De-colonizing your curriculum - some tips for auditing

Martyn Rawson

The Black Lives Matter movement has given us much to think about, as have Covid-19, Fridays for Future, #Me Too, 9/11, the digital age and globalization generally. Waldorf education is not hermetically sealed from the flow of time and social and cultural change. We are all world citizen and Waldorf education must respond to the needs of the times, just as it did in 1919. The founding of the Waldorf School was an answer to the critical social, economic and cultural challenges of the times. An the answer was not set in stone for all time, but had to be regularly reviewed and modified. This is not the same as reacting to every external demand on education, rather it is a question of having core generative principles based on Steiner's pedagogical anthropology but also taking their learning and developmental needs into account. The Waldorf curriculum is based on developmental tasks that take account of and integrate:

- <u>age-sensitive ideal-types</u> of content structured within a horizontal (i.e. across subjects in the same year), vertical (i.e. progressions within subject and skills sets over the whole school career) and spiral (i.e. expanding recurrence of key concepts over whole school career) framework (e.g. as described in official printed curricula),
- individual learning differences,
- national/statutory curriculum expectations,
- appropriate and inclusive learning methods,
- local cultural diversity.

Because of these factors, educational practice has to be modified over time and in different places. Steiner said to the parents on 13th January 1921;

> In the time since we began our work, we have carefully reviewed from month to month how our principles are working with the children. In the years to come, some things will be carried out in line with different or more complete points of view than in previous years (Steiner, 1996, 78).

In other words, educational practice is not set in stone; it has to be reviewed and modified in the light of the core principles. This is not just about perfecting an educational approach, it also means taking account of the conditions that affect children and young people's development. If those principles include the aim that children and young people will become grown-ups with an eco-logical rather than ego-logical attitude to the world, that they become active, responsible citizens committed to social justice and inclusion of all others, then we have to review our curriculum from time to time to see if we have got the balance right. In the first lecture of the Foundations , Steiner (1996, 36) made it clear that much of modern and culture and education is self-centred and focused on egotism and that Waldorf education should counter this.

Steiner's ethics, as outlined in his Philosophy of Spiritual Activity (or Freedom), is one in which ethical individualism is conceived of within a society that does not pit individualism against social responsibility, as neoliberalism does (and most countries have neoliberal education policies). Neoliberalism as the dominant idea of globalized society, says you can't have both, so chose to follow your own interests, ethnocentrism says choose in the interests of your people, and nationalism says, chose in the interests of your nation.

As Gertrude Hughes, writing about Steiner's philosophy from a feminist perspective, says;
> Steiner discusses individualism without opposing it to socially responsible behavior; his ethical individualism does not structure an impossible choice between the two…Ethical individualism is 'ethical' because it is not anti-social; and 'social' far from being conceived as arrangements that submerge individuality, is specifically described as arrangements that individuals make so as to serve individuality…For Steiner, the opposite of individual is not 'society' but 'genus'…[he argues] that when we view one another generically we cannot hope to understand one another" (Hughes, 2012, 245).

If we see people as examples of a type, we don't see them as individuals and this limits their possibilities to become free individuals. What is interesting in this discussion is that as it described here, society is made up of the actions of individuals and their actions can and should enable the individuality of the other to come into being, unhindered by any form of discrimination or lack of recognition. That means that as teachers we can and should see and respond to the individual and not to the generic class that individual 'belongs' to, including gender, cultural or ethnic background [i.e. as girl from a certain family, as a person of colour, as Muslim or Jew, as foreigner/immigrant, as differently abled etc.] or we will not be able to understand our students. Secondly, we should create conditions in which the limiting socio-cultural factors linked to these differences are overcome.

I suggest that even that is not enough. Many of the factors that reproduce discriminatory behavior and attitudes are un-reflected, taken-for-granted. Most people are not explicitly racist or xenophobic but they do not realize how their own generic group is privileged. Any British person who doesn't understand this should read Reni Eddo-Lodge's book *Why I'm not longer talking to white people about race* and there is similar literature in other languages (in German see evidence collated by the Technische Universität Dortmund: http://kurt.digital/2020/06/09/erschreckende-zahlen-wie-rassistisch-ist-deutschland/) . Structural racism (and the discrimination of women, immigrants and other groups) is widespread even in the most liberal cultures and wins votes in many others in Europe.

Instead of simply saying, "but Waldorf is against all forms of discrimination", which is theoretically true, and carrying on as usual, why not ask a few questions about the curriculum you teach and its hidden curriculum. To assist this process I have drawn up a few questions one can ask before each new main lesson block (or indeed any subject).

Socialization, qualification and individuation

In preparing lessons, and in particular main lesson blocks, teachers should bear in mind that each block relates to the developmental tasks, that is, the teaching and learning support the development of the children and young people across three areas of development, socialization, qualification and individuation. Development means sustainable change in a person's capacity over time and across different social spaces. Quite specifically we can do a checklist as we prepare our lessons and ask, what does this block contribute towards socialization, qualification and individuation? In what follows I characterize these three domains.

Social learning

Socialization refers to how children learn to participate in the community they belong to. This includes social awareness and social skills and for most people today that means living in a multicultural and multi-ethnic context. This means that children need to learn that people of different cultural or religious backgrounds, or are differently abled, who have a mother tongue that is different to that of the majority, people with different gender-orientation than the majority, women and minorities of all kinds may have different expectations, beliefs, ways of being and needs than children in the dominant cultural group. Many of these groups experience discrimination in a variety of explicit and implicit forms.

Whilst some teachers and parents, who themselves belong perhaps to majority groups, may think it is unnecessary or even undesirable to awaken children to difference too early, I would say that the other risk is greater, namely that children imitate and emulate embodied attitudes in the adults and older children around them that predispose them to discriminatory behavior and attitudes. Most evidence points to the fact that children are aware of difference even in kindergarten, especially if the parents hold marked attitudes towards the family or cultural background of the child. It is very naïve and perhaps a little romantic to believe that young children are untouched by prejudice, not least because of their essential openness to the beliefs, attitudes and dispositions of others around them. Some Waldorf teachers believe that the colours and characters in fairy tales for example are archetypes and are therefore not racially intended - but how is the black or brown child to know that, if the hero is always white, blond and male? Many European collections of fairy tales and legends were bound up with nationalist and ethnic aspirations in the 19th Century (and even the 20th Century was not free from this, as we see with Norse Mythology and the Nazis). Teverson (2019) has shown that Andrew Lang, one of the great collectors of fairy tales had an explicit assumption that these stories reflect a cultural evolution from primitive and savage to civilized, culminating in the civilizations of Western Europe, as Lang makes clear in his introductions to the collections. Lang also notes that he has adapted the tales "to the needs of British children" and that his wife "does not give them exactly as they are told by all sorts of outlandish natives, but makes them up in the hope that white people will like them, skipping the pieces which they will not like (Lang 1904, cited in Teverson, 2019). Referring to one of Lang's sources, Teverson writes,

the notion that this story… offers either a disinterested or authentic insight into the cultures of Australian Aboriginal peoples cannot be sustained. The story was the product of an unequal power relation, in which a white British settler has claimed the traditions of a colonized people, and appointed himself the preserving authority of that tradition; the narrative has then been substantially reworked…revised…and handed to European social scientists , and finally re-written again and substantially revised for the children's book market…Little wonder that Andrew Lang, by the end of processes such as this can write that the stories "collected from the lips of the Australian savage…are closely akin to our own"(Teverson, 2019, kindle edition)

Such research has shown that fairy tales reinforce patriarchal values, contain literary inventions, changes imposed by moralists, mediate ideology, antisemitism, nation branding and historical traditions (Zipes,1975, Teverson, 2013, Jordon, 2014). Without knowing what critical readings of fairy tales, legends and myths have to say about these aspects and having blind faith in the basic spiritual goodness of this material, is part of the problem of reproducing prejudice. This is not an argument for not telling tales, whose source is unknown or dubious. The solution, I believe, is retell the story in your own words, avoiding obvious colonial elements and try to capture the essence of the story. Your version may not be 'true' to the original source (who would know what that is?) but it becomes valid because you are telling the story in good faith- which after all is how story traditions have always been passed on. We are not conducting critical studies, we are being aware.

Given that there have been real tensions in our society relating to gender, ethnic and cultural background for a very long time that still exist, it is therefore important to practice both indirect and direct social learning. Indirect social learning involves cultivating all the senses and especially the senses directed to the social world (e.g. hearing, touch, sight, sense of movement, the senses of speech, thought and especially the sense of the other as an I). It means cultivating a general awareness of others, the ability to be open to others and listen to them with empathy, the mastering all kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, practicing respect of others' space and caring for others, appreciating what others do and simply being with other people, who may be different from us in some way, as a normal part of life and school, and emphasizing people's economic and social co-dependence. Direct social learning involves explicitly learning about different cultures, religions, ways of life, specific people's needs, economic processes and mutual dependencies as well as learning about our senses and how we perceive other people. Both indirect and direct methods have their place in the curriculum, which should be regularly reviewed to see if there are sufficient opportunities for social learning.

Opportunities for socialization include;
- unchosen participation with others in activities (i.e. groups that are not self-chosen),
- being careful how we portray people in story and image (are all figures in blackboard drawings white/blond- and how do you portray black and brown faces on a blackboard?), and the language we use to relate to colour, especially black- does it

always represent darkness, evil and stupidity? Is light always good and dark its implicit opposite.

- practicing listening to others and retelling their stories,
- hearing stories in which women and people from a range of diverse backgrounds appear and play key and positive roles (even if it means modifying traditional tales, legends and myths to redress one-sided portrayals and reinforcing of gender or ethnic stereotypes- after all these centuries of discrimination it is the least we can do),
- stories from a range of different cultures around the world and especially world tales in Goethe's sense of *Weltliteratur*, that is, stories that have a universal appeal and appear in many cultural forms, or which belong to world culture (see my article Rawson, 2019),
- learning how people in different cultures and places live or have lived,
- telling historical stories from different perspectives (winners and losers),
- telling or reading biographies of people colour and ethnic minorities,
- learning about the history of slavery and its real impact on British, European and American societies,
- learning about the history of migration and immigration over the whole of history,
- giving examples of well-integrated cities and cultures in the past (e.g. Ancient Rome, Baghdad, Cordoba, Timbuktu -named after the wise black woman *Tin Abutut* and Sarajevo)
- looking at how different cultures have influenced our culture (including foodstuffs, fabrics, technologies, language) and in particular how all cultures have been influenced by other cultures.

Relating to socialization we can ask the following questions when we prepare our next main lesson:

1. What social skills will be practiced?
2. In what way does the content of the lesson offer opportunities for experiencing and illustrating social qualities such as mutual support, tolerance and inclusion?
3. How multicultural is the story material?
4. Am I sure the stories I tell are as free as possible from colonialist elements?

Knowledge and skills

Qualification refers to the effects of dispositions, and the applications of skills and knowledge that children and young people need to learn to be able to do to participate constructively in the world of work and civil society. This includes;

- effective use of cultural techniques of literacy (including skills at using all kinds of texts effectively), numeracy,
- media literacy,
- artistic skills (including playing a musical instrument, being able to participate in musical activity),
- movement skills and sports,

- skills in crafts and practical work that is knowledgeable action with meaningful purpose contributing to well-being of self, other people and the environment, including socially and ecologically sustainable forms of behavior.

The expression 'knowledgeable action with purpose' refers to applying embodied knowledge in skilled activity that serves not only self-interest but is socially and culturally meaningful and productive (e.g. making things that needed and useful and actually subsequently used).

With regard to qualification, we can ask:
1. What dispositions, beliefs and attitudes are being (further) cultivated in the forthcoming block?
2. What activities are planned that enable the application of cultural skills in knowledgeable action with purpose?

Becoming a person

Individuation refers to the process of becoming a person capable of taking responsibility for her own actions, forming judgements, being creative and behaving in an ethical (i.e. socially responsible) way. As teachers we cannot ensure that students have experiences in which they are open and receptive to the other and to the world, in which they experience situations in which they are moved, touched, motivated and challenged. We can create opportunities for them to take responsibility without having to be asked, situations in which they are called forth by the situation itself to step up as a person. We can create opportunities for this to occur, be aware of such moments and appreciate them.

Various forms of review and recall can prompt reflection and self-awareness, including the experience of their effect on others. Individuation is also related to spiritual experiences, such as experiencing themselves as part of something bigger than themselves, or subtly sensing numinous or special qualities in others or in situations.

With regard to individuation we can ask;
1. What opportunities are there in which experiences of higher meaning can be felt?
2. Are there opportunities for students to take the initiative responsibly?
3. Is real creativity required and unprompted insight welcome?
4. Do students have opportunities to make meaningful choices and then to reflect on those choices afterwards?
5. Are there opportunities for encountering the real world and experiences that are rich in meaning.

Conclusion

This is only a start to decolonizing our curriculum. We need to consider of course the effects of subjects such as handwork and crafts, if they use methods and materials that are not locally sourced or have no local tradition, but are imported. We need to consider the celebration of festivals to include local cultural practices, yet also being free to create our own meaningful practices, especially where urban, cosmopolitan society has lost the significance of festivals

or they have become commercialized and Disney-fied. But if we start looking we will find a new relationship to the curriculum and make a small contribution to lessening the burden on people who suffer discrimination.

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