability and has nothing to do with academic attainment. The important thing about the macro level developmental themes is that they do not specify content. It is this that makes the generally applicable in Waldorf schools around the world.

## Developmental tasks

The term developmental tasks, coined originally by Havighurst (1948), and modified by Hurrelmann (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2013, Hurrelmann & Bauer, 2018) refers to the intrinsic and extrinsic tasks that people have to successfully navigate at key transitions in the life course. Adapted to the Waldorf context, we can identify various sources of these developmental tasks;

1. The growth and maturation of the body, which has genetic, epigenetic, biological, nutritional and social and cultural aspects (bodies are figured and gendered in culturally different ways) and the emergent Self has to embody itself within the changing body. These factors lead to variation in growth and the timetable of significant changes such as the onset of puberty, which occurs much earlier than 100 years ago. Physical growth is also influenced by a combination of genetic and external factors (<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20200823-why-are-the-dutch-so-tall>). Currently Dutch men and Latvian women are the tallest people in the world (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/173634/dutch-latvian-women-tallest-world-according/>).
2. The social and cultural environment of language and social practices shapes development and has expectations of what the growing child should be and become.
3. The developing child and young person have to adapt to institutional transitions and structures (e.g. transition from a kindergarten to a school culture). These institutional (mostly educational) cultures also impose assumptions about behaviour, relationships to others (including authorities), nature, the world and expectations about children and young people should learn by when (and often how).
4. Brute facts are things that happen to people without any obvious direct connection to them personally (e.g. through risk taking, consequence of deliberate actions etc.) such as natural disasters, collateral suffering through war, famine, poverty, epidemics, expose to violence and accidents.
5. Each Self as a being with a prenatal spiritual background brings unconscious biographical intentions, dispositions, talents and limitations into this incarnation and these play out in *how* the Self engages with body, others and the world. Teachers (and therapists) can use methods such as biographical mythos (Göschel, 2012) to read the signature of individual biographies.

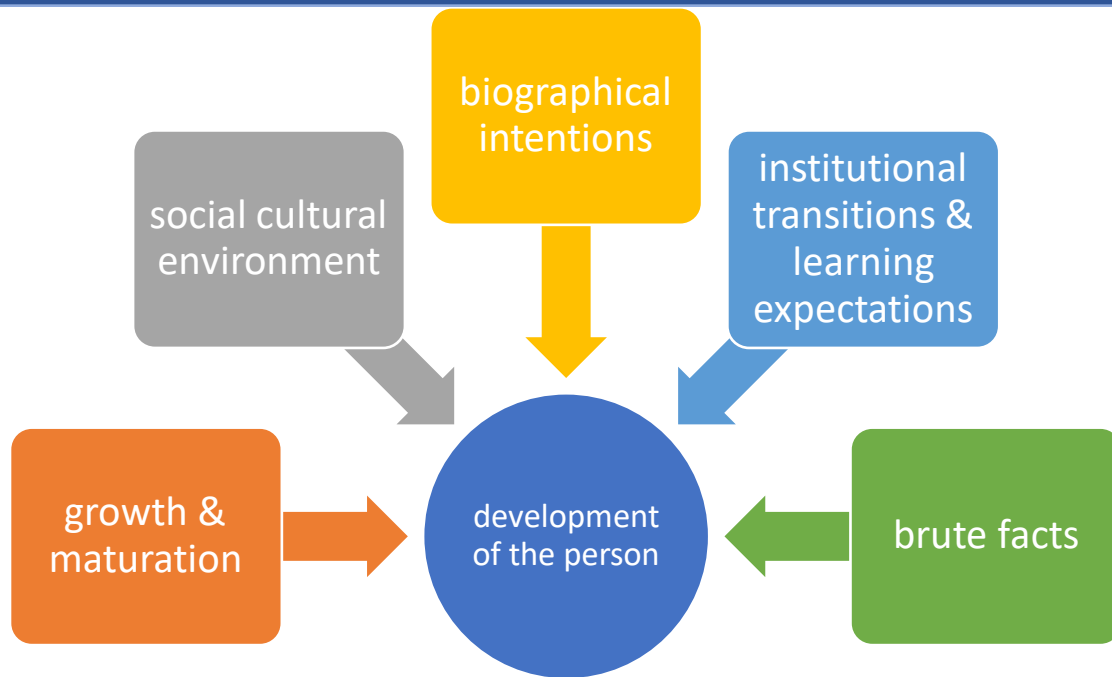


Figure 4 Developmental tasks: the cluster of factors that play into learning and development.

## A developmental curriculum

Following on from the above, we can now formulate the developmental nature of curriculum. I have defined curriculum in a Waldorf context as comprising what we teach, how we teach it, where and when we teach it (Rawson, 2021). In effect curriculum is the entire pedagogical approach and this is organized in a developmental way. We know that the underlying intentions of pedagogy can shape the way children learn. If these intentions and assumptions are unconscious and unconsidered, they can have negative effects of marginalizing some students and privileging others (Kelly, 2011). But if the intention is conscious and systematic it can have a beneficial effect on the students. There is a fine line between strongly suggesting and creating a learning opportunity in which the students' attention is directed in a certain way, so they notice what the teacher believes is salient and what the teacher considers important in terms of the learners' consciousness. Since learning and development often occur when the learner's current world view is challenged or interrupted (Biesta, 2013, Meyer-Drawe, 2012), a learning situation that prompts the individual to step up and engage with and ultimately identify with a challenge, will prompt development. This can be in cognitive, affective-aesthetic, or practical fields. The function of curriculum is to provide such learning opportunities.

Waldorf education works on the assumption that a specific sequence of developmental tasks provides a *generic developmental pathway*, on which each individual is invited to follow in their own way. Furthermore, because this occurs within a community of learners- the non-selective, heterogenous Waldorf class that may stay together over 12 years, there is a sharing of multiple shared experiences, in which the experiences the others make are often as important or even more important than the individual student's experiences. This magnifies and multiplies the learning opportunities. The sequence of developmental themes are ideal-typical, though one could say they have stood the test of time.

The ideal-typical developmental structure for a Waldorf curriculum suggested here involves a blend of maturational processes and institutional transitions. Actually, Steiner established the developmental transitions of the Waldorf School in 1919 partly on the basis of his seven-year hebdomatic cycle and

partly he accepted social conventions. Since it was the typical practice in Germany in 1919 (and this remains today) that formal schooling began when the children were six, having their 7<sup>th</sup> birthday either in the first class or as near as possible, Steiner didn't have a decision to make. At that time there was not kindergarten education for most children. Steiner ( ) imagined that it would be better if the introduction of reading and writing could be delayed until the children more or less themselves indicated that they were ready to do so around the age of 9 or 10 years old

The *Waldorf method* (the word method comes from *methodos*, the Latin for the path to fulfilling a particular goal) is to invite and enable children and young people to follow a developmental pathway of learning. This takes both the idea typical developmental themes and steps into account and the need to learn skills and knowledge and weaves both together into a learning journey over time, from year to year and across developmental (e.g. rubicon, puberty) and institutional transitions (e.g. class teacher to high school, classroom based learning to world-based learning). Graphically we can portray this as follows.

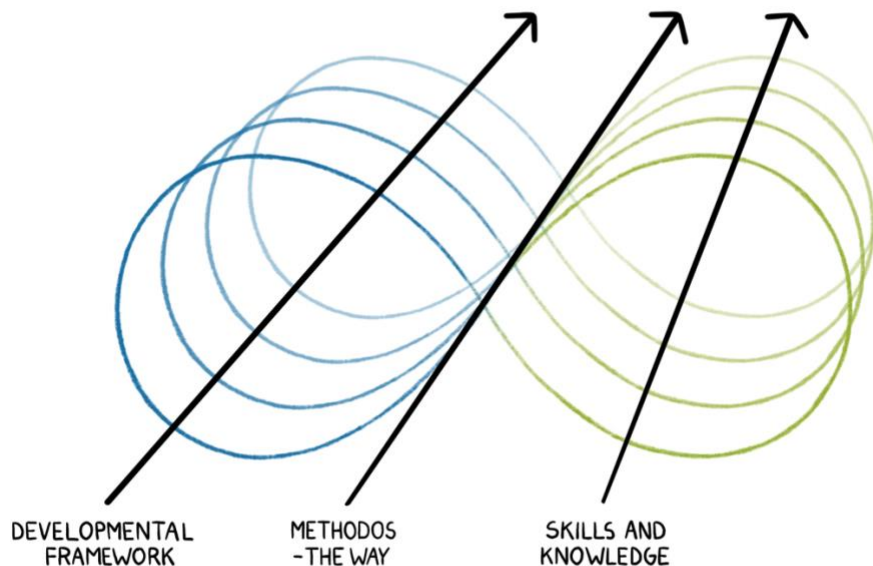


Figure 5 The Waldorf pathway of learning (*methodos*) weaving between developmental aspects and skills and knowledge

In reality, of course, the learning journey is not linear but meandering and the actual development of the children and young people is both individual and non-linear, and skills and knowledge overlap and branch in all directions, which is indicated in the following graphic.



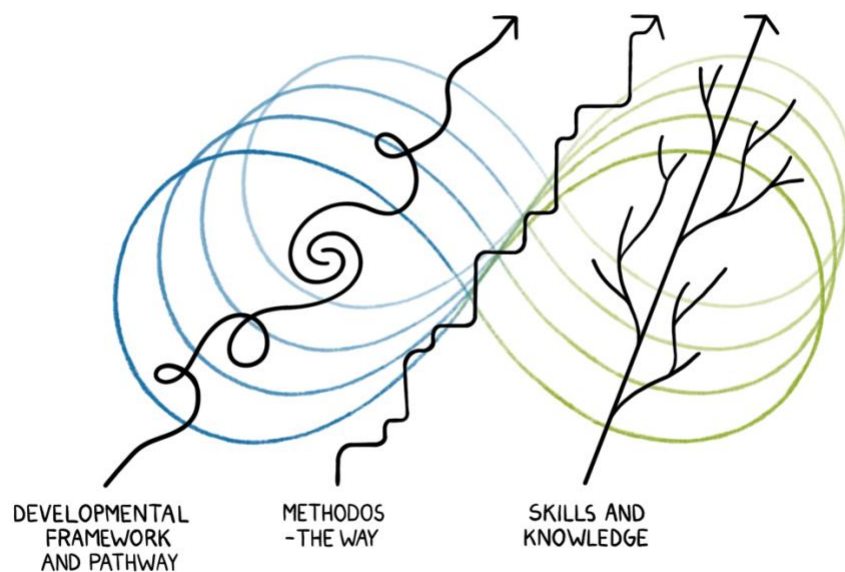


Figure 6 The reality of a developmental approach

### Further aspects of a developmental curriculum

Several further ideal typical generative principles can be identified that only be mentioned here but which will require further elaboration.

- Steiner offered a sketch progression of narrative content related to the child's changing consciousness (or as would now say, the suggested pathway) and the Waldorf tradition has consolidated this (Rawson, 2019). This starts with simply nature stories and magical tales (sometimes called fairy tales) during the preschool years. This transitions to more complex folk tales and magical stories, in which magical transformation of objects, living beings and people is normal within the narrative framework, to fables, nature stories, legends involving heroes and myths from cultures around the world. This cultural of orality, which includes poetry, song and drama, transforms into literature across the curriculum. Thus, students are able to connect to the embodied wisdom of orality as a basis for narrative as the medium of expressing complexity in literary, factual and scientific texts. Today the multicultural aspect is emphasized, though it has always been present in curricula. It is important that stereotypical roles for people of colour, Asians, Indigenous people are avoided and that it is normal for heroes to sometimes be non-white. This leads to the important aspect of gender in the narrative curriculum. Traditional tales often reflect traditional gender roles. It is quite a complex issue deciding whether to change traditional stories or ensure that different gender roles are represented in other stories and later literature. There is no standard answer but is the requirement to give serious thought to these issues in context, because stories have a powerful impact on their audience, especially when these are young.
- A further progression related to the path of changing consciousness that the curriculum suggests is the development of awareness of the changing relationship of people to the natural world. Starting from the embedded participation of human beings in the world as a realm of living beings through magical tales and stories supplemented by direct experience of the natural world

of weather, seasons and the local natural environment. This is supplemented by awareness through practical activities and cultural practices related to the ways in which human societies have traditionally used the resources of their local environment for food and raw materials for making artefacts and buildings. This is followed by the geographical-cultural exploration of the immediate surroundings of the school and the representation of this in maps and images. The curriculum then moves from the animal kingdom through the plant world to the mineral real of geology and geomorphology and how these form a basis for human economic activity and trade. This is a developmental sequence that not only is spatially expansive (from near to far), but also conceptually from concrete to cognitive (Wright, 2013).

- The history, cultural and social science curriculum also follows developmental ideal type, in that, like literacy, it emerges out of story and the children's experience in their environment that people in the past were both similar and different. It then follows a loose chronology highlighting the important significant changes in human consciousness as manifest in the way they lived the things they made and did.
- The science curriculum starts with the familiar and everyday life-practical, emphasizing experience of phenomena before theory is introduced. The practical curriculum (crafts, gardening, world of work) starts with manual practices with hand tools (ideally) using locally sourced material with an embodied cultural history. More recently curriculum development related to media maturity and digital technology (Hubner, 2015, 2021) build on this developmental model of analog and sensory-based experience before the introduction of digital technology and this socially, culturally and economically contextualized.

It may be that some aspects of the curriculum use a somewhat contrived and assumed link to Steiner's cultural epochs, with somewhat ideological claims to a 'natural' developmental trajectory. Nevertheless, the ideal typical developmental model that reflects changes in consciousness, and the progression from concrete to abstract.

## Conclusion

The suggestion made in this monograph is that Waldorf education would benefit from a new holistic Waldorf theory of child and youth development. This involves taking critical perspectives on this existing theory. Critical in this sense means that the existing theory be contextualized, updated and adapted to both new knowledge but also new situations. We live in an age when universalist understandings of the nature of human development are (rightly, in my view) contested. Even if Steiner's developmental psychology proves to be universal, Waldorf scholars would need to demonstrate this. It is not sufficient to simply take Steiner's word for this, nor to simply point to 105 years (to date) of practice as warrant for the veracity of this.

Steiner's somewhat utopian notion that the pedagogy and curriculum can be read through observation of the developing students clearly needs to be complemented by an ideal typical account of a harmonizing, integrating, health-supporting developmental pathway (as shown in figure 5), which enables teachers to judge development at all. The developmental themes that are addressed to the Self of the child or young person in its engagement with changing body, and world, help us to both address the Self's biographical intentions and perhaps identify them in the first place. What is lacking to date is perhaps a differentiated macro level ideal typical developmental sequence that distinguishes between the primary areas of development, such as motor, linguistic, social, executive control (self-competence), and practical skills. Rawson's (2024c) attempt to outline a spectrum of potentiality is a step in this direction. The meso level curriculum of culturally orientated subjects, skills and knowledge also has a development impact. This should include a variety of perspectives on difference with regard to culture, gender, ethnicity and neurodiversity. At the micro-level teachers are called on to observe the learning and developmental needs of their students and modify their teaching methods and content accordingly. The Waldorf movement as a whole is called on to publish more diverse material on understanding students

at all ages and offering a much wider range of inclusive and alternative material than hitherto, and it should fund, support and enable research into these fields wherever possible.

Montessori education is much better known than Waldorf and has around 10,000 schools worldwide, many times more than Waldorf schools, which in many countries only serve a tiny and elitist niche. Having a theory of development that could form the basis for scholarly comparison and research might make Waldorf education more accessible (if this is desirable) and in a position to offer the benefits of this education to many more children. Being more accessible does not take away the unique characteristics of Waldorf education, but it might contribute to these being better understood. Having an explicit theory of child and youth development that takes the spiritual dimension of life into account is a very worthy and needed aim.

If Waldorf education wants academic recognition and political and medial acceptance, it needs to show that it has a basis for its unique approach that is not based on faith and tradition alone. If it wants to continue being a lifestyle choice for the spiritually questing middle class, it can ignore academia. These self-referential, hermetic presentations of Waldorf education offer few points of contact with other educational theory and practice. Waldorf education often seems to operate within an (exclusive) exclusion zone. This 'Waldorf bubble factor' hinders wider recognition of Waldorf education within academic, policy and public discourses.

## Appendix 1.

### An outline of the developmental themes in the macro curriculum

#### Introduction

This outline of developmental themes is written in the present tense, suggesting that the students *are* in a particular developmental place. They may or not be in that place. The descriptions are therefore ideal typical descriptions, which are not to be taken as norms. Children should not be seen as problematic because they do not match the descriptions given here, nor should high stakes decisions be made on the basis that children do not match our expectations. The descriptions given here are not how children or young people should be. The descriptors are a model so that teachers can judge where child individually are in their development. The descriptors are theoretical or ideal typical points of reference, not milestones or standards to be achieved. The following graphic indicates this.

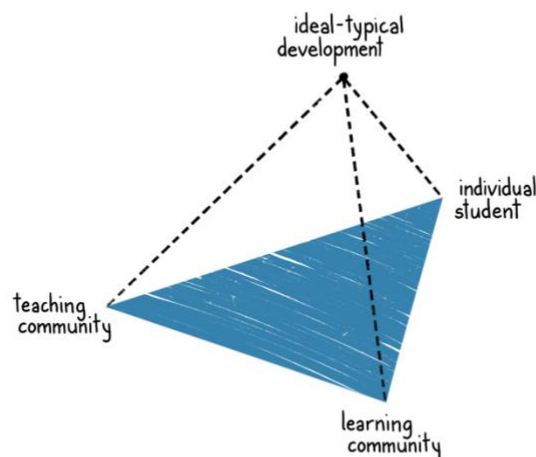


Figure 7 The relationship between the individual and the learning group and the teaching body in relation to the ideal typical descriptor.

Thus, the individual student and the class community can be understood in relation to the ideal typical descriptor by the teachers. This process is called formative assessment, which means a process-orientated appraisal of a student's development. In Waldorf education this is referred to as a 'child study' or individual 'case study'. The assessment is based on observation and judgments using criteria. Since a person's cognitive, motor (fine and gross), social and emotional, problem solving etc. development rarely develops in a unified, homogenous way, their intra-development – that is, the various aspects of development that can be observed vary along a spectrum from under-developed to highly developed. A person may have a cognitive developmental age of 14, a motor developmental age of 12, and an emotional/social development of an 8-year-old. The average of these numbers does not tell us about how we should work

with them in school. Therefore, a more finely differentiated study needs to be made in individual case studies if we want to understand individuals in their biographical journey.

For general purposes and because the Waldorf curriculum, understood as what is taught, how, where, when it is taught, is structured on a year-by-year basis, the ideal typical developmental pathway is generalized. Furthermore, the ideal typical development is also characterised by both institutional and biological-psychological moments of transition. In the case of biological-psychological transitions, these can span several classes. Therefore, the descriptors are loosely structured into these categories:

1. Psychosomatic- this includes bodily growth and maturational change (which is undoubtedly influenced by cultural and economic factors)

In keeping with the general character of this model, the classes are therefore grouped in clusters (1& 2, 3, 4 & 5, 6 & 7, 8 & 9, 10 to 12), within which similar developmental themes apply.

Transition: kindergarten to school classes 1 & 2

### *Psychosomatic development*

Following the Waldorf understanding of child development, the child's formative life forces reach a certain culmination in establishing the functioning of the organs and the bodily rhythms and processes in areas of respiration, nutrition, regeneration and so on. Growth is by no means complete but the body has been reached a stage of maturation in which the Self as spiritual core can 'feel at home' in the body. In particular, the brain-body has reached a stage of development in which basic language structures, sensory integration and motor development have reached a kind of functional stability, a basis for all subsequent learning and development. As in all aspects of development, this process is characterized by wide intra- and inter-individual variation. It may be the fact that globally because of changed lifestyles all children are probably more or less underdeveloped in the sensory-motor capacities. This traditional notion of school-readiness, which assumed that children were ready for the cognitive challenges of formal learning after the informal approach of early years and based on the physical evidence of the second dentition, is no longer appropriate. The cultural requirement today is that children go to school at least by the age of six (but not before- and if the state requires this, then the children need to meet a pedagogy that responds to their real needs) and the pedagogical requirement is that the school culture and the teachers are 'ready' for the children.

### *Institutional transitions*

The transition from kindergarten to school involves and institutional cultural change, which children need time to adjust to. Ideally the transition, which is often ritualized and celebrated in many Waldorf schools, should be smooth and integrated with some elements typical of school (more task orientated activities in which instructions are given, time structures in lessons and thematic structures between subjects and teachers, and activities such as literacy and numeracy in which individual differences become more apparent) in the final year of kindergarten and some elements of kindergarten (free play, optional participation, mixed age groups) are carried over into the first school classes.

### *Social development*

All children today need movement and opportunities to cultivate their coordination, fine and gross motor skills, and what they don't need is lengthy period sitting at a desk facing in one direction. The moving classroom, which means having a flexible space with special furniture that can be quickly moved to one side, cushions to sit on rather than chairs, and structuring the school day in more organic way (that bells ringing at regular intervals), is a highly successful model. Young school children also need to develop their senses of balance, movement and coordination, touch and establish healthy rhythms, as well as learning the rhythms of communication (when to listen and when and how to speak), along with the social skills of being in a heterogenous learning community.

### *Development of the person*

One of the main characteristics of children between the seventh and ninth year [age 6-8] is their desire to learn and make sense of their experiences. Memory, imagination, enjoyment of rhythmical repetition and a desire for universal concepts presented in pictorial form, come to the fore at this stage, and a key change in their learning is to move from 'imitation' to 'listen and do', i.e. translating verbal instructions into their own actions. Children actively seek guidance from the adult world and whilst they continue to imitate what they experience, their behaviour is modelled on how significant others are, including the teachers in the school. Children start observing those around them for signs of how to be. They look to the teachers for guidance in all aspects of being in school and learning. Gesture is a powerful means of gaining their attention, words have to generate images in the minds of the children and the way the teachers act in all things great and small shows children how things can be in ways that foster well-being, social awareness and moral authority.

### Class 1

The growth and regulatory forces that become available for the inner psychological development and especially for learning and memory.

The metaphorical gesture of Class 1 is one of opening the book of learning and beginning the process of 'reading'. Reading in this sense starts with exploring, playing with, engendering curiosity and kindling interest, followed by guided access to the archetypal 'secrets' of symbols, letters, signs, numbers and forms. In Class 1 children are exposed to a world of new languages: literacy, numeracy, the dynamic world of form, colour, movement, other languages through immersion and participation. They need to feel welcome in these new worlds, which they need to quickly become familiar with and for this they need to feel safe, supported and encouraged.

Children in Class 1 are making the transition from early childhood education, with its focus on learning through imitation, practical activities and child-led play, into formal schooling, where there is more need to listen, wait, follow and participate. They learn to become part of a new learning community, building on the learning habits, dispositions and attitudes that have been fostered in kindergarten, and learning new classroom routines and behaviours. Children are usually ready and eager to take on the challenge of this new phase of their learning, keen to get started on the exciting adventures of literacy and numeracy. The class as learning community has to establish its classroom rituals and ways of being and working together and the pedagogical priority in class 1 is establishing good, healthy learning habits and rhythms and they need to understand the factors that enhance and inhibit flow in the classroom situation (i.e. that activities move smoothly from one process to another in a way that makes sense).

Stories and explanations of things (such as classroom tasks, introductions to numbers and reading and writing) work best through providing pictures and appropriate images, which are embodied and enable the imagination to begin mapping out interior spaces. The rhythms and rituals help the children be able to focus on the structuring of numbers, letters, forms, rules. As children gain greater control of their limbs, feet and fingers, they also expand the internal spaces of the imagination, learning to focus their mental imaging. It is important to cultivate a natural sense of wonder, which is an uninhibited opening to the world and to other people.

### Class 2

In the flow of nature, we follow archetypal human pathways and songlines that weave us into the world's fabric. The writing flows, the reading is internalised, the numbers go up and down, fingers and feet become skilful – all busy work for hungry children.

In Class 2 teachers can expect the children to be alert, active, energetic learners and need to be provided with opportunities to stretch their abilities in a healthy way as much as possible. Their energies need channelling into structured and meaningful activities, and they need to establish a skills base in social and work life in school.

In Class 2 teachers can expect the children to be alert, active, energetic learners and need to be provided with opportunities to stretch their abilities in a healthy way as much as possible. Their energies need channelling into structured and meaningful activities and they need to establish a skills base in social and work life in school. Metaphorically the children are more 'hunter-gatherers' than sedentary farmers, which means they need many, varied learning opportunities to explore the world around them and be guided to become aware of the inherent qualities in their natural and cultural environment. This can be expressed through personification (e.g. personifying natural phenomena, regular seasonal activities, days of the week having specific tasks, caring tasks and responsibilities in classroom and school house/grounds). This age group often requires strong group activities with a clear focus and a wide range of challenges. The teacher requires energy and presence to meet this.

Their prime developmental task is to learn the rules of a healthy social life and a caring way of relating to the world around us. They need strong moral exemplars, both among the teachers and indirectly through story material that includes figures whose spirituality is still embedded in nature rather than urban society. The pictorial, linguistic and form elements are cultivated through the teaching to support the children's need to act increasingly out of inner images, rather than external instruction, though this is of course still needed. This means that many tasks need to be embedded in a classroom (also outdoor classroom) culture in which things have their natural time and place, letters and numbers and forms have their application and that the children can increasingly apply these because they have learned how to use them. Instruction is still a strong element but balanced by frequent phases of applying, exploring and practising. By this age children should be used to short periods of group work and even be able to work on their own briefly. The teacher is a point of reference and support.

**Transition:** the 'Rubicon' in classes 3, 4 & 5

### *Psychosomatic development*

Steiner described a developmental process in middle childhood that he called the 'Rubicon'. For most children, this transition appears between the ages eight and nine, but can occur as late as 11 years. The psychological and social challenges of the 'Rubicon' require individuals to enter a new relationship to self and community that is no longer based on uncritical family acceptance and blood ties. The emergence of a consciousness of self is also one of distance from the childhood sense of being fully embedded in the world. This is an important step in individuation and is one of the many steps in which the individual becomes aware of being different from others and therefore no longer feeling naturally part of the community and the world. The metaphor behind the notion of Rubicon is that of a transition from one state to a radically different one and crisis, in the sense of an opportunity for fundamental change. This can be an experience of a loss of inner security and identification as children turn the question of purpose and identification towards the community and the natural world, though does not have to be experienced in a negative way. Many children are ready to move on and engage with the world. Successful negotiation of the 'Rubicon' developmental tasks can lead to a new sense of belonging to the community and to the world. If this process is mirrored in narrative and myth, then the chief motives are separation, individual journeys and reunion, the need for codes and rules, human cooperation and community, and stewardship of the natural world.

### Class 3

The new developmental challenge means that new teaching methods and relationships are called for. Many children at this age experience an emergent insecurity regarding the relationships between self and other and this often expresses itself as a demand for certainty and also for boundaries. This can be met by showing the children that human societies have rules, that the relationships between people and the spiritual world can be regulated and that people have responsibilities for each other and for the stewardship of the creation.

In mythical terms, the loss of paradise is a call to work, to work together to make it work. Rules are experienced as natural laws or divine gifts. In Class 3 the developmental tasks are to learn to work with others, recognising that this requires cooperation, teamwork, rules, roles and tools. This cooperation is the basis for a new sense of security and structure through cultural rules (e.g. measurement, syntax) and co-dependency, and the meeting of mutual needs as a basis for future economic thinking.

### Class 4

In class four children are still in childhood, though the signs of major change are beginning to appear. The forces of an autonomous inner life are beginning to emerge in individualised ways, manifesting as embodied emotional energy and the ability to imagine other worlds. This can be both disorientating and uplifting.

Children begin to experience the need to regulate and shape their own relationships and follow their own interests. They respond with great interest to narrative accounts of a wide range of psychological types and the complexity of their relationships, for example in legends and myths. Friendship becomes more personal and exclusive. Their new-found depth of emotion needs and seeks a new relationship to the natural and cultural environment that involves their active participation, alone and with others in the fields of sport, music, nature, art and technology- especially digital technologies. The journey becomes a quest with companions.

Key themes include relating the parts to the whole and dealing with the relationships between the parts (e.g. in fractions, in sentence structures, in the range of different animal types, singing in canon), exploring the locality to identify its geographical, historical, economic and cultural character and learning how to translate direct experience onto abstractions such as making and using maps.

### **Transition:** Early Puberty in classes 4, 5 & 6

#### *Psychosomatic processes*

There is much evidence that the earlier onset of puberty leads to significant changes in the child's relationship to self and body, self and others and self and world. Thus, the developmental themes and tasks for classes 4, 5 and 6 have to be taken as an overlapping continuum. This means that children are in a transition from childhood to puberty, though this is very individual, and girls tend to enter puberty before the boys. Some children are still very harmonious and fluid in their movements while others experience changes in their bodies. Many children are often strong willed, self-reliant and creative at this age and their intellect is emerging in ways that enable them to begin to understand more abstract concepts, such as time and space. Physically they are individually in an optimum state of development (i.e. within their individual limitations), and they therefore need opportunities to explore and practise their agility, freedom of movement, skill and applied intelligence.



Physical puberty begins today for girls on average around between the age of 10 and 11. This process changes later into adolescence. The physical processes of puberty have long since changed the young person's relationship to their body, in particular in the growth of muscles and bones. The fact of this growth means that their bodies feel significantly heavier and sometimes clumsy. Their relationship to their body changes correspondingly and they become much more conscious of what power their body has both in terms of physical strength but also in terms of its psychological effect on self and others. Our culture places a strong emphasis on the body, its appearance, its fitness, how we use it to express our gender identities and social roles. This presents young people with a major set of challenges related to adapting their sense of self to their perceptions of their body, others' bodies and how other see them. Thus, they are often preoccupied with the identity work of adapting, being accepted, relating, which can manifest in a wide range of challenges from eating disorders, sexuality, lifestyle issues, etc.

Over the course of puberty, the formative forces at work in the cardiovascular system and respiration are gradually freed up and can now express themselves more in a differentiated and 'felt' feeling life. This may manifest in passions, devotion to others (including the unattainable heroes of streaming series or film and music stars), an inwardness that manifests in diary writing (or more likely today naïve posting on inner feelings on the 'socials')

#### Class 5

Traditionally Waldorf education has seen class 5 as the heart or highpoint of childhood, when children are bodily and psychologically at their most harmonious before the major changes brought about by puberty. Steiner and anthroposophical medicine put this down to the maturation of the child's breathing, which now become more comprehensive and deeper. Because of the close link between the feeling life and the breathing and rhythmic system, 'deeper' breathing draws more on the forces of the will and imagination and reaches into the realm of thinking and mental imaging. This stretching of the middle processes of feeling enhanced by will and thinking in a way optimizes the relationship between thinking, feeling and willing. It has certainly been observable in movement lessons, for example, that class 5 children are generally highly mobile, skilful and effortless in their movement – one need only to observe the well-known 'Olympic Games' in class 5.

At the same time children's memory, especially rhythmical memory as evidenced in length recitations or long songs, seems to go well beyond their teachers' capacities. When motivated, have vivid mental images of what they are reciting and they are gently stretched, there seem to be no limits to what they can recall, and their powers of directing their imagination, for example in visualizing geometrical forms, managing complex form drawing such as Celtic knots, are much enhanced. This maturational fact strongly argues that the pedagogy should nurture and strengthen these active inner processes of applied imagination. Several things limit and even stunt this growth, such as lack of meaningful (and aesthetic) movement, textbooks and that require little thinking or imagination, screen images, which require little effort (and leave no time) to construct, or simply undemanding, unimaginative teaching.

At this age children's focus of attention and attachment begins to shift from teachers to peers, and friendships assume greater significance. This brings significant changes in the social and communicative processes the child is embedded in, which can also mean that children can be vulnerable if such relationships are broken or denied and the risk of marginalisation becomes greater.

Children should have opportunities to expand their imaginative thinking in a range of spatial and temporal dimensions and their transformations, extend their powers of speech, recitation and dialogue through practice, experience how different cultures express their relationship to spirit and the natural and how the person relates to society, as well as archetypal narratives of individual quests.

#### Class 6

The young person's relationship to her body, to other people and to the world, changes, in ways that are usually liberating and unproblematic. At this age youngsters can be highly capable, fun, lively, loud,

curious, imaginative, brave and in a way both ‘grown-up’ and yet unburdened by the world’s problems. Physical growth and body change in endless individual variation is the norm, with girls usually being ahead of the boys in this respect. The youngsters are physically stronger and can apply this to real bodily work in the garden or crafts or moving furniture.

In contrast to their outer behaviour quite a few young people also begin to develop private and intimate experiences through close relationships, diary writing and hobbies (often involving relationships with animals). Students need age- and developmentally appropriate tasks particularly in technical fields, ranging from tool use to science and the techniques of literacy. They also need to learn social ‘techniques’ such as non-violent communication, conflict avoidance and resolution, health and well-being issues (e.g. food, body care, sexuality). The acceleration of puberty combined with models of sexuality in the media and access to social and digital media can be problematic when their use is not accompanied by understanding. Meeting the varied needs of a group of class 6 students is a considerable challenge best met by a team of teachers.

Key themes include applying skill and knowledge of tools and techniques to practical tasks, accurate observations of natural phenomena and clear concepts for the social sciences. They can apply abstraction in their theoretical knowledge (e.g. algebra) but this needs to be closely linked to real life tasks. Causality is a main theme at this age, in nature, in social life and in human behaviour (“what I do, say and think has a real effect on others”).

#### Transition: puberty to adolescence

The term puberty usually refers to the biological changes and adolescence to the psychological changes in this important and complex phase of development. This distinction is only partly helpful. Many anthropologists and evolutionary biologists see puberty as the source of innovation in human societies. The reconstruction of the structures of the neural patterns in the brain, means that much of what young children learn from their social environment has to be relearned and re-structured, which affords new ways of thinking and behaving. Many cultures have tried to prevent this from happening by making girls have children as soon as possible (which usually limits the individual’s space for innovation), through work and through rigorous training, and military service. Modern methods of education and consumerism work against this by powerfully channeling adolescent behaviour into conformity. School does this particularly effectively by keeping young people in highly controlled environments for much of their adolescence, channeling their energies into desirable outcomes. Steiner was particularly insistent that society should not seek to mould young people into existing forms that reproduce the status quo but should take the risk of allowing them to become something different. Fortunately, the very forces of adolescence often enable young people to experiment and go their own way despite the restrictions. What youth need in this regard is the offer from trustworthy adults to be there for them when they need support and advice. Without that some of us would never have made it into responsible adulthood.

#### *Psychosomatic- psychosocial aspects.*

These developmental processes can be summarized as:

- Physical growth and changes in body shape and an increase in weight, which requires considerable adjustment in terms of mobility.
- Inter-individual variation increases at puberty and intra-individual variation too. There are no typical class 9 students (under the surface). Individual dispositions, abilities, qualities and interests are highly diverse. Pedagogy does harm if it tries to treat young people as all the same or expect them all to follow the same learning path. At the same time, it is counterproductive when society or education determines individual learning pathways through selection and streaming.

- Part of the variation is temporal, with some individual starting much earlier than others and some 'late-bloomers' surprising everyone with the emergence of 'last-minute' abilities (e.g. in drama productions, sporting achievements or exam performance).
- The socio-cultural context also plays a significant role in how young people develop.
- Girls are generally a year to a year and half ahead of boys in their development.
- Girls often suffer a number of painful changes with puberty, such as serious ovulation and period pains that should be taken seriously by teachers. Boys can suffer psychologically if they start puberty later than their peers.
- Young people's sexual activity varies considerably, some starting at the age of 12, whilst others wait longer, though by 17, 70% have had their first sexual experiences, which applies for all genders.
- Learning about sexuality should not be left to the parents or siblings and therefore school has an important task to place sex education within a wider education about relationships and this should occur in age-sensitive ways not after children have started puberty. This can occur in various ways with different aspects from class 4 onwards.
- Children and young people need to be warned about sexual abuse and how to respond in difficult situations, since this is far more common than most adults realize (Largo, 2019 puts the statistic at 13% of girls and 6% of boys who experience sexual violence for Central Europe).
- Puberty loosens the attachments to family and therefore need to re-establish relations of trust to family members but also to significant others. They often transfer their attachments to peer-groups, since loneliness is hard for youth to endure.
- It is important for young people to develop their own voice and that often literally means a new language. This often takes a detour through youth slang and a reduction of articulacy. This should not be confused with being less sensitive or stupid.
- From an anthroposophical perspective, young people lose their intuitive connection to the spiritual dimension, which means that in sleep they do not benefit from the same degree of restorative processes as before puberty. This unconscious experience of a loss of a sense of belonging that being embedded in the spiritual underlies their sense of life and inner confidence when awake. Steiner suggested that the wealth of images in language (e.g. in poetry – and today that may be song lyrics) that contain a spiritual, ideal content can nourish the young person. We can also say with the benefit of pedagogical experience that young people seek and find their sources of inner inspiration and proximity to the spiritual in many ways, few of which occur usually in school. They can be found in arts and crafts (material Bildung) if these are authentic and connect them to a whole world of material qualities, artefacts, craftsmanship, cultural and ecological context, music, in relationships with others, in encounters with real life situations in which they feel called forth to take responsibility, and in life situations that challenge them to engage. Conventional school does not generally afford such experiences, though Waldorf at its best can.
- Young people seek ideals but these may not be those of their teachers and elders.

### Class 7

At this age the students are often confronted with a range of psychological challenges that can push them to their limits and beyond. Experiences and feelings of powerlessness and injustice can be overpowering, prompting responses from self-harm to inner emigration, eating disorders, aggression towards self and others and challenges to all forms of authority. At the same time new levels of sensitivity, empathy, identification can open young people to others and to the world. They can respond to social injustice in the present and past with deeply felt concern.

In this class a major theme is meeting the other, finding commonality in difference and discovering that people can find solutions together based on empirical evidence combined with imagination. In order to be able to do this they have to direct their gaze and attention to details in the world, away from their own emotional responses. One very rich field of life experience is the outdoor world of nature and activities such as hiking, climbing, bivouacking, that involve extremes of effort, technical skills, companionship as well as more reflective activities such as tracking and bird watching that bring the students into close encounters with nature. Teachers are required who can be role models of cooperation with good listening skills and sensitivity, self-humour and honesty who mediate the feeling that life is complex and sometimes bad, but together we can make a difference.

Key themes include the differences, between people and cultures, the positive and negative relationships between people and cultures (colonialism, slavery, discrimination). The inner psychological life of the individual needs to be cultivated through empathy, through creative tasks involving self-expression. Another expression of the developmental tasks is transformation in materials, in qualities and in people. This includes the transformation of materials into products, exchange and trade. Transformation manifests in self-care, health and nutrition, relationships, justice and injustice.

### Class 8

If class 8 is the end of the class teacher period, it is accompanied by many institutional transitions and special activities (in some countries this happens earlier). Whenever it happens it imposes an institution transition which has a strong impact and need marking by celebration. In many schools class 8 is a year of projects, individual and collective, that in a sense sum up all that has been learned and developed so far.

As in the previous class, students need to engage with the world, and particularly the social world, with practical environmental or social projects that do good. The emphasis is doing something well that is of value to other people and the world, as well as showing the skills have been acquired. It is less a celebration of self and more a celebration of what is good in human society and culture. This is the true source of deep personal satisfaction and fulfilment and is particularly important in an egotistical world of celebrity. The focus in the classroom is on the world as it is today in all its political, economic, scientific and cultural complexity and conflicts: the 20th and 21st Centuries are the main theme. The balance between collective and individual qualities is important; the universal human (e.g. anatomy) and the unique biography. Class 8 needs a team of teachers who can respond to the wide range of challenges and accompany the many projects, including facilitating a review in depth of the past 8 years.

Key themes include individual and collective projects that demonstrate and celebrate both individual and collective achievements, and it is important that this is not competitive and that social differences (i.e. having parents who can contribute time and money as support) are not emphasized, but rather individual achievements that are not wholly dependent on adult support. Therefore, small and manageable is more important, so that students can really show what they can do in a safe environment. Engaging with the real world as it is and learning skills that enable that is important at this age (we recall that Steiner recommended 10 finger tying, shorthand writing and formal dancing in 1921- what mundane skills do students need today?). Social and ecological projects show responsibility can be taken in practical ways.

## Transition: Adolescence and the Upper School

### *Institutional transition*

In traditional models of Waldorf education, Class 9 marks the transition from the class teacher period to the upper school. Students often experience this threshold as very important. Instead of having a single

class teacher as guide for the class, they now meet a number of subject teachers, many of whom they know from the Middle School (foreign languages, sport, eurythmy, arts and crafts and possibly the sciences and maths). Nevertheless, it is often an assumption in the school culture that the Upper School is somehow different.

What is needed in adolescence is that the students have, on the one hand, subject teachers who can represent their subject as experts, whilst on the other, they need considerable social and pastoral guidance. This latter is fairly independent from the subject content being taught and so can be provided by adults who have the interest and the skills. This is an argument *against* the 8-year class teacher model. Many class teachers will struggle to keep up with the subjects they are supposed to teach (usually those they have not studied or know little about) whilst having the time and energy for all the other important activities that young people after puberty need (field trips, excursions, drama productions, cultivation of social processes, media education, personal and health care etc.). Many contemporary Waldorf schools have moved to a middle school model, with a class guardian who focuses on pastoral care and their own specialist subject, in addition to specialist teachers for other subjects, from the age of 11 to 14.

Whenever the formal transition comes, what is important is that young people are met in their needs and developmental tasks. Whoever can do that best should do it. The virtues of the class teacher as a role model for learning about the world and for the continuity of relationships and the need for subject expertise, are tasks that can perhaps be shared. After all teamwork is also a vital model for young people.

The developmental tasks of adolescence include developing a coherent and dynamic I-identity, including establishing a personal sense of gender and sexuality and a balance between an emergent inner psychological life and the demands made on young people in contemporary society by social media, advertising and peer pressure. It is important that adolescents have the opportunity to find an inner source of meaning and spirituality (understood as the sense of being part of a meaningful whole). They have to develop their powers of holistic thinking and judgement, particularly as a basis for ethical behaviour including taking responsibility for one's actions and having resilience against forms of manipulation. Modern neurobiology has demonstrated that teenagers undergo a process of 'neural pruning', where connections between emotions and their frontal lobes - the seat of empathy - are temporarily reduced. Steiner characterises this process as being 'spat out of the spiritual world'. Adolescent education should support the development of a high level of social, empathetic and intercultural skills, the ability to form reliable relationships, the development of personal values, and the capacity to overcome the temptations of dishonesty, egotism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, xenophobia and nationalism.

## Class 9

After a brief period of finding their feet in the new system - if indeed the system is new - Class 9 students may begin to take liberties, distancing themselves from the Middle School, trying out the boundaries of what is permissible and what not. If the class teacher has kept the class on a tight leash, using the moral authority they have built up over many years to direct the class in its behaviour and expectations, the consequence in Class 9 may be an explosion of challenging authority, demanding to have a say in what happens and having their own space, all of which is entirely understandable, if somewhat tiresome for Upper School teachers.

If the class teacher has managed to transform her relationship to the class in appropriate ways, that is by expecting ever more self-responsibility from the students in the class for collective life of the class, if students have been encouraged to work on their own or in groups without everything being determined by the teacher, if the class has become competent at dealing with conflicts among themselves or with teachers, then the transition to the Upper School in terms of the class community and learning culture, need not be in any sense problematic, but be experienced as a welcome transition.

The ideal-typical developmental themes for class 9 are actually quite similar to class 8 but have new accent. If the class 8 curriculum focuses on learning about the world as it is today and how people experience

technology, history and the environment and how we relate to it, in class the theme shifts to the ideas that have shaped the actions of people. These are best learned biographically, by how they affect people, including ourselves. The long, complex processes of emancipation of oppressed peoples, social classes, women and sexual minorities were driven by ideas, ideals, values and aspirations and a quest for universal rights. So, class 9 looks at the ideas that have moved people, at the tectonic forces that have moved and shaped the earth, at the laws that shape the physical, chemical and biological processes we can witness.

The link between ideals and reality and the need to take responsibility are something that should be experienced directly, meaning that students need to start taking collective and individual responsibility for things that have often been left to others (parents, teachers, cleaners, gardeners). Practical themes and topics - building, farming, theatre etc - offer the opportunity to engage in hard and physical work, but also to learn both practical skills and the economic realities of business. Ideally, projects have an element of social service, doing something that others can benefit from. Across all subjects and activities the overriding tasks are to develop idealistic judgements (is it worth doing?) and practical judgements (was it done properly?).

### Class 10

The developmental tasks in class 10 focus on making judgements that are based on logic, causality and involve matching complex factors. Identity is an issue in each class once the transition following puberty has occurred, but in class 10 this often focuses on major issues of gender identity, cultural belonging, political positioning and of recognising that there are often multiple perspectives on most issues and that it is therefore necessary to learn how to position oneself in ways that are not too fixed. All questions relating to ecology are important because they show how complex interrelationships co-exist, whether between organisms or between human societies and their environment. These issues are often served by addressing questions of origins and the different ways these are explained (in chemistry, in the history of early human societies, in the transition from myth to literature etc.). There are different forms of knowledge in the various sciences, in mathematics, in the arts and in relationships. The developmental tasks in class 10 require forms of judgements that are evidence and rule based, that are inherent to the material, to the situation and context.

Class 10 students need many opportunities to explore their own form of self-expression in project work, in the arts and in science, so that they learn to master complex techniques and technologies; the right tool for the job (whether choosing the right kind of formal or informal text style for the purpose, choosing the colours that express what we feel) and particularly analytical tools. By Class 10, students should have the tools, techniques and skills to plan and carry out projects on their own. They should be encouraged to become much more self-reliant in their learning and have opportunities to do significant work that they can present to the others in ways in which all can benefit. In the field of practical work, an industry or workplace practical has often proven to be rewarding.

Key themes are around links, connections and interactions: the human body and psychology, the living earth as a complex organism, natural laws that link mathematics and physics, how physical geography has shaped the development of human societies, raw materials and markets, the relationship of private individuals to the state.

### Class 11

Class 11 raises the bar for complexity by taking a multi perspective view of life, seeking to integrate various views, whether in nature or in culture, into a coherent whole. This includes global history and economics, political theories, dialectics in art, civil rights and moral issues. The students are asked to engage with non-visible worlds - the spaces in between, dimensions of time and space. Another major theme is biographical: processes of transformation, questions of identity, the evolution and development of relationships over time and place, and how the complex relationships of body, gender, community, culture and ideals manifest in different personalities over an individual's life course.

Literature may offer opportunities to explore central biographical themes, fate, destiny, the quest for meaning and spiritual enlightenment and, centrally, the question of understanding the moment. Traditionally, Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval romance, Parsifal is read but other literature is of course possible. The story provides an opportunity for young people to look at their own life stories, perhaps begin to compose their own life narratives, although other literature could offer opportunities for the same themes. Young people need to gain new perspectives on their own gifts and limitations, and how one's own egotistical needs can be put into perspective by the life situation of others who face great challenges. The nature and reality of poverty is something that Class 11 students should become familiar with, as a balance to their notions and hopes of self-realisation. Many schools find that internships in social institutions, as well as accessing the work of NGOs such as Amnesty International, Oxfam, Greenpeace and other reliable sources of alternative news, offer vital perspectives.

### Class 12

Class 12 is rightly seen as the culmination of the entire curriculum and this is reflected in a series of themes that require an interdisciplinary overview of life and society. These include ecology, society, ethics and science, human evolution and development, industry and commercial interests, and differing world views, including an introduction to different philosophical traditions and theories. The core task is to enable and support young people in bringing their ideas, their empathy and their ability to act together in meaningful ways and thus exercising reflexive holistic and ethical powers of judgments.

Students look backwards at their own experiences of schooling and education, and forwards at their next steps in becoming adult contributors to civil society, gaining new perspectives. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Class 12 are the individual and collective projects. In the individual project, the student chooses a subject with both a practical and theoretical component and spends the whole year researching and developing their topic. Their final piece of work is presented to the school community in a celebratory event. The collective project is often a play, but could equally be a concert, art exhibition, eurythmy performance, class trip or a conference. The aim is to allow each student to demonstrate their responsibility for the whole, and to show how collaborative effort towards a common goal can bring about powerful, creative and memorable results. The most important role for the teacher is to resist the temptation to direct both of these. Imperfection is a much greater learning experience when it is one's own imperfection.

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