Book Review
Understanding Heydebrand's Curriculum

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The Curriculum of the First Waldorf School

by Caroline von Heydebrand, PhD.
Daniel Hindes, Ed. and Trans. Aelzina Books, 2021. (97 pages)

Education, implicitly or explicitly, relies on three things—principle, method, and curriculum. Principles are perhaps the deepest and first, and they demonstrate a philosophy of education. What does it mean to learn or to teach? How are teaching and learning best accomplished? Ultimately, who is the human being who is being educated? As John Dewey is purported to have said, *all philosophy is the philosophy of education*.

Rudolf Steiner's educational principles of education are several. Some are explicit, as in *Balance in Teaching*: Teachers should offer and embody protection for the present; reverence for the past; and enthusiasm for the future. Other principles, regarding insight into karma, for instance, are harder to synopsize.

While education requires principle, method, and curriculum, I would argue for the primacy of principle. Method and curriculum, the how and the what of principle as it finds its way from teachers to students, follow from principle. Let's look at it this way: Would you rather have a teacher who radiates creativity and enthusiasm but is required to deliver a packaged, programmed curriculum? Or a curriculum of beautiful images and stories delivered by a teacher who lacks insight and artistry? Although neither circumstance is preferable, I would rather have my child in the classroom of the first, and trust that the human qualities of the teacher would help to transcend the potted curriculum. No curriculum on its own can transcend a teacher who lacks principle.

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And, situated between principle and curriculum, we hope to find flexible, individualized, accommodating, creative methods. Some of Steiner's methods are simple: Begin teaching arithmetic, for instance, by dividing a whole pile of mulberries (or other common objects) among your students. Others are more complex, as in a description of method in *Education for Adolescents*[1]: Call on the whole being of the student; recapitulate immediately in imagination; let the student sleep; develop discernment or come to judgment or conclusion through conversation on the following day.

In this light, curriculum, discovered in the relationship between growing students and principled teachers, is more malleable or changeable than are principles or methods. Curriculum varies as the requirements of time and place vary, as a student grows and develops. The further our students are in space and in time from German speakers in the early 20th century, the less our curriculum will mirror that of the first Waldorf school, even as our principles remain steadfast and our methods relatively similar. If in Waldorf schools we accept a curriculum too rigidly, then we may fail to imbue it with principle, and, therefore, undermine our endeavors at the outset.

On the other hand, to discard or disregard what we know of the curriculum as given by Steiner and expanded by generations of thoughtful teachers all over the world would be to cut off one of the roots that nourishes our work.

To understand Steiner's intentions for the curriculum of the first Waldorf School, teachers have a few key resources. The first of these is Steiner's work—*Practical Advice to Teachers, Discussions with Teachers, Faculty Meetings*, and others. Working through these texts, contemporary Waldorf teachers will find that some of Steiner's original suggestions are well cemented into the aggregate curriculum of Waldorf schools worldwide—writing (through drawing or painting) before reading. Others—mandatory religion lessons—may have fallen away for good reason. And yet others—"race" studies—transformed to meet the requirements of different times and places. Steiner himself was not so rigid with regard to curriculum and other matters as he is sometimes presented to have been. Botany first or geology first? Depends which source you read. And

1 Note that the eight lectures in Education for Adolescents were originally called, in English, The Supplementary Course, and were intended for teachers of all grades at the first Waldorf School.

his indications are often minimal sketches, meant to be filled out by… well, by each of us currently teaching.

The second source for understanding curriculum are Stockmeyer's *Curriculum*, currently in print as *Rudolf Steiner's Curriculum for Steiner-Waldorf Schools: An Attempt to Summarise His Indications.* And, on par with Stockmeyer, Dr. Caroline von Heydebrand's *The Curriculum of the First Waldorf School.* These were written and compiled by two of the first teachers at the first Waldorf School. Stockmeyer goes fairly thoroughly through Steiner's educational lectures to collate paragraphs and passages relevant to topics or subjects in the curriculum. Heydebrand outlines the actual curriculum of the first school in its early years.

Both of these resources are indispensable. Every journey has a starting point, and Stockmeyer and Heydebrand tell us where to line up.

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Given the centrality of these texts, I am pleased to recommend Daniel Hindes's new translation of Heydebrand's curriculum. His introduction situates the book in the context of a curriculum as something that is alive and changing and in the necessary context of the history of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart.

Hindes is a Waldorf teacher and administrator, attended Waldorf schools in the United States and Germany, speaks several languages, and has written many articles and blog posts on Waldorf education and anthroposophy. He is the author of *Viral Illness and Epidemics in the Work of Rudolf Steiner*, which examines Steiner's remarks on viruses, vaccinations, and related illnesses. To the point of this review, his translations are scrupulous, insightful, and contemporary.

The book itself is divided into chapters, each devoted to one grade or school year (called a "class" in much of the rest of the world). Each chapter presents a paragraph or a few paragraphs on each school subject—including, for example, reading, writing, and speaking in first grade, or geography, physics, and religion in eighth grade.

This book is an outline, and that is all it is intended to be. The work of bringing it to life for any teacher and student requires that it be fleshed out to embody Rudolf Steiner's educational principles and that it be tailored to the world in which the students live and will live.

The book ends with a brief biography of Heydebrand, including her sterling academic background and her work in the first Waldorf School from 1919 to 1935. We learn that she had the largest class in the first school—47 fifth graders!—teaching all morning lessons and world languages. Steiner called her "a born teacher." Heydebrand left Germany in 1935, as the Nazis came to power, to work with Waldorf schools in Holland and England, and returned to Germany only for end-of-life care in 1938.

A particular value of Hindes's translation are the annotations, which assist us in approaching Heydebrand's curriculum with greater understanding. Some of what Steiner said about conversation with students had to do with the need to learn *Hochdeutsch*, "high German," for instance, moving them beyond their dialects. This is generally not a concern for English language teachers. Another German concern for language arts teachers had to do with learning to read *Fraktur*, a formal German printing that has no analog in English. On the other hand, English spelling is a seemingly irrational hodge-podge of historical influences, while German spelling is clear and logical. In addition, German schools in the early 20th century were required to teach religion, which schools in the United States are not. These classes were most often taught by visiting priests and pastors, and not out of Steiner's impulse or insight. (An exception is the lessons that Steiner created in "free" or independent religion for the children of anthroposophists. However, these were created to meet the requirements of the state, not because they were essential to Steiner's principles or curriculum. I'll stop here, but these annotations make for thought-provoking, eye-opening reading, and make this translation worthwhile even if you already own a previous version of this book.

Hindes's translation brings a valuable resource back into print and assists us in reading Heydebrand intelligently and flexibly, as we continue to take a German curriculum from the 1920s and make it our own in the United States in the 2020s. Just as Steiner intended we should.