

Learning about relationships, sexuality, gender and identity in Waldorf education: potential problems and possible curriculum solutions

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Introduction

The question of relationships, sexuality, gender and identity are central questions in education and like all important questions of curriculum, they have to be addressed in the context of the world we live in today, which has very different conditions to those when Waldorf education was first developed. In this exploratory paper I look at some of the issues relating to this area of the curriculum by taking an ecological and layered approach. The macro level identifies the universal developmental tasks facing children and young people, the meso level addresses the question of skills and knowledge the local national level, whilst the micro level is the task of the individual teacher in planning and reviewing her lessons at the school level.

The social and cultural context

I start with a brief survey of the overall historical and cultural situation, what one could call the macro level of context. There are different dimensions to this cultural aspect; a universal human level, a local cultural level and an individual level. Human development is bound up with the interaction between ourselves and our bodies, between the body I have and the body I am, between our embodied selves and the cultural and natural worlds we are embedded in. This interaction changes over the course of a lifetime and over historical time. The contemporary human sciences (psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, youth studies etc.) offer us many new insights into this interaction.

Feminism has led to a paradigm shift, not only in understanding women's roles and experiences but in understanding how our bodies are seen and experienced. Judith Butler, for example has argued that sex is a biological fact, though one that is always culturally scripted from birth, and gender and sexuality are culturally constructed and performed for a social audience using culturally inherited scripts. This means we are positioned and identified culturally in terms of gender roles and then we enact those positions and the identities that go with those roles, that is, if we are treated as girls with certain roles and behaviours we adopt these, unless we become conscious of the forces shaping us and act to counter them. This is a complex process that few individual can manage on their own, but emancipation is possible. Judith Butler's works are hard for the layperson to read but there is a wealth of accessible literature that make the complexity comprehensible, not least works of fiction such as Jeanette Winterton's *Oranges are not the only fruit*, Yrsa Daley-Ward's *The Terrible*, Anne Tyler's *The amateur marriage*, Caitlin Moran *How to build a girl* and Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, woman, other*, to name just a few personal favorites. Feminism has contributed to greater general social awareness of gender issues and to the trend towards greater openness and freedom in aspects of sexuality.

Sociology, and in particular youth studies (e.g. Furlong, 2013) offers us an analysis of the relationship between the individual and society today that can be briefly described as one in which the process of individuation, the process of coming into being as a subject and the emergence of subjectivity are located in a context in which many of the traditional structures that gave social life and biographies meaning and form, such as social class, religion and institutions have fragmented or become fluid. In particular, the world of work has significantly changed and people tend to change their place of work frequently, there are fewer jobs for life and far less job security, with an increase of short term contracts. Furthermore, the kind of work people do has changed with digitalization and the decline of both public service and industrial production. Therefore young people today have to learn to navigate an uncertain world of work and relationships. The awareness of risk is pervasive, though not necessarily in relation to actual risk and there is a widespread sense of vulnerability and non-specific fear.

Both of these trends- towards a more open understanding of sex, sexuality and gender and the processes of identification and the fluidity of social structures affect the way children and young people experience these questions. Family life has changed considerably and more and more children grow up in non-conventional family constellations, such as having single sex parents, patchwork families, co-parenting and voluntary single parenthood. Attitudes towards sexuality in general are far less restrictive than in earlier generations and homosexuality has become both legal and more socially accepted- indeed the very existence of LGBTQ community shows that there has been a significant shift in attitudes, though of course there is still discrimination and lack of understanding. Biographical learning today is an ongoing process of constructing stable and coherent identities and recognizing in any given situation the possibilities for realizing our biographical intentions by widening our scope for agency.

The almost universal accessibility of the internet has also made mass pornography available to practically every young person and this has inevitably prompted a major paradigm shift in terms of knowledge of sex and models of sexuality devoid of relationships and a dubious ethic of consent. Along with the manipulation of body image by pornography but also advertising and visual media, children and young people grow up with quite different relationships to their own and other people's bodies, so that the context of sex education and education about relationships and gender needs to be re-thought.

Though post-modernity has brought many opportunities for emancipation and new possibilities for self-expression, these are often accompanied by the parallel emergence of uninhibited, reactionary attitudes and (often cynical or simply uninformed) calls for a return to traditional values but more frighteningly, the resurgence of xenophobia, explicit racism and exclusive nationalism, often focused by right wing political movements. It is not hard, for example, to recognize the causes for the majority of refugees to leave their usually much loved homelands and what these causes have to do with us, but significant numbers of people appear to be able to filter this out, perhaps under the influence of newspaper headlines, which they actually know are not true. Clearly one of the issues we are dealing with is misinformation aimed at activating our lower selves in insecurities.

The role of social media in multiplying fake news and conspiracy theories is well known (as are the vast profits generated through social media advertising and data mining), but this knowledge is defused by confusion about freedom and choice. In regard to the dangers of substance abuse

(alcohol, medication, illegal drugs, junk food), or the right to carry weapons in some countries, or attitudes towards fossil fuels and rainforest destruction, institutional racism, acting responsibly during a global pandemic, much of the adult world is manifestly confused and incapable of separating short-term self-interest from long-term survival, let alone establishing human societies that promote happiness and well-being.

Having rigorous regulations for some whilst others get away with almost anything, depending on their proximity to power, undermines any faith one may have in justice. Testing four year-olds in English and maths may seem a good thing to do if you have absolutely no relationship to children (or reality for that matter). As Guardian columnist Marina Hyde put it recently, we live in an age in which satire, which relies on absurdity and exaggeration to hold power to account, struggles to compete with the increasingly bizarre political reality. What this all means for children and young people is hard to ascertain because it is so all-pervasive. Either role models matter or they don't. Either there should be an obvious match between what people say and do and the consequences, or there isn't. How are children and young people to construct coherent and stable identities in a world in which you can rely on nothing except uncertainty and truth is what I say it is, today?

What sociology calls late or post modernity, can be described from an anthroposophical perspective as a phase of cultural development that Steiner calls the consciousness soul. This follows on from the intellectual soul, the age of rationality. The current phase is both highly materialistic and yet is also open to spirituality, which is often experienced as a search for higher meaning and connectedness that traditional narratives no longer satisfy. The focus of much social endeavour has shifted from the emancipation of social classes, ethnic groups or gender to social justice for individuals and the question of individual identity. From an anthroposophical perspective, the central cultural task in our times is to move beyond biological ethnicity, social class, cultural belonging, gender identification, nationalism, lifestyle, the task in our times is to encounter the other as individual. This means cultivating our own experience of self as person and how we affect others. It also means opening to the other with narrative empathy, that is, the ability to tell another's story. It means being able to engage with the world, the other and ourselves in ways that liberates us.

This task is hard if you can't let go of the patterns of thought belonging to the past. Emancipation is not restricted to establishing freedom from external coercion and being positioned by others, it is also about liberating ourselves from old notions of being and the roles that went with them. Many people are afraid to let go of the mechanisms of identity that once held social groups together, such as a common language, shared history, cultural practices, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, or even identifying with particular ideas or philosophies, and so they emphasize these in order to re-affirm the superiority of one's own clan, tribe or idea of us-ness, that separates us from them. This is the cause of much conflict in the world today, since the scapegoating of the other is a widespread response to insecurity and uncertainty, by blaming the other (as refugee, as Muslim, as dark skinned person, as Asian, as liberal, as LGBTQ, as remainer - there are countless forms of otherness). But the reality is, the genie is out of the bottle regarding otherness. There is no going back to a time when each tribe was distinct, and there was probably never a time when the boundaries were clear cut.

Starting on the journey

Before we start to educate children and young people, it is necessary to look at ourselves and our own attitudes towards others.

It is impossible to understand a human being completely if one takes the concept of genus as the basis of one's judgment. The tendency to judge according to the generic category is at its most stubborn where we are concerned with differences of sex. Almost invariably man sees in woman, and woman in man, too much of the general character of the other sex and too little of what is individual. In practical life this does less harm to men than to women. The social position of women is often so unworthy because in so many respects it is not determined, as it should be, by the individual qualities of the particular woman herself, but by the general representations of what is considered the natural tasks and needs of women (Steiner, 1963, 251-2).

With these words Rudolf Steiner identified the core problem of gender. Today we would perhaps want to extend the example of the position of women in society to include a wide range of people who are one way or another different and identified as a group, such as people of colour, people belonging to certain religious communities, gay, lesbian, transgender people - even people linked to anthroposophy and Waldorf education are judged by some others in generic terms.

We are therefore called upon to develop ourselves to the level at which we can genuinely encounter the other. Rudolf Steiner (1963) described the highest form of encountering the other in these words:

Those who judge human beings according to generic characteristics stop before the boundary beyond which people begin to be beings whose activity is based on free self-determination. What lies short of that boundary ...is seeing people from a racial, tribal, national or sexual characteristics. These perspectives cannot penetrate to understanding the individual. The region of freedom in thinking starts where the determination of people by the categories of genus end (ibid).

This is a noble intention, the grail to seek and travel towards and the outcome of hard work on ourselves. Steiner's statement, however, is not a get-out-jail-card to be played if anyone questions our commitment to practicing diversity. Just as Steiner's book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* contains descriptions of spiritual knowledge, no one would claim to share these insights merely on the basis of having read the book, or having done a bit of meditative practice. There is a profound difference between believing that something is wrong or right and how we actually act. The first steps towards spiritual knowledge begin with exercises to overcome our egotistical thinking, feeling and willing. The first steps to encountering, meeting, recognizing and engaging with the other as person likewise begin with levelling the path, removing the most obvious hinderances, breaking down barriers, making access possible, practicing affirmative action, reaching out to minorities and groups who are socially disadvantaged and may be the objects of explicit and implicit discrimination. Above all, we must critically interrogate our own unconsidered behaviour, our biases and assumptions, and as institutions we must look critically at the signals we send by who we are and who represents us.

It is simply not adequate to assert that one does not discriminate against other people or that one does see the person before the generic. Being in a white, heterosexual majority means that we have to exercise bias in the other directions - we have to lean towards those who are different, even at the risk of over-compensating. When the bias is too strong those people will signal that they feel comfortable with the situation as it is and that they don't need our bias, but thank you for asking. Until they do, it is not for us, the *majoritarians*, to determine when the playing field is level. Together we have to find ways of being inclusive, enabling participation and not expecting everyone to leap at the meagre opportunities we, the majority, offer them. After 500 year of colonialism, thousands of years of discrimination against women and people who are sexually different to the majority, we have an obligation to lean the other way. Nor can we simply say, "nothing is stopping you from joining and contributing". That is not for the majority to judge. Inclusion is an active not a passive stance.

A similar phenomenon occurs when we raise the question of de-colonizing the curriculum. Some people assert vehemently that the Waldorf curriculum is neither colonial in intention or content, and does not discriminate against anyone. Whilst this is certainly true of the intentions behind the education, is it true of curriculum-as-practiced? Anyone who has looked into this can identify all manner of unconsidered (let's hope unintentional) Eurocentric and implicitly discriminatory aspects in Waldorf practice that need to be addressed (see Rawson, 2020). We must not fall into the trap of confusing intentions with the actual effects of our actions. Some people have the tendency to leap beyond the stage of civil courage, resistance, institutional reform and enabling genuine access and go straight to the brave new world of claimed spiritual enlightenment.

There are major differences between cultures regarding gender and sexuality and Waldorf schools are not free of these. What is self-evidently acceptable in one European country is cultural heresy in another. The only way Waldorf schools can align, is not in the details of their curricula but in the generative principles of the education and in the developmental themes that common across cultures. Each country must then develop a vision of what it thinks its students need to know to join the society they belong to, whilst enabling them to world citizens. The generative principle in the field of relationships, sexuality and gender can be articulated as follows:

Each child and young person needs to develop a healthy relationship to her own body, a respectful interest in the other and powers of agency, in order to establish a basis for socially responsible freedom.

The aims of Waldorf education

Waldorf education supports each child and young person to build healthy relationships to her own body, to other people and to the world. It does this within the framework of its overall aims of enabling children and young people in their socialization, qualification and individuation.

Socialisation

From the perspective of socialization this means learning to be at home and at ease within one's own body. This is the basis for forming healthy relationships to others. Socialisation includes learning about personal space and social tact and includes the language we use to refer to our bodies. This means learning how to respect and appreciate our bodies and all their parts, even those belonging to our private and intimate sphere and which may be governed by tabus and feelings of shame. Socialisation also includes understanding, appreciating and respecting difference among people related to the shape, size and appearance of their bodies, to their gender orientation and cultural behaviour or social distinctions.

Qualification

In terms of qualification, this involves learning the dispositions, bodily habits and habits of mind, skills and knowledge to understand our bodies and how to care for them. It means learning about sexuality and gender roles in the past and today and in different societies and being able to communicate using this knowledge both verbally and in text and image. Being able to articulate our identities is also an important skill. There are many aspects of biology and social and cultural behaviour that children and young people need to learn about both directly but also through being able to access literature and information about this field of human life. It is also important to be able to engage in dialogue both with this literature and with other people.

Individuation

Beyond skills and knowledge, education has the central task of creating spaces in which young people can take steps in their individual development as people. We live in an age in which the most important task of each individual is to develop a higher consciousness that enables them to act as ethical individuals beyond duty, the moral tenets of religion, cultural and inherited social values, whilst paying respect to these. We must first learn to recognize what sex, gender, skin colour, age, language, religion, social status and origin actually mean for us and for other people and then be able to look beyond these identities and try to recognize the other as a person. We need to cultivate the narrative empathy to listen to another's life story and be able to tell this story ourselves, to be an advocate for the other if they wish us to be so. We also have to learn to accept the choice of gender, lifestyle, family arrangements and religious practice that others make, even their political views. We don't have to agree with them and we don't have to like them but we do have to recognize their right to those choices and engage in dialogue with them not from a position of knowing better (even when we think we do) but respectfully at eye-level. And if the other is young and still at school, we have to acknowledge their identity struggles and encourage and support them in their explorations and to give them unmistakable signals that this searching and questing is normal and good.

Schools have to take this attitude towards people and create learning situations, in which we can “elicit the individuality from the other- if we’re able to call it forth and make room for all that is truly is” (Romero, 2017, 31). In terms of individuation, young people have to learn to take responsibility for their behaviour, to form judgements based on insight and to act in ethically responsible ways. In becoming a responsible grown-up, a young person needs to be able to construct coherent and stable identities, including gender identities, whilst having empathic respect and understanding for other people with different identities.

Waldorf education pursues these aims in age-appropriate ways and in ways that respond to the questions posed by the child and young person’s developmental tasks, that is, the challenges that each individual faces in becoming an autonomous person in the given social and cultural context.

In early years this means providing children with a safe environment in which they can experience moral role models who act in natural and authentic ways and engage in appropriate and meaningful social and cultural practices. Children need the opportunity to experience individual adults at ease with their own bodies and gender identities, whatever they are. They should also have the opportunity to experience adults interacting in respectful and constructive ways with each other. Once children come to school and up until puberty, they need to develop long-term relationships with a range of teachers - the class teacher and the subject teachers and to experience them working as a team together. These adults guide them in learning across all fields, both in terms of formal learning and informal and social learning. The primary role of the teachers in this phase of school is to model how people engage with the world and learn how they come to feel at ease with their bodies and the world, thereby establishing dispositions to life-long resilience and habits that help regulate appropriate behaviour.

The curriculum and in particular the story material should offer many examples of relationships of all kinds. Through puberty and adolescence, young people learn to encounter the world through the perspectives of disciplinary perspectives (e.g. historical, literary, artistic, scientific, practical work-based ways of see the world). At this age they need opportunities to explore and construct identities and learn to recognise their biographical intentions. Up until puberty the approach is largely indirect. From puberty onwards, the approach needs to be explicit.

Dimensions of identity

Anthroposophy offers us ways of understanding the human being from various perspectives, including the physical body, the life body, the sentient body and the ‘I’ body. Relationship education and sex education need to address each of these domains in specific ways.

Our physical body provides us with a basis for our identity as it grows and changes over time, and especially how other people respond to us and position us through our bodies. Bodies vary individually, which is why we can recognize individuals on the basis of sight alone. Development is always highly individual, so teachers need to be sensitive to individual differences. We know that bodies are culturally gendered from the beginning of our lives and we are often conditioned to relate to certain types of bodies in different ways, for example, as boys or as girls, so teachers should be observant of children who express other behaviour than that expected of them regarding their gender, and show that this is also alright. Children need to learn from the beginning that bodies are

special and to be cared for and so they need to understand how to care for them through healthy living and nutrition and through healthy activities that enable the body to develop its potential in age-appropriate ways. They need to understand that bodies grow and change particularly in relation to gender and that the male-female binary is not absolute. Children and young people need to know their physical bodies, what functions they have, and how they feel, how physical intimacy manifests and where, when and with whom it is appropriate and when physical distance is appropriate. They need to learn what feels good and what does not and they need to be encouraged to communicate about what they like and what they don't like. They need to learn what are socially and culturally acceptable ways of using your own and other people's bodies and how to respond to others if they feel uncomfortable with the way others relate to them, without feeling shame or guilt or inadequacy. This is particularly important in relation to masturbation. It is certainly better to err on the side of caution with regard to helping children and young people protect themselves from sexual advances from older people. Children should learn quite explicitly before puberty that what they do with their body is important and that they should not let anyone convince them otherwise. We won't be able to stop children and young people having early sexual experiences but they should certainly know quite concretely what the consequences of unprotected sex are and how to avoid unwanted pregnancy. The idea that just mentioning it puts ideas into their heads- the ideas are already embodied and don't need prompting- they need recognizing.

In the domain of the life body and life processes, children learn dispositions, habits, patterns of behaviour and body images in the course of their socialization and enculturation. Education has to continue this process, particularly by adding more universal perspectives. Healthy habits include getting to know the rhythms of the body and this is not only a task for girls and their monthly cycle, boys and men can get to know the rhythms of their bodies and life-rhythms too, as well as understanding about girls. This includes developing a sense for transformation and the transitions between stages throughout the life course, including menopause and ageing. The field of the life body also includes the life processes, which can be understood as aspects of the overall life forces. The life processes that Steiner discovered in his work on the senses play a very important role in our lives and are not widely understood. He identified a sequence of life processes including what he called breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing and regenerating that he identified in the digestion process of taking in, analysing, assimilating, regulating, self-activity, the regeneration, the growth of organs and reproduction. Transformed these processes become processes in our process of taking in, processing and assimilating sensory experiences. These processes are also closely related to our sexuality, though this has yet to be explored.

In the domain of the sentient soul (also called astral body) the developing individual has to deal with drives, desires, longings, emotions and feelings, attractions, falling in (and out of) love, the quest for ideals, especially in terms of relationships and partners. Also in this realm young people construct their self-image and personality. Within the soul the three activities of thinking, feeling and willing are located. Willing relates closely to our will, desires, life motifs and quest for transformation. Children and young people need to get to know the nature of emotions, which are often our responses to and expressions of bodily-based states, and feelings, which usually have a close relation to our mental imaging, memories and thinking. Thinking, which spans the spectrum from the intellect and rationality to imagination and intuition clearly also plays an important role in our relationships and sexuality. In this domain children and young people need to be able to distinguish between friendship and sexual attraction (to both other sexes, which is quite normal), to recognize

the characteristics of friendship and companionship, soul affinities and the clash of opposites. The spectrum of feelings that can be generated between people is very broad and having language to distinguish between them is important.

In the dimension of the I, the person has interest in others and in the world, forms judgements and seeks shared consciousness and meaning in relationships. At the I-level, love can be altruistic, selfless and directed towards humanity in general, as well as religious and take other forms we can refer to as 'higher love'. The saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi seems appropriate, "There are beautiful wild forces within us. Let them turn mills inside us and fill sacks that feed even heaven".

The phenomenon of human attraction (and its opposite) takes many forms and functions at different levels of the human being, ranging from physical attraction, allurements, fascination, charm, inducement, personal magnetism and so on, there are different levels of physical and biological drives, sexual chemistry, pain and pleasure, the experience of power and control. Attraction also involves social commonalities and differences, emotional connections, shared consciousness, alignment of thinking and selfless love.

The denigration of these four dimensions of sexuality and relationships can be summed up as:

- at the physical level; shame of one's own body, obsessions with physicality, pornography, abuse, violation of another's body, violence,
- at the level of the life body, unhealthy habits of excessive behaviour, disgust of one's body or other people's bodies, self-harming, eating disorders, being positioned, manipulated and enscribed by others into certain behaviours and attitudes, denial of pleasure,
- at the level of the sentient soul; uncontrolled desires and unhealthy and suppressed longing, wanting to possess or control others, seeing people as objects, fear and anger towards others, especially those who are different,
- non-recognition and non-acceptance of the other, denial of self and subjecting oneself to the will of others.

In one way or another, these denigrations of healthy relationships are, unfortunately, commonplace and therefore need to be addressed in age-appropriate ways that are nevertheless clear to the child or young person. In particular the question of what is appropriate and what to do to protect oneself and others from abuse needs to be dealt with explicitly. It is very clearly a pedagogical task to prepare children to be able to recognize what is healthy and what not.

Curriculum matters

Curriculum refers to the whole educational approach, not just what is taught, but also how it is taught, when and where (Bransby and Rawson , 2020). As in many cross-curricular themes such as media pedagogy or science, the developmental approach leads to an essentially indirect approach up to puberty (or the end of class 5) and thereafter an increasingly explicit approach. What follows are a few specific suggestions, though not an entire curriculum. In many respects taking gender into account is closely related to de-colonizing the curriculum and so many of the points mentioned here refer to the whole area of non-discrimination.

Early years

Children need to experience multi-role models among the adults around. Children should not have a gender role imposed on them at this age, with expectations of what boys and girls are supposed to be. Young children should be allowed, for example, to choose their clothing from a range of gender neutral items and not corrected if they choose other gender clothes. In any case, non-discriminatory language should be cultivated, especially in relation to the body. One can avoid a sense of shame about bodily functions by cultivating healthy and hygienic habits, together with the self-evident reinforcement of socially acceptable behaviour (i.e. behaviour that the kindergarten as an institution determines to be socially acceptable and that is communicated as such to the parents). Certainly non-discriminatory language should be cultivated and particularly in relation to the body. What adults consider intimate body parts for young children should be seen as another body parts such as hands and eyes and named accordingly, as penis, vulva and anus. What families call these body parts and their functions is a matter for the family, kindergarten and school have another function socially and linguistically, forming a safe place between home and the larger world. Likewise unhealthy behaviour can also be dealt with in friendly matter of facts ways (“we don’t do that”) followed by distraction to other activities. Toys and dolls should not be one-sidedly gendered (or skin colour) and while we are at it, crayons should include black and white and paper may be of different colours and shapes and not merely reflect standard sizes.

Lower school

In the lower school, up to and including class 5, the school should try to ensure that there is a balance of gender among the teachers and if teachers are homosexual, this fact should neither be hidden nor emphasized but rather treated as normal. In the younger classes it is important to establish healthy classroom practices in which children learn to listen to each other, respect each other’s space and possessions and learn that helping each other is both expected and normal (i.e. and therefore does not need to be rewarded or praised). Inclusion and acceptance needs to be lived and practiced, rather than talked about in a moral sense, though talking is also important when things need to be addressed.

Story material is a very important field in which social diversity needs to be represented, including a balance of gender roles. There need to be as many girl and women heroines and heroes, and people of different ethnic backgrounds or skin colour should play roles in narratives, even if the origin versions do not contain this. This is a controversial point in many Waldorf settings because of the

belief that traditional tales and legends are archetypes that may not be altered. The first point is that traditional folk tales such as Grimm's Fairy Tales were often written down by scholars (usually men) in the 19th century and reflected the values of those times. The research shows that folktales change continuously over time, making them adaptable to many cultural situations. It is impossible today to establish what is original in any meaningful sense. Holding faith in the literal authenticity of Grimm's fairy tales (or indeed the many tales collected by Andrew Lang, a British collector from the period of the British Empire) is simply not justified, quite apart from the fact that they have been translated from German. So the modern versions of fairy tales are almost certainly not original in any sense and it is entirely legitimate if one responsibly modifies stories in the telling.

The argument about archetypes is somewhat more robust, but still not compelling. It is true that the images in folktales from different cultures have different associations. The forest in Grimm's tales is often a place of darkness and evil, populated by ogres and witches (a sexist category if ever there was one!), whilst in Russian tales, the forest is a much more neutral symbol for the spiritual world, in which there are true and false paths to follow. In English and Celtic tales the forest is often a place of light and freedom (think Robin Hood). This applies to many symbols in folk tales; we usually do not know how these would have been interpreted in their original cultures. Does it change the archetype, if the girl/princess has to cut her way through a thicket of thorns to liberate the sleeping prince/boy? Can Simple Jack also be Simple Gill? Can a queen have three daughters (or more likely a mixture of children) one of whom she must choose to inherit the throne by overcoming difficult tasks. Do literary fairy/folk tales from authors such as Hans Christian Anderson, Oscar Wilde, Padraic Colum, Owen Barfield, J.R. Tolkien or Selma Lagerlöf count? Their archetypes are just as valid? Indeed Marie-Louise Franz, a pupil of C.G. Jung, described a series of modern archetypes that are in a sense even more valid than traditional ones from vague sources. To some extent it depends on the intentions of the story teller. At least since Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, we have been aware that what the cultural West calls the Orient is stereotyped, prejudiced and pejorative. This manifests itself in stories like 1001 Nights, Ali Baba and Aladdin, which are full of cultural stereotypes. In the end, we live in a multi-gender and multi-cultural world; shouldn't we pay our respects and offer tales that narrate a new world into being?

The curriculum offers us a wealth of natural aspects of sex and regeneration in farming, nature study of animals, plants and literally the 'birds and the bees'. In all these themes we relate to the human being, in the sense of, 'animals are what people have' and plants in their environment offer resources for people. Animals are guided by naturally selected instincts. Humans have the task of replacing instinct with cultural artefacts, tools, techniques, narrative, education and knowledge. When children learn about worker bees serving their queen, or stags locking horns, or sperm whales protecting their calves from orcas, or birds migrating thousands of miles, we can find wonder in their behaviour but the message is not one of emulation because the animals have no choice and probably little self-consciousness. Rather, the message is, how wonderful and complex nature is and that we too are natural but that we are different, because we have to take responsibility through consciousness. The overriding themes are relationships and in particular human stewardship of the environment and the caring and nurturing side of this relationship.

This is why some of the most important themes in the classes 1 to 4/5 include being together in a social group, learning about boundaries, mutual awareness and consent, finding the right forms of communication and contact.



The Middle School

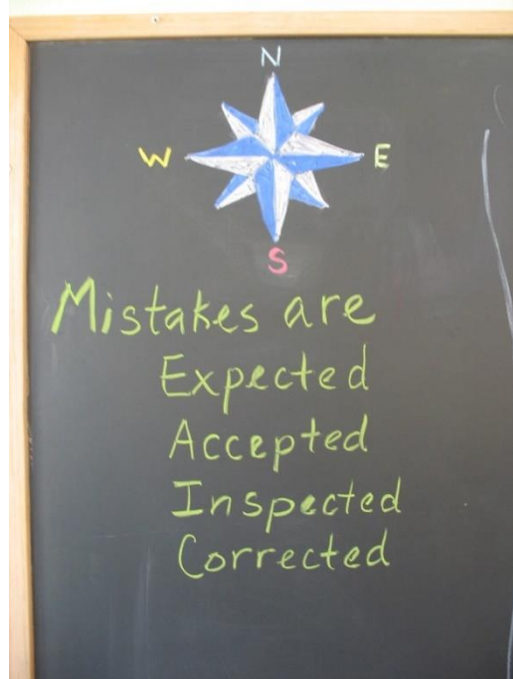
The age of the onset of puberty is now much earlier in Western societies than 100 years ago. In girls the average is the age of 12, which means that many girls will have their first period before that, which means already in class 5. Furthermore, the psychological and emotion aspects of puberty do not necessarily emerge hand in hand with the bodily changes; they may manifest earlier or later. In fact bodily development is becoming increasingly heterogeneous and the age span when significant developmental processes occurs can vary considerably. Waldorf schools should not wait until the traditional curriculum says, to engage with these important topics. As Remo Largo (2019), the famous pediatrician, says, individual developmental trajectories are the norm and the normal spectrum of developmental spans 5 years at the age of 14! So we cannot talk about typical 9 year-olds or typical class 7 students with regard to their actual development.

Therefore, from class 5 onwards the children should be aware of the bodily and psychological changes that they are about to experience in puberty. The emphasis is not only on the biological functions but also on the social and psychological significance of puberty, though explaining why girls have periods is important, perhaps through emphasizing the many ways in which traditional cultures acknowledge this transition (though we should steer clear of those examples involving brutality, mutilation and enforcing social roles on boys and girls). Traditional role models are of limited use because youth as a developmental phase between childhood and adulthood is a

relatively recent phenomenon. In fact Steiner was one of the first people to identify the significance of this third phase in the life course and in particular its spiritual significance.

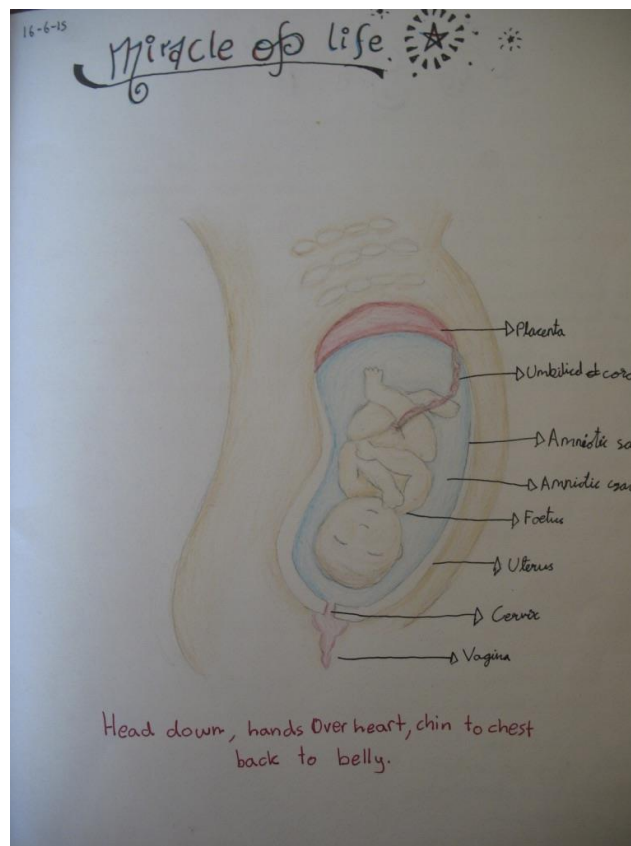
Steiner spoke about the young person losing her intuitive connection to the spiritual world at puberty. He used the drastic metaphor of being spat out of the spiritual world. In this phase of life the young person comes to 'earth maturity' and engages more fully with the forces of gravity and causality. The life processes that in the first phase of early childhood have built up and established the autonomous functioning of the organism and which in the second phase following the change of teeth, transferred to building up an embryonic psychological inner life. Now these formative forces become active again in the body bringing about the transformations that emerge as primary and secondary sexual characteristics and differentiate into male and female bodies, capable of reproduction. Powerful bodily processes driven by hormones lead to a complex and unique human phenomenon, which Steiner describes as a third birth. This involves major bodily changes accompanied by a reorientation of the life of willing through new drives and urges, moods and emotions, new intense feelings and sensitivities and the emergence of a powerful intellect. The whole process involves a somewhat chaotic eruption, surprising both the young person and those around her. It is a turbulent and risky time to live through and many young people lose their way in the process, though most do find their way again- one way or another – to establishing adolescent and ultimately adult identities. It is not surprising that one of the developmental themes at this age is revolution, polarities and their resolution in the struggle for emancipation.

Particularly important in these times is addressing the new dynamic of peer groups within the classes, especially the way they have developed through new social media. Pupils in class 6 need to explicitly learn about cultivating relationships and the power of words, images and communication using social media.



Given the changes in social attitudes to sexuality and gender have changed significantly and many children will now be familiar with homosexual couples, indeed we may have children in our classes whose parents or co-parents are gay, they need to learn that homosexuality is a normal aspect of relationships and sexuality, and that same sex partnerships and other non-conventional forms of families and relationship are part of our social mix. This should be done by class 5 at the latest (though I recommend reference to homosexuality in story material earlier).

In class 7 the human biology curriculum needs to emphasize health, nutrition and aspects of sexuality and the role of sex other than as a means of reproduction. It will certainly be necessary to introduce the topic of sexuality *before* the classic class 7 main lesson theme of health and hygiene. Certainly the children should know about contraception well before they start having sexual encounters. Exactly when and how this is done in earlier requires tact and good information about the students.



In class 7 and 8 students need to learn about gender roles and the fact that women's rights have been hard won and are not established everywhere. They should also learn in classes 7 and 8 that cultural attitudes towards homosexuality vary widely and that it is only recently that LGBT relationships have become legal in many countries. This is a belated aspect of civil rights and is still ongoing. The fact that different cultures within one country have different levels of acceptance of women's roles and homosexuality does not alter the fact that Waldorf education has to prepare children for contemporary citizenship. This may set us add odds with the views of some parents, who may have certain strongly held religious beliefs. Therefore, we need to explain our reasons for teaching the children about these things, without questioning their religious beliefs. Waldorf schools are not selective in any sense; they do whatever is necessary to explain their stance whilst accepting children from families with different stances.



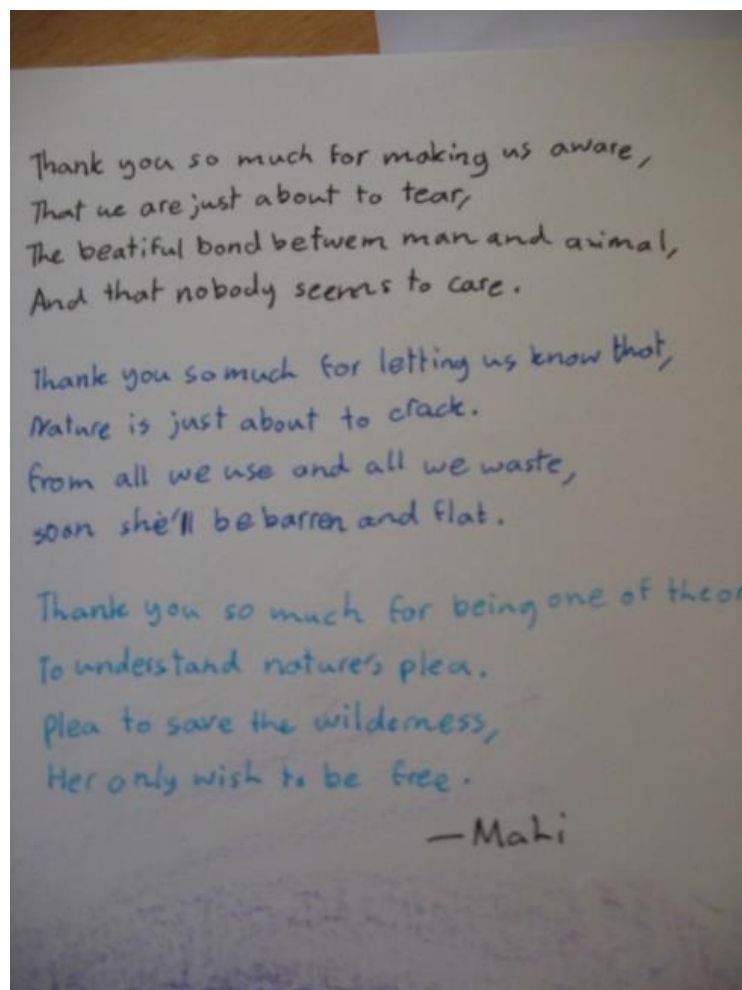
Sex and the teacher

Who should accompany this theme of relationships and the sex education process? The traditional model of the 8 year class teacher has its advantages but also its disadvantages. Among the disadvantages today are the new demands of puberty and the need for young people to develop high levels of social skills and self-directed learning. A class teacher who organizes everything for the pupils in a maternalistic/paternalistic way may inhibit the learning of the very skills the students need in terms of self-directed inquiry, team work and projects. It may lead to a kind of passivity which keep the students at a somewhat immature level than they actually need to reach- it is easier if someone, such as a parent or class teacher – takes active responsibility for everything. This general aspect of learning impacts learning in the field of sex and relationships. The process of maturing to the earth, its practicalities, its requirement that young people take responsibility for their actions

and relationships (in anthroposophical terms, they can create their own karma), may be retarded and keep the young people in state of prolonged dependence. Of course they still need guidance and role models, but what they need of role models will change.

Young people need to learn to take responsibility for their learning, for their social processes and relationships and that means they need opportunities to practice these, including dealing with the resistance and difficulties that arise. We cannot separate the learning related to sex and relationship from the development of the whole person. They need to learn the skills related to managing relationships, such as non-violent communication and conflict mediation, but they also need authentic practice in problem solving. If they neither have opportunity to learn the skills and techniques, nor opportunities to practice, they don't learn to face the consequences of their actions and decisions. They then allow their new soul forces free rein and this can manifest in bullying, exclusion, building of cliques and other behaviours that show a lack of empathy, self-control or sense of consequences for their own actions.

This is a field requiring research, training, plausibility and a strong relationship with the group of children. Schools may need to consider how they can draw on skills and expertise from within the staff body and from external professionals, and to reflect on the best way to provide brave, safe and appropriate spaces for the discussion of these complex themes.



If class teachers insist on their 8 years they also have to learn how to teach and guide young people in puberty. Models in which other teachers supplement the main lesson teaching, perhaps in subjects that are not the class teacher's particular strengths, enables the students to emancipate themselves. However, more important is the kind of learning culture that develops and practices that are used, with a strong emphasis on team work, authentic tasks, taking social responsibility.

Outward bound experiences are also very important at this age, so young people can learn to test and push their strength, face new challenges and learn practical skills including navigation and survival skills, both literally and in terms of their relationships with others. This is not something that class teachers are usually equipped to offer since the health and safety aspects require trained professionals and the relevant equipment.

The upper school

From classes 9 to 12 there are a wide range of aspects of relationships, sexuality, gender and identity throughout the curriculum, so many that I can only highlight a few aspects briefly.

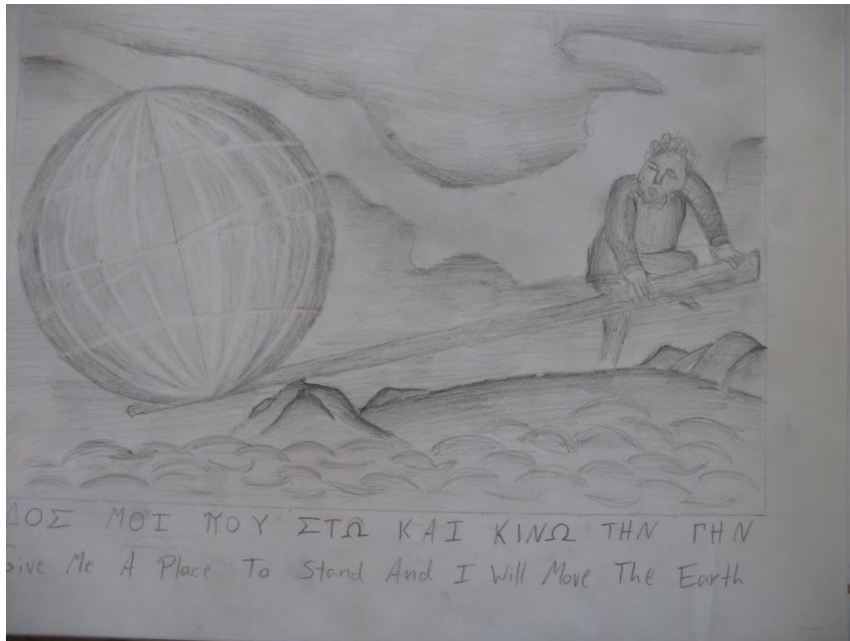
In class 9 students should have opportunities to learn about the struggles for emancipation and civil rights across the world, including the whole question of colonialism and post-colonialism in history, culture and society. In drama and literature they can experience the nature of attraction, human psychology, power and sex and different cultural responses to this. particularly the question of power and its abuses is a theme at this age. To balance this, the study of art and aesthetics offers different ideals of the body and its effects.



In class 10 one of the key developmental themes is the origins of human societies. This is an opportunity to learn about how societies since earliest times have dealt with questions of life, death, procreation, nurturing and living together. The differences between patriarchal and matriarchal societies can be explored and also the nature of blood relations, ethnic identities and the emergence of communities who break with orthodoxy and the rise individuality as a counterpoint to centralistic societies. The transition from myth to literature also offers perspectives on the emergence of individual voices in history and literature.



In class 11 the overriding theme is biographical exploration and the quest for personal identities. This includes the question of gender. This can be explored in literature, film and in creative writing. In biology the theme of genetics prompts questions about inheritance and determination. In art the engagement with portraits is another perspective on identity and individuality. In my experience this an age at which students can speak openly about their experiments with gender and transgender and non-binary forms of appearance and behaviour. They are probably more willing than the teachers to engage with this theme, but it is important to provide opportunities, even if the teachers have no experience.



In class 12 philosophical issues of the nature of being human and self-hood, life, death and the meaning of life. Questions of identity and gender are very much part of contemporary and post-structuralist, feminist and queer philosophy. It would be a shame if the students didn't have the opportunity to get to know these important ideas.

Conclusion

The reader will by now have noticed that theme of relationships and sex education is not merely a question of a biology main lesson but is interdisciplinary and runs through the entire curriculum. It is much a question of the attitude of the teachers as specific information and knowledge to be learned. Nevertheless, there is considerable knowledge that is required, though of course this knowledge has to both contextualized and applied as skill as well much as possible.

At the macro-level of curriculum we are engaging with the developmental tasks common to all human beings and the themes that enable us to focus on them. Given the dramatic nature of socio-cultural change in our times, even these universal tasks have significantly changed. They have no doubt done so in culturally specific ways. Some cultures have embraced difference, changed laws, introduced programmes of inclusion and integration, others are more reluctant to change. In such countries Waldorf schools have to be among the pioneers of change, not by preaching but by simply practicing inclusion. At the meso level, the state often requires knowledge and policies and Waldorf schools have to meet these requirements and do so in pedagogically intelligent ways. Teachers need to be well-informed about the lives of children and young people. It is part of their collegial responsibility to become informed and to cultivate collective and individual understanding of maturation and changes in society. At the micro level each teacher has to be alert to opportunities to include the theme of relationships and gender.

As one of the leaders of critical pedagogy Joe Kincheloe recalling a conversation with Paulo Freire expresses:

Teachers, he told me, cannot deny their position of authority in the classroom. It is the teacher, not the students, who evaluates student work, are responsible for the health, safety and learning of the students. To deny the role of authority the teacher occupies is insincere at best, dishonest at worse. Critical teachers, therefore, must admit that they are in a position of authority in their actions in support of students. One of the actions involves the ability to conduct research/produce knowledge...In relation to such authority of facilitators of student enquiry and problem posing. In relation to such teacher authority, students gain their freedom- they gain the ability to becomes self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge(2008, 17).

This is true in all aspects of pedagogy and in particular in the neglected area of relationships, gender and sexuality in the curriculum. This starts with self-criticality, interrogating the tacit understandings and assumptions we have as Waldorf teachers. A shift in attitudes can only come if each of us makes the effort to be honest and look at what we know and recognize what we don't know. This requires a research attitude and research practice, which can start by informing ourselves.

And it requires a whole school approach and intensive work with parents, though as I have noted above, consulting with parents is important but in the end curriculum is a question for the school to decide and then clearly communicate and explain.

This article is an initial attempt to formulate a curriculum. I would welcome feedback and suggestions.

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