Chapter 5
The Curriculum of Waldorf Education: Some Basic Principles and Practices

Abstract This chapter presupposes some acquaintance with the basic concepts of Steiner's understanding of the human being, introduced in Chap. 4. The concept of curriculum is here taken in the widest possible sense. It is not only about curriculum plans or documents but about any- and everything that children can 'go through' in school, i.e., all actual and possible experiences, conscious and subconscious, that they are intended to have. After a general introduction, pointing out the many aspects and dimensions of Steiner's curriculum ideas, an attempt is made to explain some of them in a more linear fashion, starting with the general ones that apply to all teaching, then going on to more specific ones that apply to certain age groups and school subjects. Some points about what it means to be and live the life of a Waldorf teacher are taken up. The chapter ends with a short section on the significance of school architecture.

Keywords Waldorf curriculum · Teaching as an art · Teacher's authority · School architecture

5.1 General Remarks

As noted in the introduction to this book, it is rather impossible to give a fully comprehensive presentation of the curriculum and teaching methods of Waldorf education. A good scholarly overview of the field is given in German by Wiehl (2015) (I am not aware of any similar work in English). But even though it consists of over 250 pages of dense text, Wiehl calls her work an introduction (*Propädeutik*), bearing witness to the complexity of the field. One reason for these difficulties is probably the simple fact that Waldorf education—as Steiner himself says (1967 [GA 217], p. 27)—does *not* intend to be a 'system of ideas', but an impulse of awakening, of vital action. Teachers' work is—or should be—*creative*, like that of an artist. Naturally, creative work cannot be specified and regulated by too many and too detailed rules or methodical steps lined up like a mechanical procedure. Although he sometimes called Waldorf schools *Methodenschulen*

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(method schools), Steiner argued against an understanding of teacher education as consisting of the acquisition of several clearly specified teaching methods (1989a [GA 31], p. 123; cf. Wiehl, p. 66f). The term *Methodenschulen* was used to take a distance from *Weltanschauungsschulen*—world-view schools—which Waldorf schools were *not* supposed to be. Anthroposophy should be the knowledge basis out of which educational ideas and principles can be derived—but methods in a very general and lose sense. Anthroposophy should never be the content of any teaching or instruction. In saying that teaching is an art, however, Steiner does not reject the possibility of an educational *science* (even ordinary artists may use scientific knowledge in their work). For Steiner, the main part of educational science is the anthroposophical understanding of the human being and development; it is mainly out of this knowledge that educational principles and actions must be derived (although sometimes compromises must be made with the curriculum of mainstream schools in order not to create future obstacles for the students). However, the mere knowledge of principles and ideas must be transformed into art, into creative action. For this to happen, the spiritual anthropology of anthroposophy must permeate and transform the very essence of the teacher's personality (1991a [GA 301], p. 9ff).

If it is asked how this permeation and eventual transformation occurs, perhaps one could construe an answer in parallel to how Steiner conceives of ethics and moral action. In Chap. 3, we saw that Steiner distinguished three aspects of what we may call 'moral competence', for lack of a better word. There is moral *intuition*, moral *imagination* and moral *technique*. One could distinguish parallel levels of competence in education. Steiner's texts and lectures can be understood as based on general pedagogical intuitions, in the sense that intuition for Steiner is the faculty by which we perceive ideas, ideals and principles. But intuitions need not be of a mere conceptual nature: Steiner says that as teachers we must be able to develop intuitions of everything that is humanly possible. Such intuitions belong to specific classroom situations, in which we get an idea about what is appropriate to do 'here and now' (cf. 1986a [GA 307], p. 62)[1]. They are usually mixed with a kind of imagination, which gives us a concrete picture of how we should act. Pedagogical technique, finally, is our actual ability to carry our idea into action. It is a form of spiritualised technique, based on spiritual and moral insight. Intuition is related to our understanding of children, both in general and as particular individuals; this is the level of *knowledge* of laws and principles. Imagination and technique are related to the *artistic*, creative work of planning and teaching actions. Imagination is the principal link between knowledge and action.

It has been suggested by Kiersch (2007) that Steiner's view of teaching as an art is informed by his understanding of Goethe's conception of art as bringing to expression what is *possible*, not as a representation of what is already a fact (Steiner 1985 [GA 271]). In this regard, teaching is the art of bringing forth that which is potentially inherent in the students in one's care, that is, their *individuality* (maybe

[1]English edition: Steiner (1989b).

also the individuality of the teacher) (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 148f). Teaching is the art of helping the students to realise their essential humanity, or their 'true self'; but this true self is not preconceived in the form of an abstract and general model, as it tends to be in Kant and Herbart. Of course, our essential humanity may have certain general characteristics, but it is first of all uniquely individual. Therefore, education is not directed *towards* the true human being, but takes place *by* and *through* it. It is not only about 'becoming' human, it is also about *being* human. It is about cultivating our essential humanity.

This may be the reason why the horizons around Steiner's curriculum ideas are so wide and deep. The so-called Ilkley course, for instance, which is the first series of lectures on education given in England in 1923 (Steiner 1986a [GA 307]), begins with a lecture on knowledge, art, religion and morality, and how these are related to the deeper cognitive functions of the human being, i.e. imagination, inspiration and intuition (cf. Steiner 1993 [GA 12]). In ancient times, Steiner says, knowledge, art and religion/morality were one undifferentiated whole (we can still see how this is so in certain aboriginal cultures). In the course of history, they have separated from each other and become independent fields of cultural practice. But their destiny, according to Steiner, is to unite again, on a higher (or deeper) level, retaining the levels of differentiation that they have achieved. This is necessary because the deep split between these different fields of human endeavours produce a split also within the human being, preventing us from reaching down into the spiritual sources of our existence.

A forerunner to the future synthesis of art and science is Goethe, who acknowledged that beauty is a manifestation of the secret laws of nature and that art is a most appropriate way to express those laws.[2] Anthroposophy, or spiritual science, also paves the way for this to happen. Again, in ancient times, children were educated out of an instinctive spiritual wisdom, which is now lost. We cannot go back to this instinctive knowledge; instead, we must go forward to an *intuitive* knowledge of how to teach, Steiner suggests. Intuition is a spiritual function, by which we know the spiritual element in the human being (and in nature). It is out of the intuitive knowledge of the spirit that we must educate today. But knowledge of the spirit in the modern era is abstract and dead: Steiner takes Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill as illustrations of such thinking. Modern thinking about the spirit resembles a skeleton; a lifeless structure of ideas connected by mechanical associations. It must become alive by developing living thinking and living concepts (1986a [GA 307], Lectures 1–4). In our actual experience, we never see life arise out of dead matter, but we see how living things die; how death comes out of life. In the same way, the abstract and dead thinking of modern times is really the product

[2]Natural science needs a 'redemption' through art, and Goethe's studies of nature gave an important impulse in this direction. Art in its turn needs to be redeemed by religion, and religion is to be redeemed by knowledge, i.e. spiritual science (Unger 2012). Redemption here means a kind of liberation or 'unfreezing' from too rigid and limiting practices and thought patterns. This warming up and expansion come from the feeling realm, the cognitive aspect of feelings, 'thinking with the heart' and not only with the head.

of a spiritual *life*, a life that flows in our unconscious (ibid.). The task is to reconnect our thinking with this inner, spiritual wellspring. As pointed out in Chap. 3, Steiner's 'philosophy of spiritual activity' (Steiner 1995a [GA 4])[3] intends to lead the reader to the immediate experience of living thinking: a thinking that perceives itself *as it takes form*, which is the first step towards the reconnection to its spiritual source. Steiner exhorts teachers to let thinking come alive in this way in their whole being; to develop thoughts full of character and humanity; to get beyond the bleak, impersonal, objective, purely observing, and neutral kind of thinking that is the modern academic norm—but which is now, after the event of post-modernism and post-structuralism, beginning to lose its hold at least in some corners of academic life.

Teachers must not only develop living thinking; they must also learn to appreciate living *speech*—the life of the *Logos*. Western humanity began to lose the inherent spiritual quality of words and speech already in the seventeenth century, Steiner claims. At that time, Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum* proclaimed the famous four categories of idols, which, in his view, stand in the way of objective scientific knowledge. One of these categories is the 'idols of the market', which consists mainly of *words*. Human beings reason through words, but words can easily lead us astray from the real things, Bacon argues. Objective knowledge must be based only on 'objective' sense-perception. By this line of thought, the human, 'subjective' element of knowledge is rejected. When this view enters education (as it did), the consequence is that teaching no longer finds support in the human element (*das Menschliche*), but only in the external world (*das Außermenschliche*). We see this happening in the educational thinking of Michel de Montaigne, John Locke, and Johann Amos Comenius, Steiner says (1986a [GA 307], p. 100). The power of living speech should be rekindled, and this can be done on the basis of a new understanding of spoken language. A word is not a mere conventional sign, or an abstract pattern of sounds (phonemes), which accidentally has come to be associated with the thing it refers to. Although this is certainly the mainstream view today, there are a few modern linguists and philosophers that adhere to renewed versions of a more or less onomatopoetic view of language, without being influenced by Steiner (see for example Jacobson and Waugh 1979).[4] One major example is Merleau-Ponty (1973, 1992), who emphasise the expressionist and *gestural* character of words and speech. A spoken word is a gesture in sound and rhythm, and these concrete sensual qualities express aspects of its meaning. To be sure, the experience of these qualities takes place in the subconscious, they are part of the archaic evolution of human language. We seldom experience them, because we mainly use words as signs, not as gestures. But as teachers, we must learn to use words as gestures; we must feel the sense qualities of the vowels and consonants, as

[3]English edition: Steiner (2011).

[4]See also Hadreas (1986, pp. 100ff) for a highly interesting example of how the words for earth and sea in different languages share a similar expressive structure, despite consisting of different phonemes. Furthermore, there is the fascinating book of Abram (1997), who presents an ecological philosophy of language, based on similar ideas.

well as the rhythm of the phonemes, and we must learn to use these in an intentional way to convey what we wish to say.

Poets and writers may be more sensitive to these aesthetic qualities of words. Thus, the famous Argentinian author Borges (1986) talks about how the English word 'moon' reflects something of the moon's qualities: its stillness, how it makes us slow down when we say it, and its roundness, expressed in the oo-sound (and the letter O), and how it starts with almost the same sound as it ends.

Steiner was rather optimistic about the efficiency of the educational methods he proposed, despite their high demands on teachers, their complexity and their fathomless grounds in the spiritual nature of the human being, as well as in our past and possible future evolution.[5] Economy in teaching was a quality that would emerge of itself, if teaching was based on a true knowledge of human nature. One would therefore be able to teach in a quarter of an hour what normally would take two hours, Steiner promised in a lecture to prospective parents of the first Waldorf school.[6] This somewhat naïve optimism is rather like the one displayed already by Comenius in the seventeenth century, in his *Didactica Magna* (1967). In the preface to this work, Comenius describes his method as—among other things—quick and time saving. Like Steiner, Comenius also wanted to 'follow nature' in his educational ideas and teaching methods (cf. Dahlin 2009). However, Steiner strongly objected to how Comenius had brought the principle of observability (*Anschaulichkeit*) into pedagogical thinking, turning teaching and learning too much into sense-bound activities (Wiehl 2015). This is important to note, because there is a tendency to interpret Waldorf education as 'against thinking' in a general sense, frowning on everything that smacks of intellectualism. But Steiner often pointed to the necessity of a middle course: the emphasis on narrativity and on aesthetic and artistic activities must not be taken as a rejection of the significance of thinking. For instance, Steiner opposed the idea that Mathematics should always be taught as concretely as possible: it is better if children *gradually* learn to do without the counting of apples or beans when finding the solution to arithmetical problems (1983 [GA 105], p. 37).

5.2 Some Basic Curriculum Principles

In the following, I will enumerate some of the basic ideas and principles for the Waldorf school curriculum and shortly account for the reasons behind them. The term 'curriculum' is here used in a wide sense, including everything that children or students in a Waldorf school or preschool may experience or are supposed to

[5]It is important to emphasise that the future of human evolution is by no means *given*, it is a drama the outcome of which is highly uncertain (cf. Dahlin 2012).

[6]'A lecture for prospective parents of the Waldorf school'. Available: http://www.bobnancy.com/lectures/s3829a.html (accessed 01 Feb 2017).

experience, during their school day—consciously or subconsciously. 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 school house is part of it, because in the 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 the potentials for learning that children have in different ages and phases of development. Therefore, a detailed knowledge of child development is of vital importance (Steiner 1998 [GA 297], p. 45).

A certain reservation may be needed concerning the possibility of conveying in book form the whole, or even the most essential, of the curriculum and practice of Waldorf education. One cannot really understand what it means to be a Waldorf teacher merely by reading this, or any other, summary of the 'basic principles'. One major reason for this is that (Waldorf) teaching is an art, and artistic work is always based on concrete and context-bound personal judgements about, for example, what is 'too much' and what is 'too little' of one thing or another.[7]

5.2.1 General Principles

1. *The Waldorf school curriculum encompasses 12 years, starting at the age of 7 and ending at the age of 19*. Contrary to the major trends of schooling in Steiner's time, Steiner saw the general need for children to learn and develop up until the end of the teenage years. As noted above (Chap. 4), the four essence members of the young person have not fully come into the world until the age of 21 (when the 'I' is fully incarnated). Today, we know that the teenage brain is still not fully developed. These are, in principle at least, good reasons for establishing a general 12-year schooling. In practice, this is already the case in many developed countries, but not out of concern for the well-being of young people, but because of labour market conditions. In addition, it may be noted that there should be no gender differentiation during these 12 years. From his experiences as a private tutor, Steiner realised that boys and girls develop psychologically in very different ways (see above, Chap. 2). But his conclusion of this observation was not that they should have different or separate educations. Instead, they should go to school together, because by learning and developing together, they would round off or balance out their respective, biologically based, one-sidedness.

[7]An interesting advocate for teaching as an art is Eisner (1985), who expresses some insights overlapping with those of Steiner: teachers make judgements based on qualities that emerge during the actions of teaching; teachers are influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredictable; the ends of teaching are created in the process of teaching; and teaching can be performed with such skill and grace that the experience of the students is *aesthetic* (pp. 175–177).

2. *All education is self-education.* On whatever level, education is essentially always self-education. Self-education is here not meant only in a subjective sense, as when one is engaged in studying and exercising by oneself, but also in an objective sense. *E-ducare*, German *Er-ziehung*, literally means to draw (*ziehen*) out or up—the implication being that one leads another human being, another *self*, to the experience of the stage of cultural development that humanity has reached (1986b [GA 308], p. 81). One does not work directly on the self of the student, one only brings it to the possibility of experiencing the world. How the self of the student is affected by these experiences depends on what it brings with it from the spiritual world; in this sense, it is always educated by itself. As a teacher, one must even feel a certain hesitance regarding the intention of teaching something to children, Steiner says, because the basic reaction of the child to being taught is resistance (1986a [GA 307], p. 87). Children do not by nature take it for evident that they must be taught things, on the contrary. Therefore, as a teacher, one should ask oneself how this basic resistance can be transformed into a willingness to learn.
   This idea of self-education clearly puts Steiner in the tradition of educators who proclaim the 'gardening' metaphor for teaching, as opposed to that of 'engineering'. As teachers, what we can do is to provide as good an environment as possible for children to learn and develop by their own activity (1989c [GA 306]; especially Lectures 2 and 3 emphasise the importance of the surroundings). However, to provide this environment is not an easy task, and Steiner would certainly not agree with modern tendencies to reduce the teacher to a coach or a facilitator, which ultimately turns teachers' work into merely moderating and administrating groups of self-regulated learners. On the contrary, the teacher must be ensouled by the subject taught, and the subject must be surrounded by the authority of knowledge and culture, which the teacher must embody. Without passion for the subject, teachers lack one of the most important qualities for their work (cf. Reichenbach 2012).
3. *What is taught and how it is taught must be appropriate to the age of the child.* Steiner often complained that social work in our present intellectualistic culture is so much ruled by abstract and dead truths, which accomplish nothing of what we really wish for. Abstract and linear thinking makes us blind for what is appropriate for children to learn in the different phases of childhood. One such abstract truth is that we want schools to educate intelligent people; therefore, we must start as early as possible to cultivate the intellect of the child. This idea of starting 'as early as possible' has gained even more strength in our time, due to the discovery of the so-called plasticity of the young child's brain. But it is detrimental to the child's healthy development (cf. Chap. 4), and it will not accomplish its desired aim. If we want intelligent grown-ups, we must not start too early with intellectual training. To abstract, linear, mechanical thinking, it may seem obvious that if we want to cultivate intelligence we should start as early as possible. But this kind of thinking cannot grasp the living truth, the truth of real life, that for the young child—before the age of puberty—the

intellect is actually cultivated by a sound belief in and respect for the authority of the teacher (Steiner 1999a [GA 177], pp. 131–132) (more about the authority of the teacher below).

4. The development of the abilities of the soul is of primary importance; the retainment of factual knowledge is secondary. In classical German educational thought, the emphasis on faculties and abilities is called *formale Bildung*, in contrast to *materielle Bildung*, which focus on the acquisition of knowledge contents. Steiner was certainly more concerned with the former. This may have been a reaction on his part against the almost complete dominance of the latter in the traditional, mainstream school system of the time. It should not be interpreted as a disregard for the knowledge content, because, for one thing, even the content must be considered from the point of view of which abilities can be exercised, and what soul qualities need to be supported, in different ages. However, the most basic task of school is to enhance as much as possible the functions of thinking/perceiving, feeling, and will. Thinking and perceiving—the head or 'the upper man'—as well as willing—the limbs or 'the lower man'—should be awakened through the feeling life, 'the middle man' (lungs and heart). The teaching of mere ideas and concepts should be avoided before puberty; otherwise, we will educate 'sceptics', not only in their thinking (which is not too bad), but also in their feeling and will (which is worse) (1986a [GA 307], p. 233).[8]
5. *Teaching in the early school years must be addressed primarily to the feelings*. It should be full of warmth, interest and enthusiasm. By addressing the feelings, a bridge is created between thinking and will. This brings together the basic polarity between 'head' and 'limbs', which tend to fall apart in modern human beings. It is as if only our heads are educated by being filled with ideas that have little or no connection to our feelings and our will. We tend to live in our heads and leave the rest of the body to itself, as it were (cf. Shusterman 2012). This tendency began to appear in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the time when Western culture turned towards intellectualism. In contrast, in the Waldorf school, children should *feel* the ideas they pick up; because through feeling their *will* may be activated.

   A specific consequence of this principle is how writing is taught in Waldorf schools (writing is taught before reading). In Waldorf schools, children are not hurried into reading and writing; they are expected to learn when they are ready for it, which can differ a lot between individual children.[9] For many children, a letter is a rather abstract and alien thing, according to Steiner. The letters are

[8]It may happen that the striving for a harmonious, all-rounded development of human abilities comes into conflict with the intellectual talents that some students may have in certain areas, and which they wish to develop further (cf. Helsper et al. 2007). In the Waldorf school ethos, such students may even be stigmatised as a swot. This problem takes a lot of attention and care for the teacher to handle.

[9]See Suggate et al. (2013) and Suggate (2013) for empirical evidence that in the long run it does not matter much whether a child achieves literacy at an early or a later age.

therefore introduced in an aesthetic and somewhat playful way by letting them emerge out of concrete forms and pictures (1986a [GA307], pp. 263ff). The letter S, for example, may be extracted from the picture of a swan, the head and long neck of which resembles the S-shape. This is somewhat in line with how the letters of the Roman alphabet emerged in cultural history, the letter A, for example, being a transformation of the sign for 'ox' in the Phoenician script, the inverted A resembling an ox's head. This is one reason why Steiner is mistakenly associated with the Herbartian idea of letting children repeat the stages of cultural history. Steiner based his pedagogical suggestions on much more complex ideas.

Letting the letters emerge out of an aesthetic activity like drawing animal forms is also an illustration of how the abstract concept (allowing for letters to be like concepts) is like the end product of a living activity that involves the 'lived body' (Merleau-Ponty) of the child. Learning is most genuine when it is based on participation in a living activity that engages the whole being.

6. *Teaching is directed to the whole class*. The classroom is taken as a paradigm of society and the teacher must strive to establish as good and wholesome a classroom atmosphere as possible (Waldorf teachers are certainly not alone in doing this). There is no singling out of more advanced or more slow students and giving them special tasks or instructions. If help is needed by one or a few children, this should be given in the context of whole class teaching. Only in very problematic cases is extra tutoring outside the class provided. As Ginsburg (1982) points out in her comparison of Steiner and Piaget, the latter also considered whole class work as important to counterbalance the egocentric tendencies of children's thinking.
7. *The cultivation of the will depends upon repetition and the cultivation of habits*. The will is not developed by being given general exhortations to make more effort or to perform better; this will only make the child weak and nervous. Instead, children should be given concrete practical tasks and told to carry them out every school day for some months, or even for a whole year (1992a [GA 293], p. 73)[10]. This kind of repetitive action also strengthens the memory, because the power of memory derives from feeling and will, not from intellectual memory exercises (ibid., p. 122). It may be interesting to add that the practice of repetition is a strong element in the teaching of various traditional art forms in the Far East, including martial arts (cf. Hisayama 2014, pp. 110ff). In classical Chinese painting, for example, one starts by drawing a straight line again and again, striving for a 'perfect' expression of this simple form. The perfection of the form is related to the quality of the so-called *chi* that it manifests, and *chi* corresponds to the energy of what Steiner calls the etheric body, which is also related to memory (see Chap. 4, note 4).

[10]English edition: Steiner (2004).

8. *Moral education should be based on imagination and feeling, not on precepts or commandments.* If we give children moral precepts or rules that we demand them to follow, we merely awaken feelings of antipathy and opposition. Instead, children should be encouraged to develop their own moral sentiments based on examples and stories, fictional or based on facts. However, asking young children to form explicit moral judgements should be avoided, because the ability to form independent individual judgements does not arise until puberty (when the astral forces are set free). Then, children can develop morally as free human beings. Much disgust and hatred have arisen against the noble and beautiful moral ideals in human history, because they have been presented to children as precepts and intellectual ideas (Steiner 1991b [GA 305], pp. 68ff).
9. *Arts and handicrafts are as important as cognitive subjects.* Pestalozzi's well-known principle that education is not of the 'head' alone, but also of the 'heart' and the 'hands', is generally applied in all grades of the Waldorf school, not only in the lower ones. Various forms of art and handicraft are practiced in the afternoons, when 'the hands and feet'—that is, the will—are more energetic than thinking and cognition. All crafts (including knitting and forging work) are taught to both boys and girls. In the lower grades, the recorder—or a special pentatonic flute—is played for a short while every day.[11] In addition to sports and gymnastics, Eurhythmy, the special form of dance that Steiner created, is also part of the Waldorf curriculum.
10. *No graded marks, but individual reports, are given at the end of each school year*. In these individual reports, the student is not primarily compared to a general standard or norm, but to him- or herself: what are the strengths and the weaknesses; what efforts and what progress have been made during the year, etc. The report should be supportive and constructive. Only in grade 12, marks are given, since they are needed in the public merit system.
11. *Education must be salutogenic.* The bodily states of adult life are sometimes the consequences of the state of the soul in some phase of childhood. We therefore need to see the connection between medical science and education. The forms of teaching and instruction that children experience in school will influence their future health. Even the food that they eat must be considered; some children may need a particular diet (1986a [GA 307], p. 215).

The health of the adult population is also, obviously, a concern of society. The question of how to organise society in a just and fruitful way is therefore partly an educational question, which is in turn a medical question (Steiner 1989d

[11]The pentatonic scale is considered especially suitable before the age of 9. There is an interesting phenomenology behind this idea, explained by the anthroposophist and composer Lauer (1989, p. 189ff): the pentatonic scale lacks a definite tonic or starting note; that is, any of the five notes can be used as the tonic. It can therefore be said to lack a definite base, or ground—it is as if the music is hovering above the Earth, never landing. This agrees with the nature of the young child; whose soul is not yet really 'grounded' on the Earth. Pentatonic music is found in many ancient cultures, such as the Chinese, the Aztec in South America, the ancient Egyptian, and the Celtic.

[GA 314], p. 238).[12] However, a salutogenic teaching practice is not achieved without a clear and sensitive judgement on behalf of the teacher, because it often has to do with maintaining a middle course between 'too much' and 'too little'—and where these limits go is hard to define in general terms. In his opposition against the mainstream school practices of overexerting children's memory, Steiner is often perceived as saying there should be no memory exercises in Waldorf schools. But exerting the memory too little can *also* have negative effects, causing inflammatory tendencies in later years (1988 [GA 226], p. 111). However, Steiner does not give an explicit and general answer to the question of how to find the right balance between 'too much' and 'too little', probably because there is no such answer. It seems that this problem can only be solved in practice, by the intuition and judgment of the teacher.

5.2.2 *Specific Principles*

1. *The preschool teacher should be a 'model'* (Vorbild) *for the child to imitate*. Before the age of seven, children learn mainly by imitation (this was stated already by Aristotle in his Poetics [1448b, 5–9]).[13] The child at that age has a strong need and instinct for imitation. It is therefore important that preschool staff is engaged in clearly visible activities, for example, cooking and house care; but also creative ones like painting and handicrafts. Such activities should be carried out with grace and joy and the children should have the possibility to imitate them in their own way. Somewhat similarly, Piaget also pointed out that receptive learning is as natural for the child as is spontaneous activity, and the Waldorf preschool builds almost exclusively on this fact (cf. Ginsburg 1982). But Steiner extends the insights of Piaget by pointing out the deep and penetrating nature of children's sense-based receptivity. In one lecture, he compares the child during the first seven years to a big eye. But this eye is not merely a mirror producing an inverted picture of the world, as described in physics. The pictures that the eye receives, Steiner claims, affect the circulation of the blood in the choroid, and the whole eye adjusts itself accordingly. Not only that, the whole etheric body takes up the image, and thereby the blood circulation and the vascular and metabolic systems are affected. Thus, the whole organism is informed by what it senses of the environment; and tendencies are implanted which remains for the rest of life. Of course, these are very subtle processes, which cannot be observed by the physical eyes, but it does not take too much imagination to admit that they can be real. It is because of these subtle processes

[12] In another context, Steiner says that the social question is really a moral-religious question, albeit on the condition that such questions are dealt with on the basis of spiritual insight (1986a [GA 307], p. 28). One may take this as an example of a hopelessly muddled view of the world—or as one of how everything can be seen from many different but equally relevant points of view.

[13] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html (accessed 01 Feb 2017).

that the very being of the adults surrounding the child is so important. As Steiner often said, children do not follow what you say, they imitate what you are and what you do (1989e [GA 311], pp. 25ff).

The principle behind this reasoning could be summarised as that teaching in the age from 0 to 7 should be *formational* (*gestaltende*), with the important addition that it is not about the child being formed like a lump of clay in the teacher's hands, but about the teachers *forming themselves* and their actions as a model for the child to imitate (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 170).

2. *During the first seven years, the sense organs should be particularly cultivated*. A hasty interpretation of this principle would be that children should be surrounded by aesthetically attractive things and environments. However, the crux of the matter is what is regarded as aesthetically attractive by a child. It is not about beauty in a conventional or superficial sense; it is about what may stimulate children's imagination. Nowadays, toys produced for children are often full of realistic details, which surely captures the eyes and the interest of children. But often it does not take long before such a toy is put in a corner and forgotten. Why? A normal child, Steiner claims, will reject a 'beautiful doll'—realistic in all its details, down to the eyelashes—and prefer a piece of wood or anything that activates the imagination (1990 [GA 95], p. 55). To give a child a 'beautiful doll' is really like giving its brain a whipping, Steiner claims (1986a [GA 307], p. 115). We know that when small children draw a human being, they draw a head and two legs; that is an expression of the very vague, global image they have of the human body. If they draw a mouth to the face, it may be displaced or disproportioned. Therefore, the child cannot understand all the details of the doll's realistic body, that is why its brain is 'whipped'. If instead you present the child with a rough outline of a human body, like a small round ball from which a 'dress' flows out and play with it as if it were a person, its imagination is stirred to see it as a human being, and its brain is stimulated instead of 'punished'. Thus, to cultivate the sense organs does not mean to present children with aesthetically elaborated toys and other things; on the contrary, it means presenting them with simple, half-formed objects that they must fill out or make complete with their own inner pictures.

Since Steiner's time, the market of children's toys has developed a thousand-fold. It is now a big industry, aligning itself with film and other media productions. There seems to be very little discussion and reflection on the subtler, indoctrinating aspects of these interventions in children's life. A recent development are the so-called transformers: plastic toys—sometimes with electronic or digital additions—that can be converted to different beings, such as a machine, an animal or a human being.[14] The implicit message of such a toy is completely in line

[14]For an example, see https://www.amazon.co.uk/Transformers-Robots-Disguise-3-Step-Grimlock/dp/B00P95Q2VC/ref=sr_1_3?s=kids&i.e.=UTF8&qid=1479717353&sr=1-3&keywords=transformers.

with the ontological assumptions of materialistic and technicist science: the human being is an *animal*; the living organism is a *mechanism* (for a serious discussion of the possible impact of such toys on children, see Rittelmeyer 2007; Chap. 3).

3. *From class 1 to 7 (approximately), the teacher should be a natural authority*. In Steiner's time, teachers in general presumably had a certain formal authority, on whatever level they were teaching. It was based simply on their position as professional teachers. Steiner recognised, however, that opposition against traditional norms and values, and the desire for freedom, was growing strong among people in his time (1986a [GA 307], pp. 54–55). Human beings want less and less to stand on the ground of memories and ideals of the past; they want freedom. In a way, Steiner's diagnosis of his time anticipates what the German sociologist Thomas Ziehe (1982) calls 'being culturally set free': moral, cultural and religious traditions are no longer considered self-evidently valid. One consequence is that school has lost its 'aura' as something of great value and importance. For many youngsters, school nowadays is just something you must get through on the way to the freedom that comes with being an adult. Therefore, teachers nowadays must *earn* their authority and respect, not least from their students (Ziehe 1996).

The external social and cultural conditions of schooling in Western society have developed in such a way that Steiner's idea of the teacher as a natural authority has become even more relevant. Steiner does not oppose the desire for individual freedom inherent in modern people, on the contrary. But, he claims, we are seriously mistaken if we believe that freedom should be given to children as early as possible. This would go against the laws of child development. Only a child, who in the period between seven to fourteen years old has felt genuine respect for their teacher, can later develop true personal freedom. But children should not respect their teachers out of moral obligation, or fear of punishment. The feeling of respect should arise naturally, out of the realisation that the teachers care for them and their future and that they have more extensive knowledge, not only of facts but also of what is good and valuable. The teacher knows things about the world that the child also wants or needs to know (1980 [GA 150], pp. 19–20).

The child's respect for the authority of the teacher should rest on the experience of the teacher as *representing the world* to the child. This idea is rather like what Hannah Arendt meant when she said that teachers should really take responsibility for the world and, with this feeling, show it to the children, as if saying to them: 'This is our world' (Arendt 1961, p. 189).[15] In doing this, the teacher represents the

[15]The context of Arendt's reasoning is political philosophy and thus completely different from that of Steiner. However, she points out that true authority is clearly separated from force or violence (these are resorted to when authority is lost), and that it is incompatible with rational persuasion, because the latter presupposes equality and argumentation (1961, p. 93). In these aspects, there is a certain affinity with Steiner's ideas, which also exclude force, and opposes the view that children before puberty should be reasoned with as equals. Arendt further argues that the loss of the traditional meaning of authority is related to an increasing unwillingness among modern people to take on responsibility for things.

past, but the children belong to the future. The teacher must leave the future open for what the new generation will bring into the world. Nevertheless, the teacher is an authority in that she knows the history of the world and what it has become, and this the children must also know, in order to recreate the world for themselves.

From a Waldorf perspective, the authority of the teacher is also based on the experience that what was taught and learned in a lower grade proves to be useful or meaningful in a higher grade. That is the advantage of having one class teacher in most subjects for many years.

That the teacher should be an authority may fly in face of many mainstream teachers and educational thinkers today, when adherence to the ideals of democracy and equality is widespread and taken as the very basis of modern society. However, it is important to see that the authority Steiner speaks of is *natural*, not based on the formal position of the teacher. Furthermore, the feelings of respect that is hopefully evoked in the children is counterbalanced by another kind of respect that the teacher should have for the child, partly based on the recognition that the child is so much 'closer' to the spiritual world. A wise teacher knows that he can learn a lot from a child, and this should inspire a feeling of reverence in him (1989f [GA 127], p. 64) (see also Weiss [2015] for an interesting comparison between Steiner's view of the teacher–child relation and the concept of recognition [*Anerkennung*] in the social philosophy of Axel Honneth).

However, it is important to note that after grade 7, when children enter puberty, the authority relation between the teacher and the students should fade away, and a relation of friendship and equality should take over (this transition may not be easy to accomplish for all teachers). This is the time when the young person starts to develop their own, independent judgement of things, and they should be given the possibility and freedom to do so.

4. *From class 1 to 8, there should be one class teacher leading the class and carrying out the main subject lessons*. By this arrangement, a deep trust and appreciation may develop between the teacher and each child. A condition for the continuity of relationship and communication is established. The teacher comes to know the characteristics of each child and may more easily intuit what it needs for its growth and development. Ashley (2009) considers this as part of the stability that Waldorf education creates for the child, as well as the teacher, which in turn creates good conditions for the realisation of the overarching aims and ideals that have been proclaimed for education for over a century, but so far with little success. However, the back side of the arrangement with a class teacher is of course that if the relation does not go well, a child may be stuck in a problematic teacher relation for many years. Empirical studies have recorded some discontent among former Waldorf students in this regard, see Helsper et al. (2007). A class teacher takes on a great responsibility for the development of individual children, which sometimes makes the relationship problematic. The teacher is not just an educational professional, but becomes a 'significant other'

for many children (Ullrich 2008). Because of the risks involved, Ullrich (ibid.) recommends that the class teacher years be ended in grade 6. Here, it must also be noted that the practice of having a class teacher for eight years is nowadays actually questioned and being abandoned by some Waldorf schools, for various reasons. One reason is the problem just mentioned, another is the growing lack of teachers with a sufficiently qualified Waldorf teacher education.

5. *Rhythm and musicality is an essential curriculum element*. This is an aspect of addressing 'the middle' of the human being: the feeling life, connected to the rhythmic functions of the heart and lungs (1986a [GA 307], pp. 121ff). It is especially important in the 7–14-age period, when teaching should be *enlivening* (*belebende*) (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 172). The learning process involves many polarities that must be considered by the teacher, such as 'breathing in and breathing out' in both a literal and a metaphorical sense, related to the polarity of observing/receiving versus doing/acting/practicing. Another polarity is remembering versus forgetting, related to sleep and wakening. Sleep and forgetting are actually as significant for learning as their opposites, which has recently been indicated by brain research (cf. Blakemore and Frith 2005, pp. 173f). One practical consequence of this is the organisation of teaching into subject epochs, lasting 3–4 weeks. During such an epoch, one subject is studied every day in the morning hours.[16] This allows for the things studied to be unconsciously digested during the night and then taken up again the next day. Ideally, a theme is dealt with in three consecutive days. On day 1 the theme is presented in artistic and vivid images, addressing the senses and the imagination. On day 2, the material is worked through by recalling, retelling, discussing and perhaps dramatising. On the third day, children work more individually by writing and drawing their own pictures of what they have understood, forming their own conception or 'individualised concept' of the theme (cf. Ginsburg 1982, p. 335). On a larger timescale, when the epoch is finished the whole subject is left to rest and forgotten, until it is brought up again at a later time. According to Steiner, creating such a rhythm in the children's learning contributes to the individualisation of the process; it gives each child the possibility to digest the knowledge content in its own way.

Rhythm is related to the musical element in education, and music is an expression of the inner world (1991a [GA 301], pp. 168ff). The musical element is not only present in music as such, but also in language and speech. If children have difficulties in writing orthographically[17] correct—which Steiner himself had as a child—it means that they have difficulties with musical hearing, that is, to hear the

[16]As noted above, the afternoons are devoted to bodily, practical or aesthetic activities. Cognitive subjects are usually studied in the morning, when the mind is fresh and more receptive; this is another aspect of rhythm on the daily scale.

[17]Orthography is about spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, word breaks, emphasis and punctuation.

words in their full plastic content. Teachers must therefore also be very articulate in speaking. Language and speech also have melodic aspects, so rhythm and melody work together. By cultivating the sense for melody and rhythm in music, children also develop a sense for rhythm in language. A melodic phrase has a certain similarity to a correctly punctuated sentence. The musical element of language and speech usually lives in the subconscious, but teachers do well to bring this element into awareness and work with it consciously, for the art of teaching to overcome materialism. In our times, the spoken word seldom has the 'idealistic uplift' that causes genuine enthusiasm in the listeners (1992b [GA 224], p. 16). Teachers should not talk in a dry, mechanical voice, but endeavour to bring melodic, rhythmic and full-sounding (*Volltönende*) qualities into their speech.

The musical aspect of teaching can also be related to the *content* of what is taught. This is important especially in the subject of history before the age of twelve. History should then be presented in well-rounded, plastic images, but also include tensions and releases, contractions and expansions, almost like a symphony.

In the cultural history of mankind, rhythm has actually been a common *bonnes à penser* or 'tool for thinking', especially in non-literate cultures (cf. Egan 1998; with reference to Walter Ong). Rhythm is part of the tools of rime, narrative and metaphor; like when one sums up a teaching in rhythmic verses (cf. Mathisen 2015).

From the anthroposophical point of view, rhythm is an essential aspect of all life. It is an aspect that connects us to the whole cosmos; from the shifts of day and night to the rhythms of the starry constellations and the planets. As described in Chap. 4, the heart and the lungs are understood as the rhythmic system of the human being, placed between the nervous system (head/brain), and the metabolic system (stomach/limbs). But just as thinking, feeling, and will are not separate functions working in isolation from each other, so are the three organic systems also interacting and interweaving throughout the whole organism. The nervous system and the metabolic system both have their rhythmic aspects. This is evident from the rather recent development of chronobiology, a special field of research in biology and medicine. Chronobiology studies the various rhythms that regulate the organs and behaviours of human and other living organisms (see, e.g. Kreitzman and Foster 2004). The biologist Brian Goodwin even suggests that rhythm is the very essence of life, because it maintains the balance between order and chaos—which is the basic characteristic of living beings (Goodwin 1999). Too much order, and the organism dies out of petrification. Too much chaos, and the organism dies out of dissolution or disintegration.[18] The balance between order and chaos is important also in teaching and learning and can be related to Schiller's basic ideas in his

[18]In close observation of the heart beats, one finds that the interval between two beats always varies, even if the overall rhythm is steady, because the rhythm must adapt to everything else that goes on in the body. This is an example of the balance between order and chaos on the microlevel. If the interval was exactly the same, it would mean too much order and indicate a disturbance of the heart function (Goodwin 1999).

letters on the aesthetic education of man (for a discussion of this issue within the framework of chaos philosophy and with some references to Waldorf education, see Larsson and Dahlin 2012).

6. *The speech of foreign languages is learnt already in the early school years.* In the first Waldorf school, children were taught French and English. It is obviously useful to be able to communicate in a foreign language, and Steiner realised that it would be more and more important in the future. However, there are two other reasons for why this is introduced already in the lower classes. The first is that, according to Steiner, spoken language contains etheric forces that acts in a formative way on the young organism, especially on the rhythmic system (lungs and blood circulation) (1986a [GA 307], p. 199). However, different languages have slightly different effects in this respect. By learning to speak words of a foreign language, the one-sidedness of the mother tongue is compensated for. The second reason is that by introducing foreign language at a relatively early age one prepares the soul for openness to other languages and cultures. Ethnic and cultural hostility is actually to a large extent based on being too strongly identified with one's own mother tongue, Steiner claims (cf. Steiner 1981 [GA 299] and Denjean 1999) (this identification is of course completely subconscious).[19] Implicit in every language, there are different ways of apprehending things, ways that are expressed in (subconscious) imaginations and pictures. By conveying these imaginations to young children, their minds are opened to that which is 'other' and different, and they become more flexible. Steiner's view that different languages contain implicitly different world views is somewhat like the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, according to which different languages constitute different views of reality (see for instance Sapir 1983; Whorf 1956).[20]

It is important to note that in the early classes, foreign language teaching is kept on a strictly oral level. Spelling and grammar are not considered in the first school years, only how to pronounce the words and what they mean is conveyed. Rimes and songs are used to emphasise the rhythmic and musical qualities. Grammar and syntax are gradually and softly introduced in the third class, i.e., when the children are about 10 years old. Grammar and syntax are implicit forms of self-reflection (how do I speak? what rules do I follow?); they are therefore appropriate at this age, when self-awareness is intensified (cf. the 9-year crisis; Chap. 4).

[19]GA 299 is translated into English, cf. Steiner (1995b). This edition contains an interesting afterword by Adam Makkai, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Illinois.

[20]Even though Waldorf education grew out of German soil, Steiner intended it to be for the whole of humanity—which is not to say that its curriculum should not be adapted according to the ethnic context in which it is applied; on the contrary. This is, however, a challenging task that many Waldorf schools struggle with, especially since the recent interest in Waldorf education in China and other non-European nations.

7. *In the lower classes, studies of nature should be holistic and imaginative*. The child should get the feeling that not only 'I' can speak, but also animals and plants speak to each other, and to humans. Nothing should be considered as an isolated thing, but as connected to the world around it. The plant is related to the earth and the soil where it grows, as well as to the rain, the sunshine, the insects, and other animals; they all communicate with one another.[21] An 'ecological' perspective should dominate, but not in a way that lines up a lot of hard facts, but in a way that inspires the imagination to create holistic pictures of how different beings interact and interweave throughout nature. In the early school years, children still instinctively feel a part of the world, and this holistic approach to nature reflects this feeling.

The study of each plant or animal in itself, by dissection and analysis, comes later. This idea of starting with 'the whole', which is applied also in other subjects, is somewhat similar to what Comenius also proposed in his *Didactica Magna* (1967). Using the analogy of how Nature makes a fertilised egg develop into a chicken, Comenius points out how the contents of the egg to begin with is just one undifferentiated substance, which is separated into the white and the yolk, and then gradually becomes more and more differentiated, until the complex organism of the chicken is born. In the same way, teaching should start with a general characterisation of the whole of the subject and then gradually go into more details.

8. *In arithmetic, one starts from the whole and divides it into parts*. This is another example of the previous principle. In a way, Waldorf students learn division before addition, because arithmetic starts with the whole, 'the one', and then looks in what ways this whole can be divided. If you have one cake, you can divide it into two halves, that is, it can become two. Or three, or any number. Add all the pieces together and you have one cake again. The same operation can be carried out on any digit, say 14. 14 can be the sum of 6 and 8, or 5 and 9, etc. Therefore, instead of putting forth the problem 8 + 6 = ?, a teacher may ask: 14 = ? (of course, the + operation must be introduced first). The nice thing about such a question is that there are several possible and equally right answers, so many children can contribute to the solution. From this simple example, one gets the sense of how *life* can be brought into even such a brain-centred activity as arithmetic. According to Steiner, starting from the whole and moving into its parts has a stimulating effect on the so-called etheric body, the energy of living, formative forces (see Chap. 4 above) (1986a [GA 307], p. 181).
9. *Between the Rubicon years (9–12), the connections and relations between the human being and nature should be emphasised.* As noted above (Chap. 4), around the age of nine, children wake up to a more intense self-consciousness, which means that they start to feel separate from the world around them. To counterbalance this tendency, the relations between the human being and nature become an important theme for study (1986a [GA 307], Lectures 10 and 11).

[21]For an example, see Wohlleben (2016).

Different aspects of the human being are related to different aspects of the animal, the plant, and the mineral worlds; the latter is to be dealt with last, since it is furthest from the living human organism.

The Rubicon years, also called the heart of childhood, is the best time for developing living concepts (ibid., Lecture 9), that is, concepts that can grow and change with the individual, so that at the age of 40 we do not have to try to remember the correct definition of some concept that we heard of in school, but can express our own understanding of it, based on our own thinking and life experience.

10. *In the upper classes, science teaching should be based on a phenomenological approach*. Even though Steiner does not explicitly talk about a phenomenological teaching method for science, his suggestions for teaching methods in the later school years give clear hints in this direction (Wiehl 2015, p. 208). In a lecture on anthroposophy and science, Steiner (1994 [GA 81], pp. 17ff) describes the phenomenological approach to studying natural phenomena as based on patient and exact observations, out of which thoughts, ideas and principles are carefully derived. The result is a feeling that the laws and principles of natural phenomena are inherent in nature itself and then reappear in conceptual form in human consciousness. Ideas and concepts are not something that human thinking *adds* to nature in an external sense. Therefore, the deep and alienating split between subject and object, consciousness and nature, can be bridged and even healed. This approach to science teaching has been further explored by Dahlin (2001, 2003) and Østergaard et al. (2008).

The introduction of the scientific concept of causality starts around the second Rubicon, i.e. around the age of twelve. The lessons on modern science are counterbalanced by a more systematic study of art and art history; learning to understand the significance of different art forms in the cultural evolution of humanity. Thus, the understanding of science and art are equally important, addressing different aspects of the human being and contributing to the holistic character of Waldorf education. By the parallel study of science and art, Steiner also seems to intend a preparation for the experience of the world as a cosmic work of art, and of nature as a creative artist *par excellence*. This, in turn, has the potential to lead on to a spiritual experience of life (1986a [GA307], pp. 225–226). Thus, it may be taken as an aspect of the basic principle for teaching in the ages 14–21: *awakening* (*erweckende*) (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 178). Here, we also see how Steiner's vision of the future synthesis of science, art and religion informs the Waldorf curriculum.

11. *At the age of puberty, technical inventions and how they work should be studied.* Like many modern educators, Steiner also complained that despite the great technological changes that happened in his life time, nothing had changed in the school curriculum. The human spirit had created machines such as the steam engine and the railway—and of course many more things today. Many people could see the trains pass by, or ride on them, and yet they did not understand anything about how they worked. Thus, they had no part in the

spirit that had created these things; they were alienated from essential parts of human culture. Waldorf students should not be like this; they should *understand* how new inventions work, and to some degree learn to handle them. In other words, they should be open to the world around them, and puberty is the appropriate age for this opening (1986a [GA 307], pp. 196f). If young people do not develop a real interest in the world at this age (and not only in technology but in all other aspects as well), they will turn their interest towards themselves in an unhealthy manner, such as comparing themselves to others, becoming concerned with social status, and with physical pleasures such as sex, alcohol and drugs.

5.3 Being a Waldorf Teacher

Steiner puts a lot of responsibility on teachers. For instance, he claims that it is not primarily a question of the interest or efforts that students can bring to their studies, but how much interest, devotion and effort the *teachers* can bring to their teaching. Teachers must have the time to prepare their lessons to the degree that only the artistic expression in the classroom remains. Teachers must work out of their entire being, out of their human essence as it were, not merely out of their intellectual memory of facts and definitions. Only in this way can they educate whole and complete human beings.

The recent and by now well-known study of Hattie (2009, 2012) has made it clear that the teacher is the primary and most important factor for students' learning. The qualities or competencies of the teacher that Hattie identifies as most significant (see Hattie 2012) agree to some extent with those that Steiner wishes to see in a Waldorf teacher. For instance, Hattie says teachers need to be *caring* and *passionately engaged* in teaching and learning; they need to be aware of what *each student* is thinking and what they know; students and teachers need to *feel safe* to learn, i.e., errors must be welcomed as opportunities to learn, not discarded with criticism (cf. ibid., p. 22). About passion Hattie says it is a theme that is often avoided in the context of good teaching, because it is associated with emotionalism, being biased or less serious in one's teaching. But the key component of passion is 'the sheer thrill' of being a teacher (ibid., p. 19), and if teachers want to thrive in their work, they have 'to learn to experience the joy of inspired teaching' (p. 35). These are some of the qualities and abilities of a good teacher that Hattie portrays, which are in obvious agreement with Steiner's ideas (see further Lutzker in press).

5.3.1 Being Responsible for the World

We noted above that according to Arendt (1961), teachers' authority rests upon their being responsible for the world. This means that teachers must be open to the

world at large, to take a non-prejudiced interest in everything that is happening in society, culture, and politics; locally as well as globally. To be able to participate fruitfully in the world and do one's work in freedom, human beings must understand the times they live in and assimilate its dominant ideas (which does not necessarily mean agreeing with them). And what the teachers find in the world around them they should bring into the classroom—considering of course what is appropriate for the age of the children. In this way, teachers act as the link between school and the world outside.

Teachers should realise that human consciousness is not a mere observer of the world, it is an arena (*Schauplatz*) for world events. The human soul is an arena upon which events of great cosmic significance are repeatedly enacted. One may consider one aspect of being responsible for the world to be the understanding of one's consciousness to be such an arena. Steiner's early experience of geometry, when he envisaged the soul as an inner space in which spiritual beings appeared and events took place (2000 [GA 28], p. 21)[22] is an illustration of this view of human consciousness. Of course, in our everyday state of mind we are far from experiencing our consciousness in this way, but teachers should not shy away from such a possibility. Even though it seems irrelevant to the practical work of teaching, it is not.

5.3.2 *Being Able to Relate*

Another aspect of teachers' competencies is the ability to relate to children and students. Steiner went as far as saying that the most important requirement—even more important than subject knowledge—is that teachers have the heart, mind and temperament for gradually establishing a relationship between themselves and their students (1991c [GA 181], p. 136). He understood this statement would seem absurd to most of his contemporaries, and it probably still does to many people. Or, if one agrees, one would say that this is already considered in teacher education, where, for instance, preservice teachers are advised to break off their studies if they are seen to be unable to relate to students. But Steiner surely had deeper and perhaps more imponderable things in view than what is usually considered in this respect.

5.3.3 *Cultivating One's Inner Life*

As pointed out earlier (Chap. 4), human beings are made to learn and develop during the whole of life, particularly in the inner, soul-spiritual sense. This is

[22]English edition: Steiner (2010).

especially important for teachers. The teacher's personal cultivation of spiritual life includes a meditative or contemplative approach both to the knowledge content of their teaching, and to their work experiences. In this practice, the teacher becomes a learner, a student, on their own level of development. This is also part of the basis for the authority of the teacher: that they themselves are a student, a learner. It contributes to making the dialogue between teachers and students a genuine one, in which the students can feel that they participate in an action of communion with the teacher.

Steiner suggested some exercises for the practical development of thinking; which are also of relevance for teachers (1986c [GA 108], pp. 256ff). They are the following:

(1) exact observation of, for example, natural phenomena like the weather, then forming clear memory pictures of what one has seen;
(2) exact imaginations, for example, observing how another person behaves and then imagining how they will behave next time one meets them;
(3) becoming aware of cause and effect, for example, reflecting on the causes behind another person's behaviour;
(4) to consciously lead one's thought processes, to cut off distractions and focus on a theme or line of thought;
(5) exact memory, for example, trying to remember as many details as possible about another person;
(6) to think about possibilities, not making quick judgments or rushing to decisions.

Many of these exercises involve another person; for teachers, this other person is of course most often one of the children in their class; it is part of coming to know the individuality of each student. As for the first exercise, exact observation, Steiner says it is the most important one for teachers (1986a [GA307], p. 221); that is, the ability to observe the children, especially from the point of view of spirit, soul and body, and how they interact in each child. From such observations teachers can come to know, in an 'instinctually artistic way' (*instinktgemäß künstlerisch*), how to conduct their teaching.

Altogether, the six exercises develop the basic abilities of perception, the formation of inner pictures, and thinking, all of which are conditions for knowledge-based teaching and learning activities (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 162f). By doing them, Steiner claims that prejudices, tendencies to premature judgment, and not seeing facts correctly may be overcome. There are, he says, many influences from our subconscious life that give colour and direction to our thoughts, but we are usually not aware of them. Our logical reasoning is often only a superficial justification of what our subconscious mind has already concluded.[23] The cultivation of the

[23]This is now verified by empirical studies, see for inst. Zajonc (1980). The difference between such studies and Steiner's approach is that the former just note the fact, whereas Steiner in addition points to the possibility of changing such ways of functioning through inner work.

abilities of exact observation and clear, impartial thinking are of course useful everywhere in life. But it is especially important in teaching and other social work.

5.3.4 *The Personhood of the Teacher: The Importance of 'Who You Are'*

In one of his letters, John the Apostle says, 'Children, love one another' (1 John, 3). The meaning of these simple words is not independent of who says them. Uttered by a fool, they carry no meaning at all, but said by a wise man in his old age, with a long and rich life behind him, their meaning is far and deep. In other words, the meaning of what a person says is not only in the words themselves, but also depends on the psychospiritual background of the person by which they are spoken (1999b [GA 161], p. 126). Thus, what a teacher says in the class, in teaching, is subconsciously taken up by the children in different ways, depending on the personhood of the teacher.[24] There are no 'teacher proof' ways of instruction.

It seems clear that if a teacher follows the suggestions and recommendations that Steiner makes regarding the cultivation of spiritual life, it will influence their personhood—whether this effect is for the good or not will show itself in their practice and their life (though one must be careful about judging people in this respect). What Steiner proposes here has some parallels with what has been suggested by Wivestad (2013), in a Kierkegaardian, existentialist approach to teaching and education. Children will often feel what kind of story we live by, Wivestad says, and if we live this story in an earnest and passionate way, we may give them a good example to follow, even if we fail. Personhood has very much to do with 'the story we live by'.

5.3.5 *About Planning One's Teaching*

In one of his lectures, Steiner presents an interesting and challenging fictional story about three teachers, each of which exemplifies a particular approach to their teaching work in terms of planning their future lessons (1982a [GA 166], pp. 60–81). Each teacher is interviewed at the beginning of the school year by the headmaster of the school, who asks them what conclusions they have drawn from their experiences of the previous year, and how those experiences will enter their plans for the upcoming year. The first teacher proudly recounts how he has evaluated the tasks he gave his students the previous year, both in lessons and as homework. He has now improved these tasks based on how the students responded.

[24]By personhood is meant something deeper and more encompassing than 'personality', which usually refers to a person's external and more obvious attitudes and behaviours (cf. Dahlin and Larsson in press).

The second teacher, equally proud, shows the new syllabus plan that he has developed by going through his syllabus for the previous year and correcting the mistakes he discovered he had made. However, the third teacher has a different approach. He says he has in his memory looked back over the previous year and tried to see the character of each of his students and what happened to them, what they went through, and if and how they changed. He had certainly made mistakes, but also good things, but this did not concern him so much. He thought that what had taken place was in a sense unavoidable, considering the character of his students, and the character of himself. As for the coming year, he had made no plans. He simply intended to study the character of his students, and since he had some practice in this during the summer holidays, looking at his previous students, he feels confident that he will now be better at it. As for lesson tasks and homework, he cannot present them now because he will create them on the basis of the observations of his students, which he has yet not seen. The headmaster is not very happy with the third teacher's approach. During the school year, he often inspects the lessons of the three teachers and finds that the third teacher is not doing as well as the other two. The headmaster is then promoted and another man takes his place. The new headmaster, on the contrary, likes the approach of the third teacher and encourages the other two teachers to learn from him. This new headmaster is, however, very soon transferred to another job. But he continues for years to follow the students of the three teachers and how they fare in life after leaving school. He finds out that the students of the first two teachers certainly become respectable and good people, but they do not accomplish very much in life. Those of the third teacher, however, although they were not particularly successful in school, become very significant persons and accomplish many good things.

Steiner's comment on the story is that the first two teachers are focused on the past and on the improvement of their own past mistakes, whereas the third teacher is more concerned with the students that is in his care at present, and how he himself participates in a living situation together with them. The story is touching in its implicit critique of the instrumentalist approach of 'performative efficiency', which characterise so much of modern society and which has increased a thousand-fold since Steiner's time. It is easily interpreted as putting a methodical, systematic approach up against an 'intuitive' one, rejecting the first and extolling the second. This would be in stark contrast to the many developments in different countries of syllabuses and curriculum plans for Waldorf schools, all of which (more or less) prescribe what is to be done in each school year, based on Steiner's recommendations and suggestions. One is drawn to the conclusion that Waldorf education in its own way encompasses both a systematic and an intuitive approach to teaching. But the intuitive is not to be confused with merely acting on the spur of the moment, without making plans and evaluations, and having no professional knowledge base. The systematic approach, on the other hand, is not to be understood as rules and models that should be applied in all lessons (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 167).

5.4 A Note on School Architecture

With our extended concept of curriculum as including everything that students consciously or subconsciously experience during their time in school, even the forms and colours of the classrooms and school houses should be considered as part of the curriculum. Goethe once said that architecture is music that has congealed into silence; if that is true, we walk around in this silent music for the greater part of our life. Steiner had some interesting ideas for a new architecture, based on living, organic forms (1982b [GA 286]; cf. Bjørnholt 2014). His view was that the forms and colours of the buildings we dwell in affect our minds in a deeper way than those we commonly believe. In terms of the human sense organs (see above, Chap. 4), many more senses than the eyes are involved in experiencing architecture. For instance, a spatial form is a 'frozen movement'; therefore, in addition to the eyes, the kinaesthetic sense and the sense of balance are also involved in perceiving it. Where resources have been available, Steiner's ideas for an organic architecture have been taken up by Waldorf schools, resulting in some rather original school buildings.

Some interesting—albeit small scale—empirical studies of students' experiences of school buildings and classrooms are reported by Rittelmeyer (2002). Regarding colours, it was found that some children reacted with a slight increase of temperature in the breast region at the sight of red and yellow, and with a decrease at the sight of blue–white nuances. This is in accord with Steiner's recommendation to have walls of warm, red–yellow colours in the early years' classrooms, thereby activating the 'middle man', the rhythmic system, i.e. the breast region. In another study, children were told to look at photographs of school buildings and express their experience of what they saw. At the same time, their eye movements and the opening/closing of their pupils as they watched the pictures were registered. When looking at a cement-heavy and square-formed building with rows of equally sized square windows, the children often reported various feelings of dislike. These experiences were accompanied by a narrowing of the pupils, which is commonly established as a physiological correlate to feelings of antipathy. Looking phenomenologically at this physiological response as a *bodily gesture*, it can be understood as a subconscious expression of 'I close myself' and/or 'It gets darker' (cf. ibid., p. 61). It does not take much imagination to see how such a subconscious feeling for the school building among many students would affect the general atmosphere of a school.

It has been found in other studies that a feeling of *belonging* in school correlates with academic motivation (Resnick et al. 1997). When students feel safely 'at home' in school they are more likely to adapt to the norms of the school and make efforts in their studies. The emotional atmosphere of the school is of great significance for the quality of students' learning (Spitzer 2009). The studies of Rittelmeyer indicate that even school architecture may contribute to this atmosphere. Another contribution is how school life is organised. As Osterman (2000) points out, the organisation of schools often neglects and even undermines students' experience of being members of a supportive community. Steiner's idea of main lesson blocks (*Epochenunterricht*), in

which one subject is studied every morning for several weeks, is one aspect of how teachers' work is organised for the benefit of the children (and not for the administration). Steiner also had other ideas for school organisation, which correlated with his ideas for a new social order; this is the subject of the next chapter.

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