

## Views of history and history teaching in Waldorf education

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**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this article is to investigate some concepts related to views of history connected to Waldorf education, anthroposophy and contemporary history didactic discourse. The focal point of the articles' theoretical basis is the Waldorf school curriculum, selected lectures from Rudolf Steiner, as well as articles and PhD-works in the Waldorf pedagogical field of investigation. In addition, it includes common research on view of history and history teaching. The article tries to show field of problems connected with basic historical conceptualization in Waldorf curriculum and secondary Waldorf literature, such as *evolution of consciousness, culture epoch theory* and *Eurocentrism*.

In concluding part of the article, I argue that the development didactics that characterize the Waldorf pedagogy has a Eurocentric tendency. At the same time I show that Waldorf education aims to instil in the pupils an ability to recognise and identify with a plurality of different cultures and ways of life. This trait of Waldorf education is highly relevant in today's society, but it requires a contextualization of the concept of history that comes from the Waldorf pedagogical tradition, including an engagement and partaking in the contemporary historical discourse.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.** Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist einige Konzepte zu untersuchen, die sich auf Geschichtsauffassungen beziehen, die mit der Waldorfpädagogik, der Anthroposophie und dem geschichtsdidaktischen Diskurs der Gegenwart verbunden sind. Im Mittelpunkt der theoretischen Grundlagen des Artikels stehen das Waldorfschulcurriculum, ausgewählte Vorträge von Rudolf Steiner sowie Artikel und Dissertationen aus dem waldorfpädagogischen Bereich. Der Artikel bezieht sich ebenso auf weitere geschichtsphilosophische und geschichtsdidaktische Entwürfe und versucht die Problematik aufzuzeigen, die mit der grundlegenden historischen Konzeptualisierung des Waldorflehrplans und der sekundären Waldorfliteratur einhergeht und beleuchtet wie sie mit Bewusstseinsentwicklung und unterschiedliche Kulturepoche-Theorien verbunden ist.

Schließlich argumentiere ich dafür, dass die Entwicklungsdidaktik, die die Waldorfpädagogik kennzeichnet, eine eurozentrische Tendenz aufweist. Gleichzeitig wird jedoch aufgezeigt, inwiefern die Waldorfpädagogik den Schülern die Fähigkeit vermittelt, Interkulturalität zu leben. Dieses Merkmal der Waldorfpädagogik ist in der heutigen Gesellschaft von hoher Relevanz, erfordert jedoch eine Kontextualisierung des waldorfpädagogischen Geschichtsbegriffs innerhalb zeitgenössischer Diskurse in der Geschichtsdidaktik.

### Introduction

In many ways, our world is radically different from when the first Waldorf school was established in 1919. Far-reaching social and global changes have led to a critical reappraisal of what is often described as

*Eurocentrism* in the way history is presented (Kjeldstadli, 1992). The same criticism has been levelled at the concept of development in relation to how history and history teaching have been perceived. The concept has been thoroughly problematised, not least because it has largely interpreted development as a process of progressing or moving upwards from inferior, primitive forms of society to superior, rational forms, with Europe and the Western World representing the latter category (Solerød, 2012; Kjeldstadli and Reinertsen, 2006). The previously prevailing political goals of nation-building and promoting national identity have become problematic seen in light of the current global situation. The question is how the school deals with the challenges presented by our multicultural society in today's history education (Lund, 2011).

In this article, I will take a closer look at this matter as it concerns Waldorf education. I will do this through a theoretical study in which the crucial question is what views of history form the basis for history teaching in Waldorf education and how this relates to the above-mentioned criticism of both Eurocentrism and the concept of development. It must be added here that Rudolf Steiner had a many-faceted and comprehensive view of history. It will not be possible within the limits of this article to deal with important aspects of this, such as Steiner's concept of a *symptomatological approach to history*, the concept of the Akashic Records and his description of the link between spiritual and macrocosmic factors and the development of history. In this article, I will focus on the concepts of *development* and *Eurocentrism* – two concepts that, in my opinion, are closely related.

At the time of writing (November 2017), the curriculum for Waldorf schools in Norway is undergoing revision. The new subject curricula, some revised and some new, are scheduled for completion in autumn 2020. Different subject groups are preparing proposals for amendments, which will be distributed to the schools for consultation and then processed further by the subject groups. I am a member of the subject group working on the subject of history. Since this work is still in the melting pot, I cannot cite any concrete proposals for new wordings regarding the history subject. It is nevertheless interesting to note that the questions raised by this article has already been discussed in the history subject group, which shows that the questions are of some topical interest.

## The Waldorf school curricula

### *Norwegian curricula*

The history curriculum (Ringheim & Härström, 2007, rev. 2010) states that there are 'points of contact between the common flow of history and the individual pupil's stage of development' (p. 44). The 2015 revision (p. 45) adds that these origins are to be traced 'on all continents'. In both versions, the purpose is to enable deeper identification with 'all' (rev. 2010, p.44), or 'a diversity' (rev. 2015, p. 45) of, cultures. It also states that history teaching has acquired urgent significance in relation to today's global reality. The teaching should therefore lay the foundations for identification with and understanding of other cultures, and it is important to 'break with a one-sided Eurocentric perspective and to include the historical contributions and circumstances of minorities, women and children' (p. 45).

Older curricula draw an even closer link between the historical concept of development and the pupils' development. In a curriculum from 1933, it is stated that the children 'take the same path as the whole of humankind has taken, from the artistic to the intellectual – from the imaginative to the habitually accepted and abstract' (Signe Roll, quoted in Stabel, 2014, p. 132). A new teaching plan was printed in 1959 in which the reader learns that the Waldorf education view of developmental psychology is that children to a certain extent go through the same development as humanity in general. A plan from 1966 (Stabel, 2014, p. 10) states that in year five,<sup>1</sup> pupils can 'get an incipient notion about development, about the historical path humanity has followed'. In addition to the ancient Indian and Persian cultures and the Egypto-Chaldean culture, the children shall spend most time on the Hellenistic culture, 'and this is where the fifth-graders

1. I use the current Norwegian designations for school years in my own text, even when referring to a time when the 'old' designations were used. However, when I quote pre-1997 Norwegian curricula and foreign curricula, I use the 'old' designations. In these cases, the reader must him/herself adjust the designation one step up for them to tally with the current Norwegian designations.

are happiest. In the Greek culture, human thought emerges with a particular plastic clarity, and something similar takes place in the children's own development at this age.'

When they are taught history, pupils will 'see a lot of their own development as though in a mirror'. This does not happen at a conscious level, it is true, 'but there is a hidden affinity present between the child and the different periods of history. And such affinity is something a teacher must always attempt to utilise' (p. 10).

A more comprehensive curriculum was first published in 1977 and re-published in 1988 (Stabel, 2014). As regards Norwegian language teaching, it states that 'thought, in its pure, philosophical form, first emerged during the Greek cultural era' (p. 18). This is then transferred to the pupils in the year in question: 'In year five, reflective thought emerges more clearly and demands a place for itself. This gives the children the opportunity to experience something of themselves, of their own forces of development, in big pictures' (Internal work material, 1998, p. 18). As regards history teaching for the same year, the curriculum states that 'the children will now get to know the great, ancient cultural eras in a way that tells them something characteristic, or symptomatic, about each era' (p. 50). The cultural eras are to be presented 'in such a way that the children experience how they succeed each other and how humanity changes step by step' (p. 50).

A new curriculum was published in 1992. It was republished in 1997, unchanged except for a new introduction. It is stated in this introduction (Bøhn, 1997, p. 9) that 'for Steiner, the spiritual world was present and real, although not physically visible. Through anthroposophy, he dedicated his life to bringing the spiritual dimension of being into cultural life'. According to Steiner, it was 'historical development itself that had led the view of human nature away from its spiritual foundation'. There is reason to emphasise this last sentence, as it points to a view of development that Steiner returns to in several contexts. I will return to this, but for now I include it because a curriculum expresses a certain view of historical development.

As regards history teaching for year six, reference is made to a link between the Greek cultural era and pupils in year six:

As Greek culture, with its art and thought, appears to be characterised by clarity and harmony, the sixth-grader also seems to be in a kind of harmonious balance between the lightness of childhood and the weight of puberty. If they are not exactly 'Greeks', at least they find themselves in a phase of life when reflective thought emerges and demands a place for itself. Combined with the fact that they will remain children for a little while yet, the age of eleven seems to be a sort of blooming that precisely through the Greek aspect finds nourishment for further development (Bøhn 1997, p. 49).

A new curriculum was published in 2004 (Kvalvaag, 2004). Arve Mathisen wrote the introduction to this curriculum. He makes no mention of a possible link between historical development and children's development, except for a general sentence stating that 'the Waldorf educational theory is based on a spiritual idea of development in the sense that the teacher's work is motivated by the developmental needs of the whole person' (p. 15). The idea of development is described solely on the basis of children's own development in relation to fellowship and learning.

Under 'General points of view' on the subject of history (pp. 67–68), on the other hand, it says that 'world history can be regarded as the great common biography of humanity'. Emphasis is placed on selecting subject matter and teaching methods that support the pupil's stage of maturity:

Just as individuals have their own biographies comprising very different experiences and developmental paths, world history can be regarded as the great common biography of humanity. Through being taught history, pupils can connect with humanity as a whole and thus gain a basis for understanding both themselves and their own time in the context of a big, general flow of development [...] Experience shows that children's development echoes of the cultural development, not mechanically and schematically, but as a qualitative parallel. If you bring up the right subject matter at the right time, this connection manifests itself as a kind of joy of recognition, an eagerness to connect with what is described. (Kvalvaag, 2004, p. 67).

In the curriculum completed in 2007 and revised in 2010, 'a kind of joy of recognition' has become 'a kind of recognition'. It is still about a point of contact between 'the great common flow of history and the

individual child's stage of development', and history as a subject matches 'the development of consciousness in the pupils based on historical development motifs' (Ringheim & Härström 2007, revised 2010, p. 44).

### *Culture epoch theory*

The above quotations reflect an idea that there is a correspondence between individual and historical development. This way of thinking is found in what is known as the *culture epoch theory*. It made its appearance in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Solerød, 2012) and was based on the assumption that 'history develops from epoch to epoch, and each generation must go through these epochs on their way to cultural maturity' (p. 176). The idea was formulated by Johann Friedrich Herbart and Tuiskon Ziller. According to this theory, individuals pass through different periods in their lives that correspond to a stage of cultural development that humanity has undergone. Teaching should therefore be arranged according to stages of cultural history that the pupils were to work through (Solerød, 2012). This theory found support in biology – with Ernst Haeckel, to be precise. His hypothesis was that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, expressed as the biogenetic law (Zelaso, 2013). Solerød (p. 177) describes the law as follows: 'It was thought that the embryos of most species seemed to recapitulate the evolution of their species in their development up until birth'. Thus, he continues, the culture epoch theory was confirmed by biological theory.<sup>2</sup> Solerød (2012) concludes that the culture epoch theory is outdated and now only of historical interest.

As far as I can see, this 'outdated' theory, which is 'only of historical interest', is nevertheless reflected in the curricula I have referred to so far. But before I problematise this, there is reasons to ask to what extent the culture epoch theory as it has become enshrined in the curricula is actually based on Steiner's view of history. Moreover, can we find it in the very first curricula prepared after the first Waldorf school was established in Stuttgart in 1919?

### *The Stockmeyer curriculum and Discussions with Teachers*

The curriculum known as the *Stockmeyer curriculum* (1976) was one of the first curricula to be adopted after the establishment of Waldorf education. It was translated from German into other languages, and has influenced much of the subsequent curriculum work, also in Norway.<sup>3</sup> The same applies to *Discussion with Teachers* (1967), which is based on shorthand records of advice given to the teachers by Steiner on a continuous basis during the period from 1919 to 1924.

### *The Stockmeyer curriculum*

The Stockmeyer curriculum includes many Steiner quotes about pedagogy, didactics and methodology, including about teaching history. There are no ideas about parallelism between individual and historical development, even though the idea of development is clearly present. This is worth noting, particularly considering how often this thinking is found in the curricula I have made reference to so far.

Stockmeyer quotes from a course in methodology and didactics that Steiner held before the school opened:

At this point [the pupil at age 12] he begins to take an inner interest in the great historical connections. [...] In earlier times, history education largely consisted of learning something about wars and rulers – which is not history – and a few dates when kings and famous people had lived and battles taken place. What will be important in history education in future is how the cultural life of humankind has developed. The teaching must absorb the impulses of history at the right time and include them in the curriculum (Steiner, quoted in Stockmeyer, 1976, p. 155).

2. According to Solerød (2012), the terms *recapitulation theory* and *culture epoch theory* were often used interchangeably. I mostly use the latter alternative, unless I am quoting a source that uses the first of the two terms.

3. All translations of German and Norwegian texts into English are done by the author.

The cultural development of humankind shall be an important factor, and emphasis is placed on introducing the right subject matter at the right time. Steiner is nevertheless concerned that ‘when we teach history, we should be aware that the most important thing for people is the history we experience in the present’ (quoted in Stockmeyer, p. 156). We should not portray a historical period or event as if it were detached from the time in which the children themselves live, says Steiner. On the contrary, we should be aware that the most important thing is for the child to experience history from his or her perspective in the immediate present. He uses the Greek era as an example, and points out that there are immediate living forces in the present that originate from that era, and that it is important to impart a sense of this to the pupils. The didactic method he recommends is to give the children an impression of the situation today and of how this originated in the Greek era. That will give the children ‘an idea of how history is not an endless repetition, but that a specific phenomenon is created at a specific time [...] In this way, the child gains a certain firm position in the present. The child says to itself: Our era also has a certain contribution to make to eternity’ (Steiner, quoted in Stockmeyer, 1976, p. 156).

As mentioned above, and as far as I can see, there is nothing here that can be cited in support of the culture epoch theory. There are no references in the Stockmeyer curriculum to the existence of a parallelism between the development of the pupils’ consciousness and the historical development of consciousness. The present is the aspect that is emphasised.

### *Discussions with Teachers*

Nor does *Discussions with Teachers* contain wordings that evoke associations with the culture epoch theory. In this book, Steiner advises teachers on how to interpret how encounters between cultures promote development. One of his examples deals with the era of the Crusades (Steiner, 1967). He describes how the Crusaders wanted to Europeanise an area dominated by ‘the Mongols, Mamelukes and Ottomans’, but failed (p. 81). Nevertheless, according to Steiner (1967), they did bring back knowledge and experience from the Muslim world to Europe. This was essential to Europe’s spiritual development. He encourages the teachers to communicate to their pupils how many words used in Europe today stem from the Arabic language, and how a backward Europe underwent a transformation as a result of what they had learnt in the Orient. In addition to Arabic vocabulary, the Europeans also learnt agriculture, political thinking that led to the formation of city states, and industrial production from the Muslim culture (p. 85). This is an idea of development, even though it focuses on the importance of the Crusades to European development and progress.

In *Discussions with Teachers*, Steiner emphasises that, above all, the teachers must take account of the change that took place in the 16th century. They must keep in mind that what transpired was ‘a great difference in the perception, feeling and thought of men before and after this time’ (p. 151). The idea of development is expressed in *Discussions with Teachers*, and in two forms: the latter example has to do with the change in consciousness that occurred in connection with the Renaissance, while the first concerns how encounters between cultures promote development. However, there are no statements that are open to a culture epoch theory interpretation.

### *Criticism against culture epoch theory in the Waldorf school curriculum – and what was Steiner’s own view?*

According to Helmut Zander (2007), the Waldorf school curriculum is chronologically organised by historical eras, and ‘the other subjects are subordinate to them’ (p. 1410). He writes that it is based on a thesis, namely that ‘it is possible to draw a parallel between the child’s development and humanity’s development’, and that such a conceptualisation is operationalised in Waldorf pedagogy (p. 1440).

As I have shown by means of examples from Norwegian curricula, it is not difficult to find support for such a thesis. It can also be found in secondary Waldorf pedagogy literature, not least in the writings of Rudolf Grosse, a pioneer and leading figure in early Waldorf pedagogy (von Plato, 2003). Zander uses a quote from him as an example:

In its tenth year, the child is a Teuton, then a Greek, then completes the journey from the East to the Mediterranean and becomes a Roman at the age of twelve, in its thirteenth year a knight and a friar, then a Columbus discovering America, and goes with Napoleon to Russia at fourteen and arrives in the present on reaching sexual maturity (Grosse, quoted in Zander, 2007, p. 1410).

In another context, Grosse further emphasises this by writing that ‘the method that permeates Steiner’s pedagogy’ can be formulated as follows: ‘the forces at play inside the child become, through the subject matter taught, an objective “mirror” of the same processes that take place in the development of humankind’ (Grosse 1980, p. 13).

But can the culture epoch theory, as implicitly expressed by Grosse and others, be related to Steiner’s view of history? Alduino Mazzone shed light on this issue in his doctoral dissertation (1999). He writes that Steiner was unwilling to transfer the recapitulation theory to the field of education, as Herbart and Ziller, as well as their successor Wilhelm Rein, did. The latter proposed that history should be presented ‘from its beginnings up to the present time, following a succession of cultural epochs that corresponded to the stages of psychological growth observable among children’ (Mazzone, 1999, p. 64).

Herbart, Ziller and their successor Rein (and later also G. Stanley Hall) were very influential, first in Central Europe, and later in the UK and USA, and had a direct impact on the history curricula, where teaching was supposed to progress from the mythical to factual history. According to Mazzone (1999), these development didactics are clearly recognisable in the Waldorf school curricula.

But was Steiner’s thinking influenced by the culture epoch theory when he drafted his outline of topics? Mazzone’s work contains no direct references to Steiner having regarded the culture epoch theory as adequate in relation to the curriculum – quite the opposite, in fact. In a lecture for teachers in 1920, Steiner asked how a parallel between the soul-spiritual development of the individual human being and the biogenetic principle could be justified (Mazzone, 1999). He answered that the idea that the development of the child repeats the development of the whole human race is a ‘flight of fancy’ that does not correspond to the facts. He goes on to say that, even though we can observe the human embryo and detect forms that show similarities and development from simple species to more complex ones, the biogenetic law cannot be applied to a child’s spiritual development after birth:

However, when observing the child during the first years, one cannot detect a repetition of aboriginal human conditions nor, as the child grows older, a repetition of later phases of mankind’s evolution. In order to discover such features in the child, it would be necessary to introduce imaginary forces and processes into his development. It was a beautiful invention of (some) educationalists, when they asserted that during their development children passed through the same stages of barbarism as mankind did long ago; or that at certain stages of boyhood, the Persian culture was being relived. One can of course conjure up all kinds of poetical pictures of this kind, but they are nonsense because such ideas do not correspond to reality (Steiner, quoted in Mazzone, 1999, p. 66).

Steiner clearly rejects the use of recapitulation theory as a mirror of children’s development, and in a lecture on education (Steiner, 1998), he criticises Rein for applying the biogenetic law to curriculum thinking.

Although Steiner rejects the culture epoch theory, he has in other contexts pointed to the stages of development of the child as a means of accessing past eras’ form of consciousness. In a series of lectures on education held just after the establishment of the Waldorf school (Steiner, 1998a), he distanced himself from the application of the biogenetic law to education, calling it ‘abstract theory’ that should definitely not be entertained if one wants to ‘build on a new knowledge of human beings as the basis for a real art of teaching for the future’ (p.45). He then opens up for such an approach, as long as it does not become abstract and banal, but is kept ‘artistic and intuitive’ (p. 56). One year later, in autumn 1920, he elaborated on this (Steiner, 2003). The three first seven-year periods in a child’s life are used as a key to identifying with historical development. He links these three periods to *imitation* (0–7 years), *authority* (7–14 years), and *judgement* (14–21 years). He uses these well-known key concepts in Waldorf pedagogy to characterise the development of the soul from the Ancient Orient via Antiquity and the Middle Ages to the present day. According to Steiner (2003), a theocratic Mystery Culture in which initiated priests educated the people

held a strong position in the Orient. The people, on their part, lived in accordance with the principle of imitation, following the edicts of initiated priests and leaders in the same way as a present-day child follows the adults in its environment. In later eras, of which the Middle Ages can serve as an example, people were less influenced by the principle of imitation than in the ancient Orient, but related strongly to the principle of authority, much as children between the ages of seven and fourteen do. From being subject to external leadership, there is a shift, according to Steiner (2003), towards using one's independent judgement to a much greater extent, which in Waldorf pedagogy is relevant to pupils once they have reached sexual maturity. And 'what is crucial today is to leave behind the principle of authority and live by the principle of independent judgement' (Steiner, 2003, pp. 115 and 116). What this means is that what manifests itself in our time as certain soul qualities in different phases of childhood used to be stretched out as a certain soul quality over a longer period of time. Steiner does not infer any pedagogical or didactic consequences from this. His intention is, by describing children's development in our time, to arrive at an understanding of humanity's consciousness in earlier times, and of how it has changed over the course of history. So Steiner (2003) does refer to parallels between the development of children and historical development, but only as a means of understanding past eras' forms of consciousness. Not the other way around: to use past eras' form of consciousness as keys to present-day education.

Considering the varying degree to which the culture epoch theory has influenced Waldorf school curricula, it is a paradox that Steiner himself did not endorse it. Bente Edlund (2010), who has also studied the relationship between the culture epoch theory and Waldorf pedagogy, mentions Sigmund Freud as one of those who 'endorsed this theory in various contexts' (p. 42). In the field of education, she makes reference to G. Stanley Hall. According to him, 'the individual child's development was under total phylogenetic control; both motor development and the development of interests, fear and play' (pp. 41 and 42). Edlund also provides an example of Norwegian educational thinking about this issue. It is taken from Helga Eng's work on children's drawings. Understanding children's culture as remnants of a previous adult culture is common, but, according to Edlund, Eng shows 'a specific recapitulation interpretation in which she claims that the comparison between children's art and Palaeolithic art could partly confirm the biogenetic law that the child repeats the development of humankind' (p. 42).

Edlund also writes that Waldorf pedagogy literature refers to Steiner in connection with the recapitulation theory (the culture epoch theory), but that no explicit or specific support for this reference can be found in Steiner's works. Edlund (2010) must also conclude that 'searches for statements in Steiner's works on education that explicitly acknowledge that the Waldorf school's curriculum was designed as a reflection of cultural history, yield meagre results' (p. 50). However, she is not willing to entirely discount the idea that 'Steiner's developmental psychology and curriculum reflects humanity's development of consciousness and cultural history' (p. 51), and, from the modest number of statements by Steiner she has collected, she cites an example that contains the idea of parallelism:

The child, who in its inclinations in many ways represents what has been expressed in previous cultural periods, demands a human connection to what is demanded of its will. We should not introduce the child to the abstract forms that letters of the alphabet have gained over time (Steiner, quoted in Edlund, 2010, p. 51).

Edlund (p. 51) writes that the recapitulation theory now appears to have been forgotten, or suppressed. However, in secondary Waldorf pedagogy literature 'wordings can be found that point to a recapitulationist way of thinking' and 'the grounds given for Waldorf education's cultural history curriculum open up the possibility of a parallel between the general development of consciousness and cultural history and the maturation that each individual child goes through as they grow up'. Nonetheless:

In Steiner's own work, it is difficult to find explicit arguments to support that the curriculum and methods are based on the idea of an assumed parallelism between phylogenesis and ontogenesis. On the contrary, he rejected the link between child psychology and the theory of evolution. Nor is this found among the early curriculum theorists in the Waldorf school (Edlund, 2010, p. 51).

Edlund writes that 'Steiner clearly did not endorse applying a morphological biological principle to the area of psychology and culture'. She nevertheless believes that the 'hints of cultural-psychological parallelism'

found in Waldorf school curricula are not 'pulled out of thin air, but exist as a possibility when reading Steiner's other works' (p. 52).

A way of thinking has thus developed, both in curricula work and in Waldorf pedagogy literature, that implicitly expresses the culture epoch theory. As I demonstrated, the presence of such thinking is minimal in the most recently revised version of the curriculum, although it does exist, for example when it states that 'history as a subject (matches) the development of consciousness in the pupils based on historical development motifs' (Ringheim & Härström, 2007, p. 46, rev. 2015). Both critics of Waldorf pedagogy (Zander, 2007) and high-profile Waldorf educationalists (Grosse, 1980) have emphasised the idea of parallelisation of individual and historical development as an important central element of Waldorf pedagogy.

## Eurocentrism

As I have mentioned, the concept of development is linked to Eurocentrism. In the 20th century and up until the present day, the concept of development has also been problematised as much as Eurocentrism in how we view history. The classic concept of development was linked to development as something that 'takes place in stages, and that different countries are at all times at different stages of development', writes Hilde Reinertsen (2006, p. 30). It is an old idea in the Western tradition that different cultures represent different levels of enlightenment and degrees of realisation of their potential, she continues: 'It is hardly a surprise that Europe came out on top in this representation. Asia was regarded as enlightened, but stagnated, while Africa was deemed to show no signs of even the slightest hint of enlightenment' (p. 30). The Eurocentrically biased logic of development also prevailed in colonial times, and was then transferred from Europe to the rest of the world. However, the same ideas also dominated during the postcolonial period, introduced as a new economic doctrine. Economic growth became a crucial criterion for determining which developmental stage a society had achieved. In this perspective, the West had already completed the development process. Societies at lower levels could thus accelerate their own development by adopting Western technology and institutions (Reinertsen, 2006).

Kjeldstadli (2006, p. 13) believes that two elements from classic Western history thinking are worth keeping: chronology and change. What we need to get rid of, in his opinion, are our notions of a goal and progress. We must also abandon the notion of development from a lower to a higher stage. Changes do occur, but the idea that all societies go through the same (and necessary) development should be abandoned, according to Kjeldstadli (2006).

Postmodern thinkers strongly criticised a view of history that was based on the existence of general patterns and that aimed to impose one perspective on history (Kjeldstadli, 2006). Is *thinking* in terms of perspective at all adequate? Together with the 'dream of syntheses', does this not mean violating diversity, constructing unfounded patterns and exercising power by depicting history as one big narrative' (p. 12)? If we only tell one narrative, we eliminate all the others at the same time, according to postmodern criticism. Kjeldstadli acknowledges that such a point of view is justified, but he also sees this criticism as problematic because it is based on a metanarrative, which is also an underlying narrative stating that 'really, fundamentally speaking, the world does not consist of patterns, is not structured, but consists only of individual episodes, atomic phenomena, individuals' (p. 12).

When one narrative eliminates others, a hierarchy of values arises. One attempt to avoid this took the form of cultural relativism (Gismervik, 2006): 'Cultural relativism means acknowledging the distinct characteristics of different cultures without elevating one of them to a standard' (p. 36). We refrain from quality assessing different cultures precisely in order to avoid Eurocentrism, which favours the culture of which we ourselves are a product. This attitude has been criticised for, 'in its eagerness to underestimate Europe', not presenting a balanced view of history (p. 36). The question Gismervik (2006) asks is whether 'we are capable of viewing difference through a neutral lens, without Eurocentrism clouding our vision' (s. 36). He does not answer the question, but asks himself whether it is even possible to avoid making value judgements, and whether this would be desirable.

Kjeldstadli (2006) suggests that we must try to identify some general lines, but believes that the traditional representation of history with specific patterns and necessary stages is not a feasible approach: In that case we will end up with the narrative about a 'primitive state, via barbarism to civilisation, in which the Western world is superior to the rest' (p. 12). He points out that viewing the history of the world as a development of complex and long-lasting, parallel civilisations existing on a grand scale is a tradition that originated with Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, and more recently Samuel Huntington. They all saw these civilisations as 'qualitatively different, closed to the outside world, and internally homogeneous', which Kjeldstadli believes can both be 'disputed' and 'also, to put it frankly, results in a pretty belligerent programme for the 21st century' (p. 13).

For Kjeldstadli (2006), 'comparative macrosociology' is one feasible approach (p. 13). It involves studying societies to identify similarities and differences in economic, social, cultural and political factors, as well as similarities and differences between worldviews. However, this approach also presents a problem that has to be solved: 'How can we avoid imposing categories developed on the basis of one form of society, usually the Western form, on other forms of society?' (p. 13). The following admission is also a necessary part of the postcolonial discourse: history-writing has been dominated by Eurocentrism, and a global and multicultural society requires a more open and inclusive approach (Kjeldstadli, 2006).

In his book on history didactics for teachers and students, Lund (2011) writes that what used to be the political goal of history as a discipline, i.e. nation-building and promoting national identity, is problematic seen in light of the current global situation. The question is how to deal with the 'challenges posed by multicultural society in today's curricula' (p. 39). The criticism against Eurocentric history teaching was particularly strong in the 1970s, both at the academic and at the subject didactics level. The history of other cultures and civilisations was gradually introduced to traditional teaching of world history, but Western civilisation was regarded as leading and as a goal for the rest of the world to aspire to. And the goal was defined in terms of the degree of economic growth and democracy (Lund, 2011).

The alternative, which (first) emerged in the USA, was called *new world history*. As far as I can see, this is synonymous with the concept of *global history*, which, according to Jarle Simensen (2006, p. 15), is a neologism for the term *world history*, and describes an approach to history that is liberated from the 'old' world history's concept of development and Eurocentrism. Based on *new world history* and the recently defined *global history*, attempts were made to perceive the world as a whole, which means not 'assessing different cultures and civilisations as separate entities', but, as Kjeldstadli (2006) expressed it, studying 'different kinds of connections and interactions between civilisations and societies through the ages, and patterns of change that cut across and are not limited to certain countries or civilisations'. In this approach, globalisation is dealt with not as a phenomenon that has arisen in recent decades, but as a historical process over a much longer period.

The new global history was met with resistance, not least in the USA. The Senate voted against it (by a majority of one vote) in 1996, and the majority wanted to continue the practice of in-depth study of Western civilisation. This point of view gained even greater influence after 11 September 2001 (Lund, 2011). In recent years, however, global history has gained support both in the USA and in Europe. A recommendation from a congress for European history teachers in Berlin in 1995 emphasised the importance of recognising that history has been misused through emphasising national identity in the sense of cultivating a patriotic feeling of being 'good Frenchmen', 'good Germans' and 'good Norwegians'. History as a subject thereby cultivated "us and them" attitudes and clear depictions of "the enemy", not least in textbooks' (p. 47).

On the topic of the *subject of history in a multicultural society and a global world*, Lund (2011) concludes by referring to a 30-year-long research project carried out at universities in London and Leeds that has resulted in a *transnational curriculum* (p. 56). This curriculum focuses on 'the great common history of humanity' and enables 'the pupils to themselves create the big pictures of the past' (p. 60). Lund writes that there is little room for history as traditional nation-building and national identity in this alternative transnational curriculum, which, among other things, states that, in order to achieve the goal of history awareness, it will be necessary for goals 'relating to national citizenship and identity to be subordinate

to a history curriculum of global reach, relevance and validity' (Lund, 2011, p. 61). Lund is critical of what he describes as a tendency to place stronger emphasis on national history, which he claims that many countries do. Instead, he proposes that the transnational curriculum 'should be an important corrective and a perspective for further development of the Norwegian curriculum' (p. 61).

## Eurocentrism and history teaching in the Waldorf School

The importance of a world history dimensioning of history awareness by focusing on multiperspectivity, historical comparisons of cultures, and source and presentation criticism, has set the trend in the general educational discourse in Germany, writes Michael Zech (2012). If we 'define an educational goal as *lifeworld orientation* (*lebensweltliche Orientierung*), history must, [...] in an age of global interaction and mutual interdependence, necessarily reflect its local, national and regional narratives in a global context' (p. 340).

Zech asks: How has this influenced the curriculum and teaching of history in Waldorf education? He refers to the fact that Waldorf education's history curriculum included cultural and world history from the outset. The basis for this was the school's institutional self-understanding, whereby the purpose of education was to serve the individual, and not primarily to comply with the teaching goals defined by the state. Based on Steiner's view of history, he continues, there is one specific narrative that functions as an organising element both for the history curriculum and for Waldorf pedagogy as a whole:

In this narrative, all of history is regarded as an expression of a step-by-step progression and a multi-layered process for the emancipation of the individual. Humanity has thus emancipated itself from an original family/ clan-based, and, later, collective/religious, manorial form of life and society. In this perspective, the pre-modern forms of culture are seen as precursors, which also created the preconditions for the modern individuation process (Zech, 2012, p. 341).

Here, Zech summarises the development logic inherent in Steiner's view of history, and also in history teaching in Waldorf education. As described by Zech in a later article (2014), this is clearly intended to highlight the diversity of historical expressions and the distinctive value of the single cultural epochs. This is also clear from the Norwegian history curriculum, where it is emphasised that 'at the point of intersection between the humanity and individual aspect', we find 'the good grounds for the subject's place in an education process, namely to strengthen and cultivate the individual's identity with a view to achieving a deeper understanding of "the others", both in time and space' (Ringheim & Härström, 2007, p. 44, revised 2010).

In my view, the development logic we find in Steiner (1961), with a clear Indo-European line of development concentrated around geographical points (India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, the Roman Empire, Europe), has a distinct Eurocentric quality. It is thereby open to the criticism referred to by Kjeldstadli (2006) and Lund (2011), among others. When Zech (2014) writes that the older cultures are regarded as 'precursors' of 'the modern individuation process', one can recognise the criticism that Kjeldstadli (1992) draws attention to, namely that, in the past, 'world history' was really about the history of Europe. While it is true that the river cultures of Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt were also included, that was because they were perceived as the 'precursors of European civilisation' (Kjeldstadli 1992, p. 87).

What distinguishes Steiner's notion of development from the above, according to Edlund (2010), is that he does not describe a progression from low to high, but goes in the opposite direction: he describes a development from something 'higher' in pre-logical, mythical times, to something 'lower', more aware and down-to-earth, in a time characterised by rational consciousness. At the same time, this 'descent' leads to individuality being present, i.e. the specifically human regardless of ethnicity, as expressed, for example, in Steiner's criticism of Spengler's view of history. Here, Steiner writes that Spengler's 'materialistic mysticism', which is based on the importance of blood ties, fails to see what is specific to our time (1962, p. 54). In Steiner's view, modernity is characterised by humanity having arrived at a point where the specifically human increasingly breaks free from the collective and ethnically based (Steiner, 1963).

In Steiner's (1962) criticism of the historian Karl Lamprecht, he highlights a distinction between Lamprecht's method and his own spiritual investigation. Where Lamprecht 'seeks to find historical periods

of development for the German people,' spiritual investigation must 'ignore the boundaries drawn for the development of peoples and tribes. It is necessary to keep the general historical origin of humanity in mind' (p. 205). According to Zech (2014), there is much evidence to support that Steiner's emphasis on world history rather than national history also had consequences for the prominence given to the former in the Waldorf school curriculum. Zech (2014) writes that Steiner's approach to the history of culture and consciousness cannot be incorporated into national history. In that sense, 'history education in Waldorf schools is dimensioned on the basis of the history of humanity and world history from the outset' (p. 96).

Although Steiner emphasises general history, not history that is limited to 'the development of peoples and tribes', in my view, his presentation of history nevertheless has clear Eurocentric characteristics. This is clear from Steiner's idea of cultural development (Zech, 2012), where he regards phases of development and culture as expressions of variation in human consciousness. The idea on which Waldorf history education, in particular, and Waldorf pedagogy, in general, rests is an understanding of individuality where the leading thought is the individual human being's realisation of autonomy and self-awareness (Zech, 2012). Thereby, Zech continues, the traditions from the Age of Enlightenment and antiquity's philosophical thinking about human beings are also given a central place in the curricula, along with the great civilisations of pre-antiquity and their specific cultural and consciousness-related expressions. The red thread that runs from theocratic societies to incipient democracies, individualism and autonomy, is spun from a Western/European mentality; it is, in other words Eurocentric. Even if one teach in accordance with the above-mentioned curricula and treat previous civilisations with great respect in order to enable pupils to identify with them, it is nevertheless difficult to free oneself from the idea of these epochs as precursors of the current European/Western form of consciousness.

Zech addresses this by pointing out that the big narratives presented in oral teaching at upper primary level becomes increasingly complex and complicated at higher levels. In upper secondary school, the teaching of world history is greatly expanded, and Zech (2012, p. 343) writes that, at this level, teaching takes place 'less through Steiner's traditional epoch concepts, and more through the knowledge horizon that comes from the (subject) teacher'. This expands the 'Eurocentric presentation of history'. History *understanding* is explicitly addressed in the final year of upper secondary school. Pupils are confronted with the idea that there is no one history as such, only different presentations that can be questioned. The pupils have to navigate their way through different positions and points of view (Zech, 2012). The world history dimensioning therefore does not attempt or aim to communicate a wide-ranging content, but to 'elaborate on history as ways of thinking, as a means of epistemological orientation for self- and world understanding' (p. 343).

Here we see a conscious use of a development logic of a more narrative nature in the way history is presented in the first school years, which is replaced by a more analytical and historical-critical approach in later school years. According to Zech (2012), Steiner's epoch concept thereby gradually recedes into the background, the Eurocentric presentation of history is broadened, and there is no longer one presentation of history, but several, and they can all be problematised.

Does this mean that the question of the culture epoch theory and a Eurocentric aspect of Waldorf history education has been resolved? This question requires more thorough discussion.

## Discussion

In history and pedagogy discourse, the culture epoch theory is regarded as interesting, in that it was used until as recently as the 1950s, but it is also seen as obsolete and outdated (Solerød, 2012). As I have shown, it has nevertheless persisted longer in the curricula of the Norwegian Waldorf schools. The more recent curricula include a proviso, however: That we 'can find an echo of the development of culture in children's development' should not be understood 'mechanically and schematically' (Kvalvaag, 2004, p. 67). But it is there, even if it is less explicit in more recent curricula, particularly in the current one (which was revised in 2015). Culture epoch thinking is also found in secondary Waldorf pedagogy literature, not least in Grosse (quoted in Zander, 2007), which clearly emphasises that the child 'mirrors' historical phases from year to year.

It is possible, as Edlund (2010) also points out, to find phrasing in Waldorf education curricula and secondary literature that is influenced by culture epoch theory. But she concludes that explicit support for this view of development cannot be found either in Steiner or in the early curriculum theorists in the Waldorf school.

Steiner consistently rejected the application of culture epoch theory to the field of education, and, as I have demonstrated, he expresses his rejection in no uncertain terms (Steiner, 1998a and 2003). Thus, the culture epoch theory appears to have been as outdated for Steiner in the early 1920s as it is for Solerød (2012) and others nearly a century later. At the same time, we can find many examples in Steiner's other works where he uses the development phases of individuals as keys to understanding the development of consciousness throughout history.

One possible reflection about whether the culture epoch theory has left its mark on curricula and secondary literature, despite Steiner's explicit rejection of it, is that writings on development logic in Steiner's other works have seeped into a pedagogy that from the outset had a clear development didactics orientation. On the one hand, in a time where the culture epoch theory is regarded as outdated, this could lead to Waldorf education falling into a 'conservation trap' by deeming the idea of parallelism to be an 'underlying law' (Edlund 2010, p. 52). On the other hand, in the opinion of Zech (2012) and others, Steiner's view of development and culture phases as expressions of variation in human consciousness is fruitful in the history didactics context. This is not least the case if it is a condition that all times and all cultures are perceived as a particular manifestation of a *common* human culture (Zech, 2012). As mentioned, Steiner's development logic has not only left its mark on history teaching, it has also become a model in Waldorf pedagogy that means that humanity (like the individual) is gradually realising itself through increasing self-awareness and individual autonomy (Zech, 2012). Zech also referred to this development logic as furthering teaching and making pupils more interested. Zech finds the presentation of history as a journey from a pre-logical, magical-mythical and theocratic era, via a logical, philosophical era of incipient democracy, to an era of natural science characterised by autonomy and individualism, to be a pedagogically and didactically productive and engaging approach (2012).

At the same time, and in my opinion, the idea of such a course of historical development is clearly Eurocentric. Although Steiner expresses sympathy for the richness and distinctive nature of all culture epochs, and although he views the development as descending rather than ascending, he nevertheless unequivocally emphasises the adequate form of consciousness in our time as the form that is associated with individual freedom, and the independent human being who is no longer subject to overarching religious or ethnic demands (Steiner, 1988). Such a form of consciousness is cosmopolitan in orientation in that it concerns humanity as a whole, but its origin is in Europe, and the preceding historical eras are seen as its precursors in terms of culture and consciousness.

The problem with this view of development is that, while it stands for values that are easily recognisable and easy to endorse in our time, they define – if not explicitly, then at least implicitly – non-individual, collective and ethnically based cultures as inadequate forms of consciousness. This means, as far as I can see, that both Eurocentrism and a more or less clear ranking of values is inherent in this view of development.

There is no evidence in Steiner's work to support that the culture epoch theory can be deemed to be compatible with children's development. The fact that traces of it can still be found in the curriculum and in Waldorf pedagogy thinking should be discussed in the Waldorf education community. The question we should ask is how the idea of a possible parallelism should be understood. This does not mean that we should opportunistically take a position as close as possible to prevailing opinion. The main point is that we must be able to justify our own approach to development didactics.

Today, there are Waldorf schools on all continents and in all cultures. The fact that the Waldorf schools have not been confined to a European context, but are integrated into different religious and cultural contexts, and that there are also several intercultural Waldorf schools in Germany, indicates that it is more than just a Western fringe phenomenon.

Steiner's own orientation was both individual and cosmopolitan (Steiner, 1998), and this is also true of the Waldorf schools. However, it is possible to interpret Steiner's idea of development as favouring a certain culture, and the culture in question will in such case be that of Europe and the Western World. The development from earlier spiritual, magical-mystical and theocratic societies connected through blood ties to a gradually developing logical, democratic and rational culture, with materialism, science and autonomy as the basis for a new and independent relationship to spirituality, is described by Steiner as a movement from east to west. Such a Eurocentric idea that views this development as a long road towards individuation, is a central element not only in history teaching, but also in Waldorf pedagogy as such. The question, however, is whether this leads to a one-sided Eurocentrism, where cultures that fall outside it are deemed to be backward and outdated, or whether it opens up for the possibility of respecting different ways of being a human being.

As regards Waldorf education, my conclusion is that the idea of a pedagogy that educates pupils to value individual freedom and independent thinking and take an interest in the world by giving them an education that seeks to achieve identification with a diversity of cultures and many ways of being a human being, is relevant to our times, inclusive and forward-looking. Even though such development didactics are intimately linked to the context of European and Western history of ideas, it is possible to represent it in a way that recognises the value of different cultures without favouring ones own. This does not mean that one have to abandon the idea of the development of consciousness through history, it is more about the attitude one take when presenting different historical and contemporary cultural expressions, where, without ranking them by value, one can describe a rich cultural material and a development logic that is not linear, but shows the rich variation of humanity.

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