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# An emergent, rhizomic approach to curriculum for Waldorf schools

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ABSTRACT. Over the last century, Waldorf schools have become established around the world. They are united in pedagogical approach, but distributed in different geographies, cultures and contexts. This article critiques the arborescent model of a single, original, authentic and historical Waldorf curriculum that has often been 'transplanted' as an 'exotic' in other cultural and geographical spaces, suggesting in its stead the Deleuzoguattarian botanical metaphor of an emergent, rhizomic process, one which allows 'native' species to develop. A brief survey of the history of Waldorf curricula suggests arborescent curricula are inappropriate and inadequate when dealing with the factors of time and space. The need to adapt and modify Waldorf curriculum is both intrinsic, given the need to take account of cultural differences, and extrinsic, in response to the major social, economic and ecological challenges faced today. Neoliberal educational policies of performativity and standardisation increasingly require Waldorf schools to demonstrate their educational outcomes in measurable forms, which can threaten curriculum autonomy. By exploring what a common rhizomic network might comprise, the authors believe that this model can help enable Waldorf schools to recontextualise curriculum in their own situations and overcome discernible Eurocentric traditions.

*Keywords*: rhizomic, emergent, layered curriculum, curriculum, Eurocentrism

## Introduction

Aoki (2005) and Roy (2003) have written about the notion of rhizomic curriculum. This article takes the concept of rhizomic curriculum and curriculum development and applies it to the particular case of Steiner Waldorf education to see what it offers this century-old movement, now widely distributed in scores of countries around the world. Ted Aoki claims that "the word *curriculum* is yearning for new meanings. It feels choked, out of breath, caught in a landscape wherein 'curriculum' as master signifier is restricted to planned curriculum with all its supposed, splendid instrumentalism" (2005, p. 423). We would argue that the same yearning for new meanings applies to Waldorf curriculum (inter alia, see Bransby & Rawson, 2020). In order to reframe the Waldorf approach to curriculum, we consider Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2013) the notion of the rhizome offers a lens through which to view familiar topics and understand them in new ways. In this book *Teachers in nomadic spaces*, Roy (2003) explores aspects of curricula through a Deleuzoguattarian lens; we continue this approach to view the particular challenges faced by the global Waldorf movement.

This is, in many ways, an abrupt departure from how curriculum has so far been conceptualised and situated in the century-long history of the Waldorf movement.[1] Framing curriculum using Deleuzoguattarian terms such as 'rhizomic' offers possibilities of freeing Waldorf practice from approaches that seek to reproduce a construct that is imagined as an original, historical and authentic – an 'arborescent' curriculum that is actually based on historical traditions (Denjean, 2014) – so encouraging curricula to emerge at a local level, while retaining a common underlying structure.

## Rhizomes

What do these Deleuzoguattarian terms offer the Waldorf movement? The philosopher Gilles Deleuze und the psychoanalyst and social activist Félix Guattari produced a number of books of growing significance, among others *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987/2013), not a title one would immediately associate with education, let alone Waldorf education. However, in the introduction to the second volume (first published in 1976), is the essay 'Rhizome', in which the metaphor was explored contrasting a rhizome to the image of tree with roots.

Deleuze and Guattari characterise a rhizomorphic form as exemplifying the principles of connection and heterogeneity; each random point on a rhizome can be connected to any other, in contrast to the tree with roots, which stands alone and is ordered towards a centre. The characteristic quality of the rhizome is multiplicity and movement along lines of flight. They offer the analogy of the pianist Glenn Gould: when he varies the tempi of a piece of music, set by the composer, he is transforming the musical points into lines that flow, which is also the core principle of jazz compared with a marching band.

In *A thousand plateaus*, what is self-contained, given, resistant to change, separated from what is around it, replicable, is characterised as being "arborescent" or tree-like – in Deleuze and Guattari's words, a "root-book" (p. 5). This root-book is then contrasted with a rhizome which "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles" (p. 6). A rhizome has no predetermined structure but can proliferate freely, adapting to all circumstances. "Any point of the rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (p. 5). Moreover, "In a multiplicity, what counts are not the elements, but what there is between, the between, as site of relations which are not separable from each other. Every multiplicity *grows in the middle*" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. viii).

The rhizome is dynamic. It reacts to changes in its situation; it does not have a given shape or content. It constantly adapts itself to changes as they occur. It is at all times responsive and emergent. It is what Aoki (2005) calls a "live(d) curriculum." These live and lived curricula recognise and legitimate potential curricula "that in the imaginary of the arborescent landscape have been rendered invisible" (Aoki, 2005, p. 420). Rhizomic curricula are responsive to situation, to location, to culture, to time, to demographic. They allow a high degree of teacher responsivity to the same; they allow the teacher to "read the child" (Steiner, 1924/1997, p. 79), and respond with appropriate curriculum. Working in this way is a clear contrast to current reified, prescribed approaches to curriculum which can be found in Waldorf institutions and Waldorf texts.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a map, "an experimentation in contact with the real" (1987/2013, p. 12). This map "is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (p. 13), able to be used, reworked, transformed by contact with changed circumstances, new knowledge, altered requirements. A rhizomic map is in a constant state of becoming; it is responsive to its environment and surroundings, forever emergent. As rhizomic curriculum is developed, unique maps are established, each appropriate to its own geographic, social, cultural and pedagogical situations.

Such a map is contrasted to a tracing. A tracing is a copy; it is fixed, unable to be modified, and hazardous.

1. The terms Steiner education/schools are used interchangeably with Waldorf education/schools. In this article we use Waldorf to refer to all schools working with this educational approach.

> The tracing has already translated the map into an image; it has already transformed the rhizome into roots and radicles. It has organised, stabilised, neutralised the multiplicities according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it. It has generated, structuralised the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself. That is why the tracing is so dangerous. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013, p. 13)

A curricular tracing is then an imposition, non-emergent and not sensitive to its context. It takes what was an authentic map from elsewhere – another place or another time – and reproduces it elsewhere.

Appling the rhizomic–arborescent metaphor as a heuristic to Waldorf curricula, we get the following image. The rhizomic framework is located in the 'ground' of Steiner's pedagogical anthropology; the generative working principles (Rawson, 2021) derived from this anthropology make it possible for educators to generate and develop practice locally.

The arborescent model places a single, original, authentic curriculum at the centre of an expanding and evolving educational movement. Following this botanical metaphor, the seeds of the original tree are transplanted to other places and cultures, where they largely retain the character of exotics (indigenous plants being natives). Whilst some obvious changes have to made to the imported curriculum, such as the language of instruction, an arborescent curriculum retains as much as possible of what it imported, because it is believed to be an integral and irreplaceable part of Waldorf education. Attempts to find equivalents, for example, to story material such as the traditionally told Old Testament or Norse Myths can be frustrated since direct equivalents are rare, given the fact that this literature is embedded in specific cultural contexts and histories. The rhizome on the other hand has no centre or original source (except another part of the rhizome) and new shoots grow from any point where conditions allow. The implication is that, unlike the arborescent model which privileges a single original source, in the rhizomic model all plants/curricula are of equal value as long as they come from the rhizomic stem. Before exploring what a rhizome might consists of in relation to Waldorf curriculum, we look at how curriculum has developed within the Waldorf movement.

## Waldorf Curriculum

### *Origins*

In 1919, Rudolf Steiner gave an introductory course (Steiner, 1919/2020) to future teachers of the Waldorf School in Stuttgart which covered anthropological foundations of human development, practical advice on pedagogical approaches, as well as some indications of curriculum content. This was followed up by regular discussions with the teachers in which the actual practice of teaching in the school was discussed and further developed. Steiner continued to give lectures on the education, both in Stuttgart and other cities around Europe. This body of lectures is compiled in Steiner's *Collected Works*.[2]

When the Waldorf School was inspected for two weeks in February 1922 by Mr. Eisele, a representative of the education authorities, it was noted that there was no written curriculum explaining what was taught, how, when and why (Zdražil, 2019, see pp. 325-336). The teachers intended to remedy this, but it was only completed shortly before Steiner's death in April 1925. In October 1925, Caroline von Heydebrand published a 60-page account (1925/1994) of what was being taught in the Waldorf School, briefly listing the topics in each subject by year from grades 1 to 12. In her introduction to the text, she made it clear that the publication was not to be taken dogmatically as *the* curriculum, instead emphasising that teachers should create curriculum on the basis of Steiner's 'ideal' curriculum and their "reading of [the] children" (Steiner, 1924/1997, p. 79) within the actual conditions. "The ideal curriculum must follow the changing picture of human nature in the different age-groups, but like every ideal it must deal with the reality of life and adapt itself to this" (Heydebrand, 1925/1994, p. 3, authors, Trans.).

Steiner addressed this himself in *The First Teachers' Course* (1919/2020) when he pointed out the problems of matching an ideal curriculum with what was expected at that time, noting that Waldorf education as

2. The education lectures are found in volumes 293–311.

intended in its ideal form did not fit into the existing social world, and that various factors which would flow into the school from that world would frequently thwart the realisation of such an ideal curriculum. In particular, he pointed out that the learning expectations of the state would be difficult to realise in the first two classes but that this would be less of a problem by the ninth year (grade 3) using the Waldorf approach, (1919/2020, p. 294). He insisted that, "We will only be good teachers, however, if we know the relationship between the ideal curriculum and the curriculum we need to follow initially because of outer demands" (Steiner, 1919/2020, p. 294). This would require imagination and flexibility and the ideal curriculum would provide an ideal-typical point of reference. A day later in *The First Teachers' Course* Steiner added,

> We need to be able to develop our curriculum ourselves at any moment, by learning to read from the children what they need, depending on their age. Tomorrow we will compare the ideal curriculum with the one presently used in Central European state schools. We will be well prepared for this if we have really internalised what we need to know in order to understand the curriculum [i. e. *The First Teachers' Course*]. (Steiner, 1919/2020, p. 311)

In 1955, Stockmeyer published a compilation of all the references in Steiner's lectures and meetings with the teachers in Stuttgart (published in *English as Rudolf Steiner's curriculum for the Waldorf schools*, 1985). These two sources, Heydebrand and Stockmeyer, remained the primary sources of reference for teachers until the 1990s, while ideas about curriculum were also informally spread by word of mouth from school to school and country to country, as already mentioned.

## Translations

From the 1920s, Waldorf schools were founded in other cities in Germany, and in England, Norway, the Netherlands, Hungary and the United States. This meant that the German-language Heydebrand curriculum was translated into other languages (though only published much later). Initially little was modified, except in terms of some story material, local history and local geography. Since all the European languages (except Greek and those which use Cyrillic script) use alphabets comparable to German, the methods of teaching writing and reading were to a great extent taken from the German practices that Steiner had developed, though, as Langley and Militzer-Koppel (2019) comment, this method overlooks the many differences between letters and sounds in the English language; "English speaking students require more classroom instruction to advance to the orthographic stage than can be found in Steiner's indications" (2018, p.18). This has not always been recognised. Beyond this, many countries remained close to the original German (Heydebrand) curriculum, including in the United States (see Oberman, 2008), where Waldorf schools have remained remarkably loyal to this Central European model. In Australia, the British version of the Waldorf curriculum was practised, although this was modified in some schools in more radical ways from the 1970s to take on a strong Australian focus (Korobacz, 2015). This pattern has remained; some national Waldorf federations, schools or even individual teachers have adapted and developed curriculum, but most of the movement has reproduced the historical Central European version with little change.

In the 1990s saw the opening of many new Waldorf schools, most significantly in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, in South America and Asia (Göbel, 2022). On the whole, as far as we can judge, this did not initially lead to significant cultural adaptation (with noble exceptions). The Waldorf curricula used were still recognisably European, and more specifically German, sticking closely to the Heydebrand original.[3] Frielingsdorf (2019, p. 305) has pointed out that even in Germany many curriculum changes and innovations remain undocumented and therefore often linked to the teachers who introduced them, rather than entering the overall curriculum discourse. This process is further limited by the lack of any systematic curriculum evaluation.

3. This has become clear in discussions between Rawson & Bransby (personal communication) with some national Waldorf associations (e.g., US, South Africa, Denmark, Taiwan) in relation to the Art of Teaching curriculum process, referred to below, and in curriculum discussions during the online *14th International High School Conference* (2022), attended by teachers from around 25 countries including Brazil, United States, South Africa, India, China, Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.

## Change prompted from without

What has prompted the biggest changes in Waldorf curriculum has been pressure from outside the school movement. The rise of neoliberal education policies (starting in the Anglophone world) led to national curricula being developed based on standards and specified outcomes and testing regimes (see Graupe & Krautz, 2014; Wallace et al., 2021). These policy changes applied pressure to Waldorf schools to justify their curricula in terms the state could compare with its own national curricula.

Due to this pressure, a process began in the 1990s to develop a more up-to-date version of the curriculum in German, leading to the publication of a draft curriculum edited by Tobias Richter (1995). This development was met with considerable resistance in Germany from teachers who felt that any published curricula necessarily limited teacher autonomy (Zech, 2023).

The lack of up-to-date and comprehensive curricula in local languages limited curriculum development in Waldorf schools in many countries, and not having a defined and agreed national Waldorf curriculum, or one in a form that education ministries could relate to, often made negotiations with state authorities difficult.

In the late 1990s, the New Labour Party (later Labour government under Tony Blair) in the United Kingdom was interested in incorporating Steiner Waldorf schools into the national education system, and a comparison was made between the then English National Curriculum and the Waldorf curriculum as practiced in the UK (Mepham & Rawson, 1997). In 2000, a curriculum was published by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (Rawson & Richter, 2000) on behalf of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. This took note of the German Richter curriculum (hence the reference to Richter as co-editor) as well as curriculum practice in the United States, Australia and some other countries. It reviewed current practice in the UK and added a section on Waldorf early years education, seeking to provide a contemporary account of Waldorf education that government officials could relate to. The Rawson & Richter curriculum became the most commonly referred-to international Waldorf curriculum, partly because it was written in the English language, but also because it was written in a way that state authorities could understand. The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework was accepted by the Australian government in 2009 as valid for Waldorf schools nationwide up to Class 10 (Steiner Education Australia, 2009). In preparing this, the editors consulted widely on curriculum developments in other countries.

To date (and to our knowledge) the existing curricula that are based on local practice and not merely modified translations from English or German, include the German Richter (2019) curriculum, the British Rawson et al. (2014) curriculum, the Australian Curriculum Framework (2009), the Steinerskolen Laerplan (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020) of the Norwegian Waldorf Schools, and the New Zealand Māori Curriculum Guidelines, *He Reo Puāwai* (Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, 2015). There are a number of translations from Rawson et al (2014) (e. g. into Italian, Polish, Spanish, Simplified Chinese), which contain varying degrees of adaptation. The German Richter curriculum (the 2016 edition) was translated into English (2020) and modified to some extent by the translator Norman Skillen. Many countries in Europe have no published Waldorf curriculum and draw variously on German and English models as required. The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education has established a permanent Working Group on Curriculum (ECSWE, 2022) to draw up guidelines for each European country to have a curriculum it can use primarily for advocacy purposes, since many the autonomous position of Waldorf schools in many European countries is precarious and significant compromises have already been made in a number of countries that often reduce the Waldorf element in these schools. There is little or no published information about this, partly due to the Waldorf federations not wishing to draw attention to the loss of autonomy, but the problem is well-known to the European Council of Steiner Waldorf Education and its advocacy work is mainly directed towards this challenge.

There is anecdotal evidence from the United States that *The Waldorf Curriculum* (with definite article and capital letters) is valorised as a complex, multi-layered work of art that brings the universal developmental nature of the human being to expression, offering archetypal contents that corresponds in a fine-grained way to the (universal) child's assumed development in a year-by-year progression (e.g. as presented recently by

Glöckler, 2021). One of the central assumptions made about a Waldorf curriculum is that it is developmental in its structure and that the content matches the developmental age of the students, year by year. The problem with this, as Largo (2012) pointed out at an international Waldorf conference at the Goetheanum, is that a "teacher with a class of twenty six-year olds will see differences of up to three years in the children's developmental ages…At the age of 13, the developmental ages of the furthest and least developed children diverge by at least six years" (Largo, 2012, p.18). One cannot therefore speak of a typical grade 3 child, or any other age, and one cannot insist that a particular content is specific a certain year.

The effect therefore of a fixed, normative curriculum that is structured on a year-to-year basis tends to isolate and fossilise it and renders it semi-immune to updating, transformation and change to meet changed times, changed needs and changed societies. Practitioners are generally convinced of its rightness because it appears 'to work', and since alumni studies show a general satisfaction with the education (Mitchell & Gerwin, 2008; Randoll, 2015), there is little pressure to change it.

This valorising manifests most clearly in the frequently reported belief that *The Waldorf Curriculum* is a gift from the spiritual world to children and therefore any alteration weakens the power of the gift. Whilst this quasi-religious imagery may reflect a core religiosity of American society, the taken-for-granted assumption of the general validity of curriculum content encountered in Europe and other continents reflects perhaps a belief in the essential nature of Waldorf education and its founder Rudolf Steiner, whose infallibility is widely assumed (for instance, Lindenberg, 2013). At any rate, the founder and origin myths of Waldorf education are still potent (Rawson, 2023). Internationally then, it is probably taken for granted by most teachers, parents and students in Steiner schools that there is such a thing as *The Waldorf Curriculum*.

There is a counter trend, however, that takes various forms. Zech (2023) notes that there has been resistance to a fixed curriculum in Germany because of concern for teacher autonomy. Both Ullrich (2008, 2015) and Steinwachs (2019) make the point that there is concern about hidden aspects of the curriculum, which manifests as the accusation that the curriculum promotes "education towards anthroposophy[4]" (Steinwachs, 2019, p. 175).[5] This trend to seeing curriculum as an orientation rather than as prescription, based on anecdotal evidence, seems to be accompanied by a tendency for some teachers to be interested in Waldorf education but not its anthroposophical origins or its founder. Rawson (2023) argues that it is necessary analytically to differentiate what is meant by anthroposophy and distinguishes between anthroposophy as metanarrative, as foundational myth, as esoteric path, as basis for Waldorf education, and as epistemological and ontological method. It may be that many Waldorf teachers refer to Steiner's educational lectures but not the rest of his work. Indeed, the separation of the education from anthroposophy is probably more advanced in the German Waldorf movement than elsewhere. This position has been most clearly articulated by Schieren (2022), who describes the relationship between anthroposophy and Waldorf education as a methodological function that lies mainly in Steiner's epistemology, pedagogical anthropology and the psychology based on this, whilst the other major themes of anthroposophy are not essential to Waldorf practice. Schieren also emphases the heuristic function of Steiner's pedagogical anthropology, which basically rules out an essentialist view of curriculum.

The relationship of anthroposophy to Waldorf education and Waldorf educators is currently the topic of several publications such as those by Zdražil (2023) and Rawson (2023).

## Changed global contexts

We consider the current issues faced by the global Waldorf movement regarding curriculum can be summarised as falling into three broad categories:

(1) Changed contexts: temporal, cultural, geographic, regulative

4. Anthroposophy is the name Steiner gave to his cosmology and philosophical approach. It is expressed in the 35 books Steiner wrote and the 6000 lectures he gave during his life.

5. See the critique of Ullrich's position in Schieren, 2015.

(2) Issues with translation and equivalence

(3) How to develop curriculum locally.

The global profile of Steiner education continues to expand as it is practised in evermore widely diverse geographies and cultures. Over the last two decades, there has developed a body of literature which questions the Eurocentric worldview which can be discerned within the traditional Waldorf curriculum, and which questions the inclusivity of the education and the degree to which minorities are equitably represented, and whether such a Eurocentric curriculum is desirable in a global educational movement. Examples of this include Boland (2014, 2015, 2017), Boland and Demirbeg (2017, 2018), Boland and Muñoz (2021), Caldwell (2021), Oberman (2008), Rawson (2022), Saar (2023), Steinwachs (2022) and Williams (2021), including from an Indigenous standpoint (Muñoz, 2016). Much of this work has been clearly and ably drawn together in Tyson's review in this journal of literature on eurocentrism in Waldorf education (2023). Such points of view have gained heightened prominence in some countries following the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement and global campaigns to increase the visibility and rights of minorities and those previously silenced or made invisible. The pressing need for such work is acknowledged in international educational bodies – for instance by UNESCO's recent *Futures of Education* project (2022) – but it has yet to appear a priority within much of the Waldorf movement and there are voices to be heard which are critical of such work (Debus, 2023; Schwartz, 2019). The Research Institute of the German Association of Waldorf Schools (Pädagogische Forschungsstelle beim Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen) has funded a two-year project (Forum Geschichte) to review and revise the use of Steiner's cultural epochs and the history curriculum from a postcolonial perspective. Within the frame of this project, Zech (2023) has given an example of a postcolonial perspective in the history curriculum by showing how aspects of German colonial history require a new critical narrative. It is also part of this project to network with colleagues in other countries to document how these aspects of curriculum have been modified and adapted. Steinwachs and Rawson are publishing a collection of essays on decolonising Waldorf curriculum in German (in press), and Rawson and Boland are doing likewise in English.

## Problems of translations and equivalence

We suggest that in the translation – in the range of meanings that that word carries – of Waldorf education in general, and in curriculum in particular, is problematic. The question of adapting the educational approach to different cultural contexts has already been noted. The problem with curriculum starts with the word. Horlacher (2018) has pointed out that the German term *Lehrplan*, which is usually translated as curriculum, has changed its meaning in German since in the early part of the 20th century. At that time, *Lehrplan* mean something like the entire educational approach, a unified whole embodying everything essential about that approach. This understanding is

> strongly tied to ideas of 'German culture', which cannot be contemplated in the German-speaking world without including the notion of *Bildung*. In turn, the notion of *Bildung* is not primarily oriented to economic or social exigencies; rather, it should be understood as a 'counterpart' to life's political and social structures and implies the *pure* development of the individual, a process that, in principle, should be conceived apart from any external conditions and constraints. (Horlacher, 2012, p. 142, italics in original)

Horlacher draws a contrast between traditional notions of *Bildung* and *Lehrplan* with 'Anglophone' curriculum theory, which understands curriculum as a description of prescribed content and outcomes in response to the perceived needs of society and more specifically the economy. Thus there are two fundamentally different approaches; "the Anglo-Saxon orientation towards usability and the German emphasis on pure *Bildung* (Horlacher, 2018, p. 11).

When von Heydebrand called her text *Vom Lehrplan der Waldorfschule,* the little word *vom* (meaning from, deriving from) implies that the content was not 'the' *Lehrplan*, but rather an outline showing how what was taught was an application of the bigger *Lehrplan*, which both she and Steiner referred to as the ideal curriculum and included the whole educational approach based on Steiner's pedagogical anthropology.

Militzer-Kopperl (2018) takes the view that Heydebrand's *Lehrplan* was actually an account of curriculum-in-practice in the Stuttgart Waldorf School at the time, rather than an exposition of curriculum-as-intended. So, it was an account of how the ideal curriculum was applied at *that* time under specific conditions. It is not therefore a model for curriculum everywhere, though it has historically acquired this character. It follows then that, if there is no original, authentic, standard generally valid curriculum, we have to go back to the original pedagogical intentions. All curricula that interpret these original intentions then become equally valid. Furthermore, what is taught, when and how, have to be seen in the context of the overall educational approach.

The further aspect of translation is illustrated by Benjamin's (1996) understanding of the term. His view was that translations are interpretations, and that a good translation can have the same value as the original – it can be considered a valid work in its own right. Translation is not merely a functional relationship between two languages but is significantly more complex. Following Berger (2013), a good translator must go back to the pre-linguistic meaning of a word or phrase and from there seek words in the other language that derive from this original source. In terms of translating curricula, this is true at the linguistic level, but more so in the wider sense of returning to original intentions. This is where the problem of cultural content plays into curriculum. If one curriculum recommends working with Shakespeare in a particular grade, this may not be relevant in another culture (either reading his plays in the original or in translation). Rather, one needs to return to the original intention – that is, why study Shakespeare in the first place – and from there find a literature that engages the students in the developmental tasks relevant to them in their cultural situation. In other words, if Shakespeare was the answer, what was the question? Finding direct equivalents (e. g. for Grimm's fairy tales, the Old Testament, Norse mythology, Parsifal, Goethe's *Faust*) is not always possible, meaningful, or indeed desirable. In this way, it is not the *content* of the Waldorf curriculum which is original and therefore intrinsic to Waldorf education, but rather the curriculum *intentions*.

This leads to questions of equivalence. If there is taken to be an original, authentic and foundational Waldorf curriculum, then translations/adaptations to other cultures have to try to find equivalents to the content in question. This gesture is arborescent and strongly Eurocentric[6]: the original source curriculum remains the blueprint and model for any subsequent versions. The complexities which this occasions are often underestimated.

## Waldorf schools as method schools

A further hindrance to resolving the question of translating an existing arborescent curriculum onto other times and places, is the question as to what constitutes the essential elements of Waldorf education, if not a unified curriculum.

Steiner was often insistent that the Waldorf School was not a *Weltanschauungsschule* (Steiner, 1919/2020, p. 33), that is, a school with a particular philosophy, but rather a 'method school'.

> The Waldorf-School principle is not one that wants to make a school with a particular world view, but rather a method school. What is to be achieved through a method that is based on a knowledge of the human being, is what makes children into people who are physically healthy and strong, psychologically free and spiritually clear. (Steiner, 1922/2009, p. 157, authors, Trans.)

Gathering references to method school (see Wiehl 2015) allows several core aspects to be identified:

- the education starts with a knowledge of the general nature of the developing human being seen from an anthroposophical perspective:
- an educational approach is developed out of this, in which the teaching and learning methods take this anthropology into account,

6. See, among others, the work of Chakrabarty (2000), who critiques the global tendency for Europe to be taken as the central standard from which other cultures and continents differ (itself an arborescent idea).

- this has the aim of enabling children and young people to have a healthy physical, psychological and spiritual development.

Steiner uses the word method in its origin meaning *methodos* in Greek, which literally means the way of pursuing something, a means, a way that leads to a goal.[7] So a method is the way we do something to achieve our goal. Therefore, a pedagogical method is a way of attaining an intended educational aim. Following Nind et al. (2016), pedagogy is the relationship between teaching and learning and has three modes: pedagogy as craft, pedagogy as art and pedagogy as science. In this way, a method school in Steiner's sense, is one that bases its pedagogy (in the three senses just referred to) on an anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology, from which one can derive a series of generative working principles (Rawson, 2019, 2021) that can be applied to generate pedagogical practice. One of these practices is curriculum. We can show the relationship of curriculum as an educational practice to the core of pedagogical anthropology as follows:

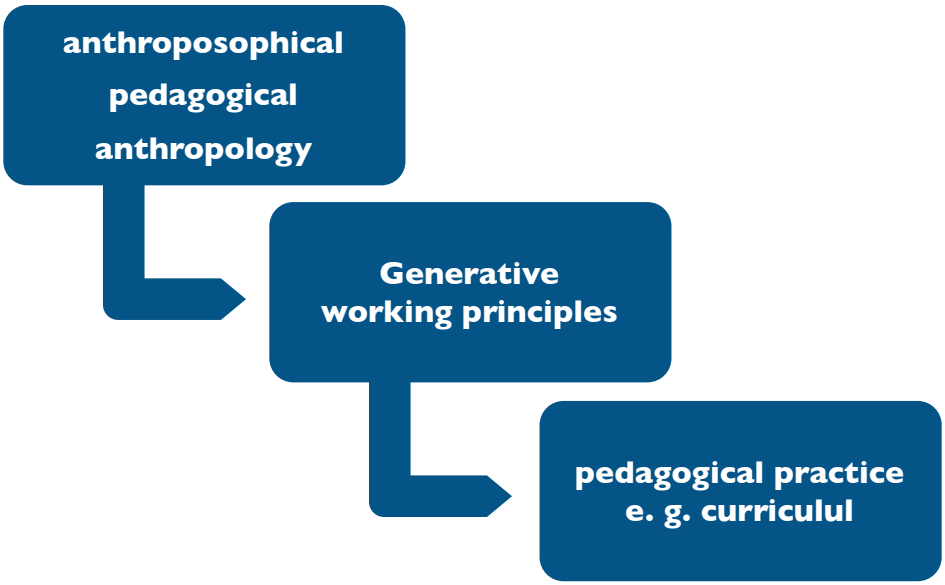


Figure 1: The relationship between pedagogical anthropology and curriculum

As there are cultural differences in the meaning of curriculum/Lehrplan, it is necessary to define what is meant. Following Dahlin, Bransby & Rawson (2020) propose that curriculum includes:

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

The pedagogical function of curriculum then (Bransby & Rawson, 2020) is to provide a sequence of learning opportunities that enable learning and thus development.

## Rhizomic reframing of curriculum in Waldorf schools

We believe that reframing Waldorf curricula using the metaphor of the rhizome offers much that is positive and encouraging. It allows for curriculum to be represented in a non-hierarchical, non-linear ways

7. Literally, a way, a pursuit of knowledge, investigation, mode of prosecuting such inquiry, or system (KLUGE, 2022)

which resists established, structured curricular models and their often-uncritical translation into differing geographic, social, cultural and temporal contexts. A rhizome must by definition be connected to all things – an attractive characteristic in a globally distributed movement. It is free to form its own connections, to develop without restrictions, to explore its own lines of flight.

Bransby & Rawson (2020) have developed a framework for a layered curriculum that enables a rhizomic approach. They start by pointing out that curriculum is a pedagogical response to the developmental tasks that face children and young people at key stages of the life course. The notion of developmental tasks was first coined by Havighurst (1982) to describe the social expectations that accompany various phases in the life course, and in particular the transition from youth to adulthood. Hurrelmann and Quenzel (2015) modified this construct for the conditions of late modernity for youth; it was in turn adopted in the context of Waldorf education by Götte et al. (2016), in relation to inner and outer developmental tasks. Bransby and Rawson (2020) have applied it in their concept of a layered curriculum.

They identify three sources of developmental tasks. The first is bodily growth and the psychological processes that emerge through the person's interaction with the changing body, which, following Steiner's (1919/2020) pedagogical anthropology brings about significant changes in the emergent consciousness of the child and young person. The second source comprises the expectations in terms of dispositions, skills and knowledge that are framed by the society and culture the young person is embedded in. The third source of developmental tasks are the individual's biographical interests and needs.

The layered curriculum addresses these three types of developmental tasks by distinguishing between meta, macro, meso and micro levels. The meta level comprises a common pedagogical anthropology and a set of generative working principles which can be applied to shape practice. The other three layers are then embedded within this.

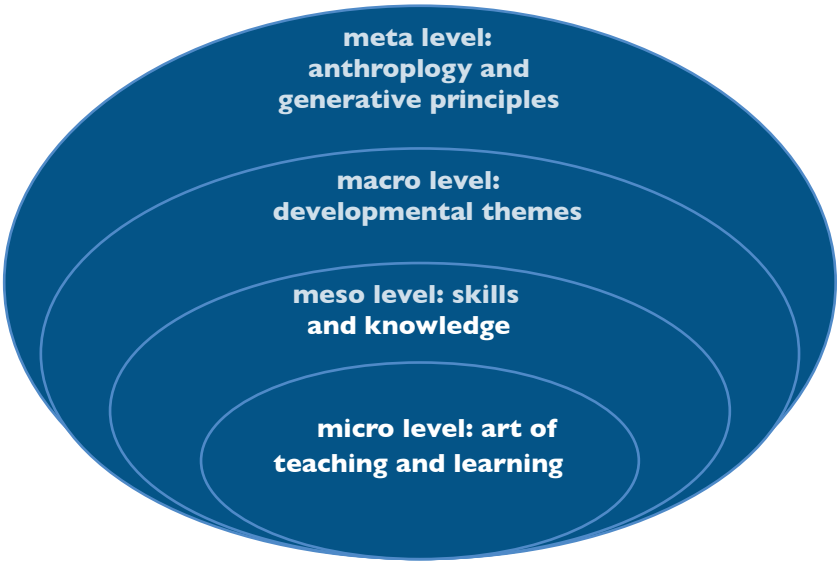


Figure 2: Nested layers of curriculum embedded in a field of a common pedagogical anthropology and generative principles

Seen from this perspective, the curriculum is embedded in a common environment or rhizomic network of an anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology and the generative working principles derived from this, which can be applied to generate practice (Rawson, 2021), including curriculum-as-practice.

The curriculum as a framework has the function of opening up zones of proximate[8] development

8. We follow Barrs (2021) who points out that recent translations of Vygotsky make the original meaning clearer. Proximate simply means the next developmental step.

(Daniels, 2017), which the students engage in. At the macro level of curriculum, an ideal-typical sequence of age-related developmental themes is provided that address the emerging and changing relationships of the person to her body, self, other people and the world. The developmental framework provides an ideal-typical sequence of developmental themes for a group of students of the same age (i.e., with birthdays within a year), embedded in a Waldorf class as a learning community, or community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and a series of pedagogical opportunities to engage with them. One of the generative working principles of Waldorf education (Rawson, 2021) is the assumption that being embedded in a learning community has many benefits for social learning. As a learning community (Wenger, 1998), a mixed ability, non-selective Waldorf class group (staying together for up to 12 years) enables shared identities, meanings, learning and sense of belonging, whilst providing a supportive and caring environment for differentiated individual development. This macro level of a common ideal-typical sequence of developmental themes is the common basis for Waldorf schools anywhere. It is this dimension of curriculum that is universal, though not necessarily fixed for all time.

At the meso-curriculum level, subject content is described that allows the relevant skills and knowledge to be learned whilst at the same time reflecting the developmental themes of the macro level curriculum. Though there are likely to be some similarities in the development of skills in subjects such maths and to some extent natural sciences, the curriculum content is determined at the local, or national level, reflecting the nature of the local language(s), geography, climate, history and cultural context, the kind of additional languages that are learned and the local arts and crafts traditions.

At the micro level of curriculum is the art of teaching, in which teachers select material, plan, shape and evaluate lessons within the overall framework, but taking the actual needs to the specific group of learners into account.

In summary, the layered curriculum can be shown as follows:

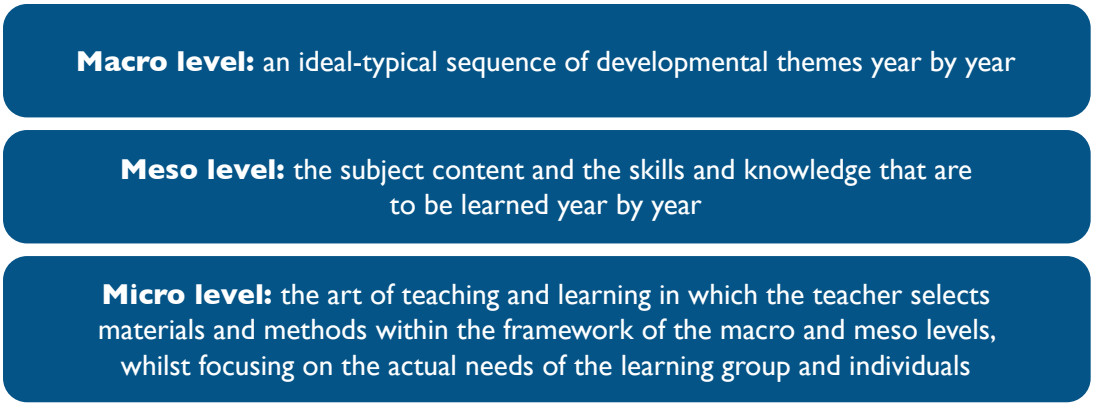


Figure 3: A summary of a layered curriculum

The spiritual ground in which the rhizome grows is the pedagogical anthropology and the generative principles this gives rise to (what in Figure 1 is designated as the meta layer), and also includes the macro level developmental themes. Curriculum content then is designed at the meso or local, national level, based on the skills knowledge that are required in the given educational environment. These are based on the nature of the local language of instruction, the local cultures, history, geography, arts and crafts, local economy and so on. No doubt, in a globalised world, there are similarities in terms of numeracy and science, but one should not underestimate the degree of cultural difference even in these subjects.

Some of implications of this approach need to be concretised. Within the South American context, Argentinian literature and culture are different from Brazilian. State requirements in Argentina are different from those in Brazil. Deciding how to adapt curriculum for children in Finland will likely differ in Spain or Greece. An Egyptian response would be different from a South African. New Zealand and Australian

approaches would take in their Indigenous and cultural heritages. In countries with a long-established Waldorf tradition, changes in demographics, religious preferences, historical outlooks, and social norms and expectations can be considered at this level. Mapping the national or regional rhizome is undertaken by those with specific contextual knowledge. A meso-level curriculum provides a semi-permanent framework of orientation, but which can be reviewed and modified to reflect the social, cultural and statutory developments.

It is also at this level that distinct historical and cultural interpretations of curriculum can (and should) emerge. This can provide a point of resistance to existing and traditional interpretations of Waldorf curriculum which are often direct modifications of a European model. The meso curriculum allows the existing centrality given to Western thought, civilisation and history to be reassessed. The question of decolonising curriculum content belongs at this level, as this is always historically and culturally situated.

At the micro level teachers plan their lessons for specific classes and learning groups, taking account of individual learning differences, biographical interests and needs. There may be scope here for school policies rather than each teacher making her own judgements without dialogue with colleagues.

The territories the rhizome moves into are already occupied by local knowledges, local histories, local literatures, cultures and traditions. At a classroom level, the rhizome will expand to touch every child; it will become a curriculum-in-use which is enacted in the dialogic relationship between teacher and student. It will include specific detail such as lesson content, actual exercises and tasks to be undertaken, texts, materials and learning expectations. Such micro-curricula can be informed by regular professional discussions and reviewed through internal and occasional external moderation.

## Further connections, lines of flight

In this model, contexts become more localised the further the rhizome expands. A teacher, in deciding what to teach her class, will at every moment have connection from her classroom practice, through a nationally focussed meso-curriculum to the macro-curriculum, developmental themes and further to the generative principles of the education. At the same time, the rhizome will, of necessity, continue beyond her classroom. It will extend to involve parents, caregivers and the school community, it will include local organisations, institutions and move out into her wider community. In this way, a rhizomic curriculum extends far and wide, each global area, country, region, school, and teacher enacting their own rhizomic map.

It can be extended further to include former students of the school, those connected with the school who have passed away, as well as the spiritual beings who work with those involved in the education. The rhizome can extend, indeed must extend, to include all of these. Each individual remains free to create the emergent curriculum she needs at any time, while simultaneously being linked at all times through the levels mentioned to the core of the educational impulse.

What all Waldorf schools everywhere share is the common understanding of general pedagogical anthropology and the generative working principles derived from this. The curriculum becomes rhizomic and emergent when contextual features begin to emerge at the macro level. It gives possibilities for mutual exchange and discussion in which no curriculum tradition, be it from, Argentina, Germany, or Vietnam, has any greater authority. Exchange between regions is the ideal. A renewed curriculum approach in Germany could take curriculum developments in other regions into account.[9]

## Conclusion

Whilst we suggest that curriculum has often been arborescent in its development, the actual spread of schools appears to be rhizomic in character. Based on the Australian experience,

9. This exchange is already practiced at high school level in the annual multi-perspective history and in the comparative literature workshops at the Kassel Refresher Week, in which Waldorf teachers from numerous countries regularly exchange what they teach and why in the various high school grades.

> Connected by a loose network, Steiner schools draw on common insights, approaches and curriculum traditions, but are not formally affiliated or commonly administered. Each school or initiative necessarily reflects its own circumstances and seeks to give Steiner ideas their own expression, much as the children are encouraged to become uniquely themselves. (Bak, 2018, p. 296)

Work by Sagarin (2011) and Oberman (2008) in the US, and Frielingsdorf (2019) in Germany, and supported by the authors' personal experience, affirms that Waldorf schools are frequently founded in idiosyncratic ways by highly motivated people, with their own transformative experiences of Waldorf education and often embedded in a local environment. In this way, schools often arise rhizomically as natives, even if the curriculum they use tends to be exotic in character. It is even possible that local curriculum variations equally arise idiosyncratically, though variations are often assumed to part of an arborescent, 'original' curriculum once they are passed on and reproduced. Sagarin (2008) refers to such inventions legitimised by unsubstantiated reference to Steiner as 'Waldorf myths'. The point being that legitimation comes with proximity to the 'origins myth'. It appears as if there is a strong wish that Waldorf be authentic and as close to the original model as possible, even if the actual process is more rhizomic than is often realised. More research would be needed to ascertain if this is the case.

When Rudolf Steiner first began the Waldorf School, the central aim was to build a more just society through education (Boland, 2020; Rawson, 2020; Steiner, 1919/2020). Establishing an emergent curricular approach in Waldorf education which empowers local practitioners to find content appropriate to their learners. A curriculum which does not automatically preference content from other places, times and cultures we believe has significant advantages. A major consideration in suggesting this layered approach as a foundation of a rhizomic Waldorf curriculum is that it offers a point of resistance to current Eurocentric curricula and Eurocentric traditions within Waldorf education and empower regions and teachers to create curriculum which is appropriate for them and their students' contexts. If Waldorf educators can explore curriculum in these ways, they would be acting in consort with Aoki's call to recognise and legitimate "live(d) curricula that in the imaginary of the arborescent landscape have been rendered invisible" (2005, p. 420).

It is clear that the ideas we put forward here are exploratory and form an indication of what might at some time be possible for the Waldorf movement. Significant work would be necessary to expand them into something which can be worked with. However, a rhizome must begin somewhere. As we close, we ponder on whether this article is a spore, an insignificant speck of an idea floating through the air which we have tried to bring to earth. It will have to be seen if this modest spore is able to grow. If it can, it could generate a new approach to curriculum in Waldorf schools worldwide.

## Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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