

HUMANISTIC ASPECTS OF RUDOLF STEINER'S CONCEPTION OF CURRICULUM

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Introduction

In the broadest sense, humanism is a system of ideas emphasizing and respecting the value of man as a personality. Humanism stresses the right for freedom, happiness, and development of one's potentials and abilities. In everyday speech, humanism means humanity and human dignity of living conditions of man (Malá československá encyklopedie, 1985, p. 870).

In this paper we shall not deal with terminological problems of humanism, nor with general notion of education or related notions. Neither, we shall concentrate on sociological, cultural or political perspectives of education. While presenting Rudolf Steiner's conception of curriculum we shall draw on theoretical ideas and definitions published by Š. Švec (1991) and E. Walterová (1991). We shall concentrate on a brief description of educational anthropology of R. Steiner, on which his conception of curriculum is based. Also, we shall describe the curriculum proper. Our analysis will be based on humanistic foundations of anthroposophic education of R. Steiner, as presented in my earlier paper (Matulčíková, 1991).

For a small group of teachers of the first Waldorf school who developed an early draft of curriculum, the knowledge of man and developmental needs of the child was crucial. An outline of developmental stages and needs of the child served as the basis for the outline of curriculum, known among teachers as "Small Curriculum" ("Vom Lehrplan der Freien Waldorfschule") by C. von Heydebrand (1990). Relationship of formative and informative aspects of education was one of the important factors in designing curriculum, which was labeled "the Bible of Waldorf teachers". This relationship was described in the work of E.A.K. Stockmeyer (1988, esp. pp 368-386).

Developmental needs of the child and curriculum

According to R. Steiner, the child develops in seven-year cycles. However, the time aspect of his development is not decisive. The first cycle starts with embryonic development and end with change of teeth (R. Steiner, 1983, p. 14). It is the creative

potentials that undergo metamorphosis in earthly time rhythms, that are decisive for education of the child. After completion of first seven years they become independent from the physical body (they abandon the sphere of nutrition and growth) and they continue living as spiritual powers in feeling and thinking of the child (op. cit., p. 15). Therefore, the curriculum for the first three grades of the Waldorf school is based on the assumption that creative powers, that affect the physical organism, have completed their functioning in the physical body (emergence of permanent teeth which are tough and firm) and they enter the psychical life of the child, whereby they enable concrete-visual thinking, development of memory, education of character and will. These powers also prepare an important change in the development of consciousness, which, as a rule, begins at the age of 9.

By shifting the focus of ontogeny from the head (the sphere of senses) to the chest (the sphere of feeling), everything which is connected with rhythm, time and rhyme acquires a special importance. On these principles selection and organization of the subject matter is based, i.e., in grade 1 and 2 dreamy of consciousness should be respected. In instruction the teacher must proceed from artistic aspects to intellectual ones, and from movements of hands to activity of the head.

As concerns the forming of consciousness, in the developmental period that covers approximately grades 4-6, the child experiences a distance, or withdrawal, from the spiritual life in which he lived so far. This phenomenon is caused by an extreme activity of all conscious powers, which results in more independence of the inner world of the child and in growth of his self-conception. In addition to the emotional crisis, the child's ability to observe the world realistically increases. Also, his perception and thinking becomes more objective. Criticism to people, who were so far informal authorities, emerges. These developmental changes create conditions for differentiation of school subjects and to gradual transition to more abstract subject matter. It is very important that the subject matter helped child in this period of developmental in his uncertainty, and offered the child "safeness" of learning and doing eternal human activities (making bread, construction of a house).

Another significant milestone in the development of the child is age 12. Not only this age is marked by beginning (in girls by acceleration) of puberty, with a necessary "foreplay" of motor disharmony (caused by a significant physical disproportions), but also by maturity for understanding of some specific logical relationships. According to C. von Heydebrand, everything what is in science and life ruled by mechanical principles may be taught with great benefit (op. cit., p. 29). Therefore, in this period of schooling curriculum contains new subjects, and also the level of difficulty of learning changes. According to R. Steiner, in this period the child is dominated by some musical powers. Therefore good education should contain musical and lyrical performances.

Another important determinant of selection and ordering of the subject matter is the completion of school attendance which takes place by a variety of circumstances. In the curriculum and in the commentary to it, it is reflected by provisional completion in all spheres. The provisional completion, however, helps also those pupils who pass from the third to the third level of schooling. This is justified by a notion that a symbolic act of completion of school attendance brings an important emotional experience, a jump from childhood to youth.

In education based on Anthroposophy, transition from childhood to adulthood and attaining sexual maturity is a very important milestone. However, it is to be noted that Steiner preferred the label "maturity for earthly life" (Erdenreif). This was justified by the idea that rather than to species, it refers only to individuality of man. Sexual maturity and maturity for earthly life opens a new developmental period. It is the closure of the second seven-year cycle. Curriculum is strongly affected by developmental changes in consciousness. After attaining sexual maturity a young man needs education which uses fresh powers of independent logical judgement and critical thinking. This is the stage when synthetical (global) thinking develops. Intellectual development should be harmonized now with emotional and social maturity, which will be attained later. Talent and aptitudes, that are truthfully assessed, and interests, that are developed for a longer period of time, open space for training for profession; they enable differentiation of curriculum - according to needs and wishes of pupils and specific conditions of the school. The secondary school should be based on fresh potentials of consciousness of the child that were acquired in the process of **concrete and visual thinking**, or on potentials that were **protected by following an authority** by the child. Also, they were protected by avoiding premature intellectualisation or premature criticism to the child. In all teaching domains and subjects, requirements for intellectual attainments should increase radically, abstract thinking should be used and developed, and the aim of learning synthetical knowledge of man and world should be achieved. Key importance in this period of education is what the young man will need in life.

The systematic schooling ends in grade 12 (or 13). In grade 12, pupils complete an important life epoch, the first 18-year period. If education and instruction fulfilled their tasks well, a young man who is intellectually mature and morally strong may enter the life. In the top grade the school provided him with an overview of scientific fields and all the subject matter learning resulted in a synthetical picture of man himself and his position in the world. In this synthesis everything **spiritual and moral** that the child have learned, and that was protected from premature intellectualism, should be utilized. The school which is based on Anthroposophy, i.e., on spiritual learning of man, "sends the school-leaver the world in order to understand what it is to be a real man, it sends his to fulfill this sacred mission and to serve the mankind" (C. von Heydebrand, op. cit, p. 51).

Specific features of curriculum in Rudolf Steiner schools (Waldorf schools)

The first outline of curriculum was designed by R. Steiner and his close collaborators, namely, E. Molt, H. Hahn, K. Stockmyer, in April 1919. In this outline they planned that pupils would learn practical business correspondence, history and geography of their homeland, and modern languages, preferably, English. They put great emphasis on mathematics learning. As concerns classical languages, Steiner valued Greek more than Latin. He claimed that teaching of Latin was a legacy of monastery schools (E.A.K. Stockmayer, 1988, p. 14.).

It was obvious that in designing the curriculum for the Waldorf school, R. Steiner was occupied also by the theory of the school. After analyzing the contemporary educational systems, he decided to prefer a comprehensive school. This school should provide education for both sexes and social structure of pupil should correspond to that one of the school district. He took the contemporary Austrian lower "real" school (Unterrealschule) as a model. This was because this school corresponded to his ideas of having school attendance up to the age of 16. He had in mind a complex education up to the university years. He assumed that the two year period between completion of the school and beginning of study at the university would be devoted to general university education. His considerations about the school and the university included also changes in examination (with the exception of doctoral examinations).

Initially, R. Steiner considered only 8 grades school. This was because he respected the critical periods and crisis in the development of man. Respecting the crisis of Self led him to expand the education up to the age of 16. A rapid increase in intellectual abilities and abstract thinking as well as a possibility of objective assessment of the level and kind of talent of the child in the age of 14 led him to the idea of establishing a new, vocational school (Fortbildungsschule, today named Berufsschule). The main intention was to provide young apprentices the same humanities education (menschliche Bildung) as it was provided for children who studied general courses. The time that was saved (instead of counter-productive stay in plants) was used for professional vocational training (op. cit., p. 29). The reason for this decisions was that the apprentice, who at Waldorf school was granted a qualification in some manual profession (handwerkliche Beruf), had a possibility, if appropriate, to study also at the university. Of course, this required streaming of classes to "fully" general and to classes with extended vocational training (which was economically well based, as Steiner frequently emphasized). Unfortunately, Steiner died before streaming in upper grades of Waldorf schools was implemented. This streaming can be met in models of Waldorf and Hybernian schools, where streaming is done in two ways:

1. Merger of vocational and general education (e.g., in Waldorfschule Kassel, R. Steiner-Schule Nürnberg, Hibernia-Schule Wanne - Eickel (Herne).

2. Strengthening the practical component of education without vocational education (e.g., R. Steiner-Schule Bochum).

Specifically, these problems are dealt with by E.M. Kranich (1990, p. 18-22) and K. Rýdl (1991, p. 725-728).

The nucleus of the curriculum was written by R. Steiner in May 1919. It was later elaborated in lectures and discussions in in-service training of the first Waldorf school teachers in September 1919 and at conferences at the beginning of the following school years. In this outline of curriculum (preserved in notes of E.A.K. Stockmayer) Steiner accented the humanistic aspect not only by requiring teaching children by the same teacher up to the age of 12, but also by selection and ordering of the subject matter according to anthroposophic anthropology.

"In grade 1 and 2: reading, writing, drawing, elementary computation, singing, eurythmical exercises, language ad libitum: 1. English, 2. French.

In grades 3 and 4: training of speech, teaching something about colours, singing, continuation of music and eurythmics, addition and subtraction (in grade 1 it was up to 100), multiplication by heart, animals in the neighbourhood.

In grades 5 and 6: fundamental mechanical concepts based on automobile, continuation in animals and plants, basic concepts in meteorology and climatology (rain, sun light, rise and setting of stars, seasons of the year), fundamental concepts in geography, proportions in mathematics (Rechnenunterricht).

In grade 7: understanding of the way of wheat grain from the field to bread.

In grade 8: farm, plants, meteorology, geography, historical concepts: Pre-Christian, Post-Christian, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, Greco-Roman cultures, geometrical concepts derived from geometrical drawing, commercial arithmetic, simple bookkeeping, perspective drawing, beginning of written computation, astronomy up to Copernicus system. Later: reduction of language arts, technical drawing, plans, maps, mathematics up to equations, section in a cone, practical geometry, surveying, construction art, chemical concepts, commercial style, elementary bookkeeping, world view education (Weltanschauungsunterricht), physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects of man, descriptive geometry, first aid in accidents " (E.A.K. Stockmeyer, 1988, p. 14-15).

Since this curriculum (irrespective of teaching methods and strategies) was very much different from generally recognized and valid curriculum, R. Steiner had to respect the ministry of culture and adapt the curriculum so that transfer of a pupil to another school, if appropriate, would be possible. After receiving consent from the teaching staff he worked out a memorandum containing some compromises so that the Waldorf school would meet the requirements of the public schools (öffentlichen Schulen). This made it possible for the pupil to transfer to another school. The materials written by Steiner required that assessment of pupils be done at the end of grade three, sixth and eight. In the periods from grade 1 to 3, from grade 4 to 6 and in grade 7 and 8 Waldorf teachers were free to use any method to achieve these aims (op. cit., p. 17). Another compromise was an agreement that, if necessary, teachers will issue pupils records.

Teaching at Waldorf schools, and especially needs of instruction in grade 9 which was opened in the autumn of 1920, forced Steiner to design curriculum for upper grades, much contrary to his initial plans. He was also forced to plan preparation of pupils for the final examination. This resulted in a completely new curriculum for the 12 grades of Waldorf schools, in which more emphasis was put on streaming of pupils; special attention was paid to those pupils that planned to do the final examination at general secondary schools. Steiner recommended to modify curriculum to meet requirements of the final examination: extended instruction was offered in classical language (Latin and Greek). The proposed changes were great: modern language instruction would be reduced to "maintenance lessons" only. As demonstrated by Steiner in grade 7 curriculum, Latin and Greek could be included among key subjects instead of science, that was postponed to later-day teaching (op. cit., p. 24). By introducing streaming Steiner met the needs and wishes of pupils in upper grades. These changes could be made by the teacher if as few as 4-5 pupils applied.

When judging the curriculum and Steiner's notes that accompanied it, three specific areas are obvious. The first one is drawing of forms (Formenzeichnen), the second one is religion, and the third one is teaching on life and technology (Lebenskunde und Technologie).

Drawing of forms was an independent subject at the beginning of the school attendance. Later it was included into other subjects. Its importance was justified by the need of harmonizing willing engagement of the child (child as a willing being) with his preparation for intellectual work (child as a thinking being).

Religious teaching was differentiated according to the types of religions that parents opted for the child (in reality teaching this subject was very complicated because of geographical and cultural conditions of Waldorf schools in different countries). R. Steiner developed a notion of **free religious teaching**. In the first grades respect for the spirit that is above and around man was taught. Later the pupils learned that in everything what one thinks and does the God is present. Education of qualities like piousness, affection, willingness to help others and love for truth was followed by learning about Christ. Religion instruction was extended by learning biographies of important historical personalities and different religions. Pupils thought of the importance of life and death, of destiny and human destiny, of holy things and of love. In upper grades various religions were taught, and emphasis was put on broader consequences and integration of knowledge (E. A. K. Stockmeyer, 1988, p. 341-351).

The subject called **life and technology** was a prototype of integrated school subject. Though it was taught in grades 10-12, it synthesized knowledge, skills and learning strategies that were learned beginning from grade 1:

- "teaching about things" in grades 1-3 (awareness of environment, construction of a house, care of a field),
- handwork in grades 1-10, ranging from workshop skills, to gardening.
- descriptive geometry in grades 7-12, technological mechanics, surveying, first aid in accidents in grade 10, speedwriting in grade 9.
- geography (production relationships and transportation in different countries), physics (locomotive, telephone),
- life and technology (chemical technology, paper production, textile production, power generation, social care, etc.).

This socio-cultural content generated appropriate methods and strategies of instruction (e.g., teaching in epochs, periodic instruction, blocs, two hour lessons).

An important aspect of R. Steiner's educational conception is arrangement and ordering of the subject matter. These issues were solved together with the timetable. The first step was to identify learning areas that could be divided into epochs, those that were taught in the main part of the teaching day, and those subjects that emphasized reviewing and could be taught in 45 minutes lessons after the main subjects. The third group consisted of practical subjects that could be organized in a number of time units, i.e., two hour lessons, periods, or blocks.

The following areas were taught in epochs: mother tongue and literature (integrated with painting, modelling and drawing of lines and forms), arithmetic - mathematics with geometry and descriptive geometry, "teaching about things" that was

later segmented into history, geography, natural science, chemistry, physics. In the upper grades (9-12) also esthetics and art (Kunstunterricht) was taught in epochs.

Steiner suggested to teach languages (modern and classical), religions, eurythmics, music (singing, musical instruments playing, orchestra), P.E., gymnastics, handwork, gardening and speedwriting in lessons.

Practical subjects (crafts, life and technology) were segmented into blocks, periods or one week courses.

As concerns the time table, he required free afternoons on Wednesdays and Saturdays. He considered to be optimal if the main instruction ended at 10 a.m. (or in upper grades twice a week at 11 a.m.). This was followed immediately by foreign languages, singing, eurythmics, and P.E. He recommended to teach religion, handwork, workshop skills, chorus singing and orchestra playing in the morning (E.A.K. Stockmeyer 1988, p. 39-44).

He recommended to teach languages (classical and modern) in small groups.

Steiner's proposals concerning planning and segmentation of the subject matter in the school year are very interesting. For instance, he recommended to teach subjects (domains) organized in epochs to be taught in the main instruction during three quarters of the school year, and to use lessons in one quarter of the school year - so that pupils could well review the subject matter they learned during the school year.

Waldorf schools included also the so called supportive classes (Förderklassen) for children with physical, spiritual or intellectual inabilities. According to Steiner's recommendations, these classes provided training in speech and in motion of hands and legs with the aim of linking spiritual and intellectual components of man, or in order to release tension. Pupils devoted less time for learning and more time for therapeutic eurythmics and general eurythmics. Instruction was organized into epochs, and, according to Steiner, children should be partially integrated with other children. Therapeutic and educational procedures should be prescribed according to diagnosis of individual systems of man: nerves and senses systems, rhythmical system, hands and legs system, metabolism - this all in interrelation, and especially with respect to karma connections with defects or inability (R. Steiner GA 317, 1985, especially the first lecture, p. 12-21; K. Schubert in E. Kolisko (ed.), 1927, p. 45-46)

It may be summed up that in the curriculum (including notes and recommendations for implementation) R. Steiner provided teachers, who accepted the anthroposophic anthropology, challenges and recommendations according to which they could adequately judge educational situations and use the subject matter as a means of harmonization of development and educations of pupils. The selection and sequencing of the subject matter was based on the knowledge of developmental crises. This knowledge was also used in solution of the relationship between Waldorf school and the public school.

Already in the period of implementation of the Waldorf educational conception in first schools a question arose whether or not this conception could be used in public schools. Steiner's opinion was affirmative. He stressed that this educational conception was not aimed at teaching the pupil a certain world outlook (Anthroposophy) but rather to improve his health and the world as such. This was a stimulus to test viability of this educational conception in public schools (E. Bühler, 1990).

E. Bühler (1990), a member of Free Educational Association of the Kanton of Bern, summarized over 50 years of experiences with the educational system of R. Steiner in public schools (E. Bühler, 1990). The summary of the Swiss experiences are as follows:

1. A precondition for implementing of Waldorf conception in public school is law amendments that would allow teachers more freedom and responsibility for their teaching and cooperation with parents.

2. Due to differences between public schools and Waldorf schools in pace and sequence of teaching of the subject matter, Waldorf schools requires more tolerance from the school supervisors (teaching pace in Waldorf schools is slower, teachers avoid premature intellectualization; on the other hand, much emphasis is put on the development of will; Physics instruction starts as late as at the age of 12 (grade 6) when the pupil is mature for this learning.

3. Waldorf school curriculum cannot be used in public schools in full. Therefore when used, great teaching mastery of the teacher is required. In this school teaching aims at liberating and at use of preconditions of **freedom and mankind** that are put in every child. Teacher's sincere interest in the child, love for the child and for work are therefore more important things than curriculum that can be arranged in any format.

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Resumé

HUMANISTICKÉ ASPEKTY KURIKULÁRNEJ KONCEPCIE R. STEINERA *Mária Matulčíková*

Príspevok vychádza z analýzy základných téz pedagogickej antropológie R. Steinera. Analyzovaný model obsahu vzdelávania je odvodený z vývinových potrieb vzdelávaných, zo špecifických

kostí ich vývinu telesného, duševného a duchovného. Podrobnejšie sú analyzované špecifickosti obsahu vzdelania: výber učiva zo sociokultúrnych obsahov, jeho štruktúrovanie do epôch, charakteristika integrovaných učebných predmetov náboženstvo, náuka o živote a technológia. Predmetom analýzy je aj vzťah obsahu vzdelania k procesuálnym aspektom koncepcie vyučovania R. Steinera, t.j. v akých organizačných formách sa obsah vyučovania realizuje. Model obsahu vzdelania je konfrontovaný so známymi modelmi obsahu vzdelania T. Harbu a D. L. Kauffmana.