



Steiner Education Australia

AUSTRALIAN STEINER CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK 2011

Educational Foundations Attachment 3 (c)

STEINER APPROACH TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL POSITION PAPER

Primary School Curriculum Position Paper

Contents

1. The Nature of Curriculum
 2. Child Development Overview
 3. Curriculum and Alignment with the Development of Human Consciousness
 4. Integrated Teaching: The Main Lesson and Three-fold Rhythms of Learning
 5. Imagination, Creativity, Beauty-Alignment with the Liberal Arts
 6. Literacy: Neurological Development, Music, Movement
 7. The Senses
 8. Arts Integration
 9. The Central Role of Narrative
- Conclusion

1. The Nature of Curriculum

The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework, Primary School, is designed to be experiential, narrative based and arts integrated. The underlying pedagogy, in harmony with the Melbourne Goals, values deep learning, the development of imagination and creativity as well as the individual development of ethical and social qualities.

In a vibrant, artistic learning community, primary age children respond with enthusiasm to creative teaching.

But what are schools for if not to make children fall so deeply in love with the world that they really want to learn about it. ...In a proper school no fact would ever be presented as a soulless one, for the simple reason that there is no such thing. Every facet of reality, discovered where it lives, startles with its wonder, beauty and meaning.

Marjorie Spock (1973)¹

This curriculum is a framework, albeit with rich indications for elaboration and insights into deeper paradigms of development. Beyond this framework is what happens in the classroom, as expression of the teachers own creativity and the student's inner impulse for development.

In the Waldorf Curriculum it is not the content of the lessons that is the important thing but rather the soul forces² that grow while being occupied with it. But whosoever says that the curriculum is not so important because we are not primarily concerned with content looks at the matter only superficially; in fact the content is recommended because it is with the content that we can gain what is more important for life.³

2. Child Development Overview

The study of child development forms the underpinning of the curriculum. In this respect, for example, an understanding of optimal times for different learning approaches and development of different skills would be found and applied across the curriculum.

Steiner education is founded on the principle that everything is in development, both physical and spiritual and that this development while broadly linear in progression is also characterised by cyclical or spiral growth and times of metamorphosis and transformation.⁴

Will or Initiative, Feeling and Picture Thinking in the Primary Years

In Steiner schools the recognised 7 year stages of child development can be viewed from the aspect of the three soul faculties of will or initiative, feeling and thinking. The primary school years from 6 or 7 years of age until 12 are within the second phase in which feeling predominates over thinking and will. The will is still active but 'doing' and playing are no longer the main forms of learning as they were in the Kindergarten. The ability to think in pictures grows stronger and the ability to visualise story content and processes therein is a rich potential of imaginative learning. The feelings are awakened in these stories, deepening the engagement of the children. It is not until the High School years that the thinking is developed and freed. This leads to the search for truth, the forces of idealism, as well as the logical and abstract thinking that emerges in the adolescent.

The Journey toward experience of the Self at Nine Years

In concert with the development of these faculties there is also the growth toward self-awareness. Steiner Education recognises significant times of 'awakening to self' at around 3, 9 and 16 years of age which

¹ Spock, M (1973) *Too Much Like Work* in Waldorf Schools. Kindergarten and Early Grades 1993. Mercury Press

² See Educational Foundations Glossary

³ (Trans) Berenson, M. *Working Material for the Class Teacher*. Study Material of the Pedagogical Section and the Pedagogical Research Center.

⁴ Mazzone, A. 2010 Draft for Publication

were identified by Dutch psychiatrist Lievegoed as a progression from ‘*self-awareness to self – experience and then self-realisation*’. ⁵

The shift to *self-awareness* around 3 years is most notably recognised in the child of 2-3 years for the first time speaking of themselves in the first person as ‘I’. The point at around 9 years leads to a new strength of self and more objective consciousness. At 16 years of age there is the possibility that, along with the growing depth of discernment and the strengthening ideals, a sense of the realised self can arise.

Three Phases of Childhood and the Threefold Curriculum

	Kindergarten Birth to 6/7 years	Primary/ Middle School 7-14 years	Mid-Upper High School 14-21 Years
Quality with which to imbue the learning. Child assumes world is imbued with...	Goodness	Beauty	Truth
Area of Human Endeavour which integrates learning	Presence and Connection	Artistic expression of experience	Discerning, scientific approach to knowledge lifted to ideals
Role of Teacher	One who is deeply connected to life with reverence	World Knowledge expressed through Arts	Ethical Researcher/Scientist
Teacher Works through.....	Intuition and connection in their presence and in their deeds.	Inspiration in their transformation of learning into artistic experience	Imagination in their transformation of concepts into living thoughts, pictures and deeds
Children make things their own most optimally through...	Self-directed Creative Play	Inner Pictures - Arts of drawing, writing, speaking, movement, music, painting , creating.	Thought which rises from the conceptual to the truthful image and then ideals which inspire action
Teacher works through/with the student’s faculty of	Imitation of all that is good.	Openness to Authority (one who knows about the world)	Individual Judgement which seeks the ethical expert in the field as guide

3. The Curriculum Sequence and Alignment with the Development of Human Consciousness

From the dream-like picture, through fully conscious abstraction to an equally fully conscious imagination: this is the evolutionary course of human thinking.⁶

As Steiner educator, Alduino Mazzone,⁷ points out, the Steiner curriculum is designed to follow the development of human knowledge and capacities sequentially and in so doing bring the children into the stream of time up to the present.

From the dream-like picture consciousness of the Fairy Tales and Legends to the Fables and then myths of the historical epochs from Ancient India through Persia, Egypt Greece and Rome to objective historical biographies of our times the human journey unfolds. So to do the paradigms of the Sciences and Mathematics keep pace with their historical counterpart in the development of human consciousness.

4. Integrated Teaching: The Main lesson and Three-fold Rhythms of Learning

The Main Lesson is a vehicle for integrated teaching. A particular subject is studied for 3-4 weeks to allow for a deep and enriching learning experience. It is taught in the first two hours of each day and may involve integration of the humanities, sciences, mathematics and arts. In the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework the Topics may be presented as Main Lessons in the form given or in other combinations of Content Descriptions. They will normally be followed by a series of practice lessons with skills arising out of the content.

The 3-day or 3-fold method is employed by Steiner Primary School teachers in Main Lesson. First the children experience the new learning, then it is expressed pictorially and through the feelings and finally the understanding becomes conscious.

- new material is presented through story images, concrete learning experiences or phenomenological observation (in later years)
- This is recalled the second day and integrated through drawing, music, movement or drama.
- then children create a written or practical record of the material which has become deeply integrated

This methodology is supported by recent research that suggests that during sleep there are clear neurological indicators of rehearsal, integration and the movement from short to long term memory. The success and depth of these processes is dependent on the artistic quality, meaningful context and emotional connections to the material learnt. Isolated skills, unrelated data and neutral concepts imprint least successfully.

5. Imagination, Creativity, Beauty-Alignment with the Liberal Arts

Liberal Arts and Steiner Education

Steiner Education's breadth of curriculum, the central role of imagination and creativity, the focus on the visual and performing arts and inclusion of richness of classical literary sources give it much in common with a liberal arts education. This is however not at the expense of achievement of basic skills at the age appropriate times.

The work of the Thomas B Fordham Institute⁸ points out that the dilemma of a skills approach is that it narrows the curriculum content which gives rises in the short term literacy skills but a fall in the middle grades and high school where a rich knowledge base and understanding are paramount and decoding, phonics and comprehension skills do not on their own suffice. This knowledge, they recognise, comes from a rich content of cultural history, geography, the arts, languages and literature.

⁶ Steiner, R. Lecture August 20, 1922.

⁷ Mazzone, A 2010 Draft for Publication

⁸ Finn, C.E. & Ravitch, D. eds (2007) *Beyond the Basics Achieving a Liberal Education for All Children*. Thoms B Fordham Institute. Introduction.

In this report Dana Gioia ⁹ also speaks for creativity, self-realization of potential and the role of the arts.

“The real purpose of arts education is to awaken us to the full potential of our humanity both as individuals and citizens in society....Incorporating the arts into other subjects can enliven the classroom. Pleasure, beauty and wonder are not out of place in a history class. These qualities are not decorative to learning: they are essential.”

6. Literacy: Neurological Development, Music, Movement, Oral Language

Neurological Development studies suggest that the proprioceptive and vestibular systems must be well developed through **extended time for movement such as running, gardening, climbing, swinging and skipping**¹⁰ so that letter and number shapes can be visualised and imprinted. Studies suggest immature vestibular functioning may correlate with letter reversals, dyslexia, and language and attention disorders¹¹.

*Now, when these children (with well-developed vestibular system) look at the shapes of letters and numbers, their eyes will follow and track the lines and curves. The memory of these movements will then imprint upon their mind. They will have the capacity to make mental pictures or images of these numbers and letters..... The correct orientation of the letter or number will be seen within the mind before it is written.*¹²

Studies suggest that the right hemisphere maturity at age 5-7 which allows sight words to be recognised is not sufficient for reading. The left hemisphere matures around 6 – 8 and allows phonics and decoding to be utilised efficiently in reading. Not until the corpus callosum has been developed can reading, comprehension, visualisation and recall of material function fully¹³.

Music and Learning

The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework integrates music into all Learning Areas including mathematics and sciences and it is built into the daily morning circle of rhythmic activities which takes place at the beginning of Main Lesson.

Researchers have found a causal link has been found between music learning and spatial temporal intelligence (Rauscher & Shaw 1996, 2003)¹⁴ and music programs and increased phonological awareness and word recognition (Bolduc 2006)¹⁵. Playing of musical instruments is a complex skill and has been found to involve more right and left brain functions than any other activity (Habermeyer 1999)¹⁶. It seems that gains in strength of verbal memory after instrumental tuition in music are retained even a year later¹⁷.

⁹ Ibid Part 1 : *Pleasure, Beauty and Wonder: The Role of the Arts in Liberal Education.*

¹⁰ Goddard-Blythe S 2004 *The Well Balanced Child* Hawthorn Press

¹¹ R Kohen-Raz,(1986) *Learning Difficulties and Postural Control* Freund Publishing House
P Blythe and D.J.McGowan *An Organic Basis for Neuroses and Educational Difficulties* Insight Publications

O.L.Schrager 2001 *Posture and Balance :Important markers for Children’s Learning Development* European Conference of Neuro-Developmental Delay in Children with specific Learning Difficulties

¹² Johnson, Dr S *Teaching Our Children to Write Read and Spell* you andyourchildshealth.org/articles

¹³ Goddard Blythe, S 2004 *The Well Balanced Child* Hawthorn Press

Long Term Enhancement of Preshool Children;s Spatial Temporal Reasoning, Frances Rauscher et al, Neurological Research InPress 1996

¹⁵The Effects of Music Instruction on Emergent Literacy Capacities among Preschool Children: A Literature Review 2006

¹⁶ Sharlene Habermeyer *Good Music, Brighter Children* California Prima Publishing house 1999

¹⁷ YC Ho M-C Cheung and ASChang *Music Training Improves Verbal but not Visual Memory* Neurophysiology 17 (3) 2003 pp439-50.

In the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework scaffolding of literacy skills and support for developmental unfoldment are implemented through:

- A strong self-directed creative play component with opportunities for **extended social interaction and oral language in Kindergarten**.
- A rich **music program** with daily singing, instrumental music and movement with all children learning an instrument throughout primary schooling.
- Morning circle with rhymes, games and verses with phonemic sound play and substitution.
- Listening to quality traditional and **classical stories with rich expression and vocabulary**
- Extended outdoor **movement time** with diverse opportunities for climbing, running, jumping, building, gardening, bushwalking and nature play.
- **Form Drawing** which practices movements which balance and develop directionality, visualisation, metamorphosis of forms and flow of patterns.
- **Timing of introduction of reading** through oral language then writing then reading,
- Imprinting of letters through movement, **picture association through images** in stories
- Sequential reading development through reading of own writing, reading of teacher created and prepared books and then introduction of quality readers.
- Sequential skills development through eg phonics, sight words, digraphs, blends, morphemes and prefixes and suffixes.
- A love of stories and reading developed through daily immersion in stories.

7. The Senses and Learning

The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework recognises the importance of the senses for rich and deep interaction with life and for learning itself.

The Need for Sensory Enrichment and Integration of Experiences in Curriculum

The deterioration of the senses in human neuro-physiology is an area little mentioned or researched. If the processing of information from the senses is, through bombardment of stimulation in modern life, changing in such a way that perception and integration is effected then a fully integrated arts-based curriculum, may be able to ameliorate these effects.

As Michael Kiessle¹⁸ reported , scientists discovered that the senses of taste and smell had degenerated significantly with previously recognised sensations now not being accepted. Further to this in the eighties there was another dramatic development as greater action potential was needed for the brain to be stimulated. There may also be alterations to internal strategy of the brain, with cross linkages reduced and stimulus carriers working in parallel (Rau)¹⁹ so that they are not adequately networked or enhanced with emotions²⁰ .

The Principles of Steiner Curriculum can be viewed as a counterbalance which focus on reducing bombardment, providing natural sensory experiences and those which unfold over time eg

- planting and looking after a vegetable garden and observation of plant growth,
- building a small structure in the school by hand,
- acoustic instrumental music,
- crafting natural knitted, felted and crocheted projects,
- observation of the sky phenomena over extended lunar and solar cycles.

¹⁸ Kiessle, M *The Decrease of the Senses and the Evolution of the Fast Brain* Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) (Waldorf High School Research Paper - WHSRP)

¹⁹ Dr Harold Rau Institute of Medical Psychology at the University of Tübingen

²⁰ Kiessle, M *The Decrease of the Senses and the Evolution of the Fast Brain* Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) (Waldorf High School Research Paper - WHSRP)

Steiner Curriculum also allows a healthy integration through cross-curricular learning experiences which will synthesise what has become disjoint. Specific cross-domain activities require establishment of neural pathways for the senses to work together.

8. Arts Integration

In the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework the arts are fully integrated and part of the methodology of all Learning Areas. They are not seen as additions to teaching practice through an external arts partners but part of the class teacher's role. They are not a weekly extension of a theme or developed to illustrate learning. Nor are they there primarily to develop motivation or to meet different learning styles though these are undoubtedly advantages that follow. Movement, speech, music, drawing or handcrafts are part of every Main Lesson and nearly all specialist or practice lessons.

The lessons where the arts are embedded are seen to provide optimal learning experiences. Since the conceptual realm is not, until after the 12th year, the optimal approach to knowledge then the importance of the arts as a learning experience and embodied form of knowledge becomes central. In the child between 7 and 14 the arts, through providing spatial, tonal, rhythmic, colour and sculptural experiences of form, gesture, relationship, growth, transformation, meaning and beauty, are fully embedded in every content organiser table.

Current research increasingly supports arts integration on a whole school. Studies such as Critical Links²¹ show the importance of multi-modality or **cross-domain** encoding of information which leads to deep learning.

Storytelling, drama, poetry, visual arts, music and movement are integrated into, not only mathematics, but reading, history, spelling and each other area of the curriculum. Arts enrichment happens at each moment in the classroom with the class teacher.

Results from Arts Integration Programs support this approach. As indicated by Eric Oddleifson²² (Chairman of the Center for the Arts in the Basic Curriculum) work such as Gardiner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences has helped extend the arts integration programs in many schools. His thoughts provide an overview of this rapidly growing area of educational reform.

"Stanford's Elliot Eisner suggests that our difficulty in recognizing the benefits of the arts comes through our own fundamental misunderstandings about the very nature of mind, knowledge, and intelligence. Besides believing that language is required for thought, we think that logic is necessary to express intelligence. Not true. Poetry, which employs language, is not only not necessarily logical, but considered by many to be the highest form of thought. We believe that the senses are mere receptors of stimuli, to be mediated and "made sense of" by intellect. Not true. Both the cognitive psychologists and neurologists ... now know that the senses are direct forms of cognition, and understanding. "

Citing Waldorf or Steiner Schools as examples of arts integrated schools, Oddleifson²³ mentions their success in exam scores in Germany where 40% of over 1,000 Steiner graduates (compared to the national average of 6%) qualified to skip their freshman year due to sufficiently high exam scores. He goes on to quote Ernest Boyer

One of the strengths of the Waldorf curriculum is its emphasis on the arts and the rich use of the spoken word through poetry and storytelling. The way the lessons integrate traditional subject matter is, to my knowledge, unparalleled.It is an enormously impressive effort toward quality education.

²¹ Critical Links

²² Oddleifson, E, (1995) *Boston Public Schools as Arts-Integrated Learning Organizations*. Centre for Arts in the Basic Curriculum. Hingham.

²³ *ibid*

He then quotes Thomas Armstrong²⁴, author of *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* :

Waldorf education embodies in a truly organic sense all of Howard Gardner's seven intelligences. Rudolph Steiner's vision is a whole one, not simply an amalgam of the seven intelligences. Many schools are currently attempting to construct curricula based on Gardner's model simply through an additive process (what can we add to what we have already got?). Steiner's approach, however, was to begin with a deep inner vision of the child and the child's needs and build a curriculum around that vision.

Multi-modality, cross domain and multi-literacy research has much to offer the understanding of the efficacy of what Steiner Education implements.

9.The Central Role of Narrative

The role of oral storytelling in the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework is paramount. It is placed in each Main Lesson Morning as the source of learning of history, of humanities search for meaning, of mathematics, literacy and natural science. The role of narrative as a central part of teaching method in the primary years – finds support in the work of imagination in learning by Kieran Egan²⁵ in Canada with his phases of somatic, mythical and romantic which precede the philosophic and ironic. He conceives that curriculum could be thought of being constituted of the great stories of the world. Especially in the early years he recognises that the young child can understand much more in story form than they can in isolated abstract concepts.

*It may be that the typical 5 year old could not adequately define loyalty or courage but they use such concepts clearly in making sense of all kinds of stories . There is sense in which we might say that children understand such concepts so profoundly that they make sense **with** them.*

In the Steiner Curriculum we acknowledge that it is the rich archetypal picture thinking of the young child that finds meaning in the experiences of these stories while the concept finds its place later in childhood.

He also notes that richness of children's oral language including poetry and story is both a fertile development ground for later literacy learning through rhyme, rhythm, proverb and metaphor as well as providing a rich measure of their intelligence.

He notes that in our cultural history rationality did not displace myth but grew out of it and suggests that if we wish to develop a later rich rationality we should attend to this historical development in individual development. Steiner education has followed this developmental picture for many decades and teacher research upholds his insights.

.. curriculum then might be characterized as constituted of the great stories of the world. The world they are to make sense of has a vivid and dramatic history, and I think we can relatively easily reconceive our primary curriculum in terms of telling children the story of science and technology, the story of mathematics, the story of history, the story of art, and the stories of all our ways of sense-making. This requires our reconceiving these areas of sense-making in terms of those oral capacities children have already most highly developed, rather than, as we tend to do, in some logical scheme beginning with what seems to us the simplest logical components and working "up" from there. Third, we reconceive teachers, not as increasingly de-skilled purveyors of prepared texts, worksheets, and tests, but rather as our culture's story-tellers.

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Egan, K. (1988) *Teaching as Storytelling: An Alternative Approach to Teaching and Curriculum in the Elementary School*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago

9. Conclusion

The principles of Steiner Education have found resonance in the increasing professional and public awareness of the importance and efficacy of rich, creative and imaginative learning in childhood. Through looking at substantial recent public reviews these methodologies find support as concern grows about the focus on early academic learning and the marginalisation of the arts.

Steiner Primary Curriculum and Methodology are well positioned to overcome the apparent conflicts between the need for a rich and broad curriculum which nurtures creativity as well as time for learning age appropriate academic skills which reach the necessary high standards in middle childhood. The arts based fully integrated curriculum allows for deep learning of skills through multi-domain experiences and includes the rich oral language traditions of our cultural history.