

L3) Minor Phases as Key Stages: Aims, Progression and Assessment. By Dr Robert Rose

The question of assessment can be a challenging one to many, some may even see it as a meaningless exercise. Whatever the case, assessment is tied inextricably in with the Aims and Progression of a given curriculum. So it might be worthwhile considering what the point of it might be within the context of Steiner Waldorf Education:

What we are aiming for here is a re-conceptualisation of assessment in harmony with developing human nature according to the principles of Steiner / Waldorf Education.

This is noteworthy. It would be entirely possible to graft on a form of assessment drawn from other philosophies, mainstream or otherwise. Our intention here, however, is to outline the **fundamental principles** of assessment that are entirely compatible with the ground of this form of education. From out of these principles teachers can create their own specific ways of doing assessment. ***It is not the intention here to tightly specify these special ways: that is for the individual teachers and schools to do out of their freedom.***

In Steiner/ Waldorf education, the case is made that, from a certain perspective, human beings are born with potentialities of various kinds, some of which are open to learning. Ideally, these potentialities become realities, or actualities through the teaching - learning process. The teachers' task is to create learning environments through which the young person can realise their potentialities as actualities. Put differently the teacher is helping the pupil towards the fulfilment of their potentialities so that they can live well in their social and World environment. In this process the teacher needs to take note as to where the student has reached in the fulfilment of their potentialities and what they still need to do. The teacher should consider how to go from the now and into the future for each and every pupil: they are trying to help this realisation of potentials for the sake of every young person in their care. **Assessment can be conceptualised as the means for the teacher to help the young person, whomsoever they are, to unfold their potentials from where they are to where they could be (see Protected Characteristics, in the Independent Schools Standards).**

A part of this also involves an element of self-assessment for the teacher as it requires them seeing what **they** need to do to help the young person develop. As we know from previous modules, these potentialities come in distinct phases in Waldorf Education as well as there being individual ones. As we will see in our explorations, these distinct phases have a certain **type** of “Key Stage” quality to them.

Consequently, in consideration of the previous power points and modules, whilst it is not normally done, it may be worthwhile comparing Steiner / Waldorf Education with the **Key Stages** in Mainstream Education. This might give some insights into the approximate equivalences in terms of expectations and **assessment**. Again it needs to be emphasised at this point that the goal here is not to predetermine what teachers should do in Steiner / Waldorf settings, but to highlight some essential principles of assessment. This is meant in the sense that, as everything in this form of education is derived from its ontogeny, its child development principles, it only seems reasonable therefore to evolve modes of assessment from out of this underlying philosophy of how children develop.

These phases of child development can, in some respects, be regarded as key stages in Steiner Education (see module 3). If one accepts that, it is arguable that there are ***in principle three major key stages and nine minor key stages in Steiner / Waldorf Education:***

“One can recognize these seven-year periods throughout the entire human life, and each again can be seen in three clearly differentiated shorter periods”. Steiner, R (1922/2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 107.

In the Steiner developmental model these reduce to seven (module 3, L1 & L2). This is because the first and the last stage in the model are largely outside the time period covered by the schools. In addition, the last two sub-phases have not been elaborated on either by Steiner or other Waldorf educationalists. In practice therefore there are the equivalent of six key stages in Steiner Education, with the understanding however, that these initially focus on the emergent human ***abilities or faculties***, but then this also leads onto the emergence of the ***content of the curriculum***.

In light of this, it might be worthwhile considering the situation of the first Waldorf School concerning phases and sub-phases in relation to the national expectations of the time. Steiner was willing to make some concessions to the educational authorities, but under certain conditions:

“In my letter to the authorities, I stated that, on completion of the **third school year**, our students would have reached the same standards of basic education as those achieved in other schools, and thus would be able to change schools without difficulty. This implies that a child with a broader educational background than the students in this new class will nevertheless be able to fit into any new surroundings, **and that such a student will not have lost touch with life in general...**

Similarly, I said that our teaching between the end of the ninth and twelfth years—from the end of **class three to the end of class six**—is intended to achieve standards comparable with those of other schools and that our students would be able to enter seventh grade in another school without falling behind. We do not wish to be fanatical and, therefore, we had to make compromises. Waldorf teachers must always be willing to cope with the practical problems of life. **And if a student has to leave our school at the age of fourteen**, there should be no problems when entering a high school or any other school leading to a university entrance examination. So we try to put into practice what has been described... **Now, having established our school through the age of fourteen, every year we are adding a new class, so that we will eventually be able to offer the full range of secondary education leading to higher education. This means that we have to plan our curriculum so that young people will be able to take their graduation exams.** In Austria, this exam is called a “maturity exam,” in Germany “Abitur” [A levels or equivalent university entrance qualifications] and other countries have other names. In any case, our students are given the possibility of entering other schools of higher education.” Steiner, R (1921/2): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic press, p.126/7. (My bold)

In other word's Steiner accepted the notion that children at a Waldorf school need to have achieved the same level as in state schools at distinct three yearly time points. Steiner also anticipated that the teachers in the school would further differentiate this in terms of each of the years, so long as it is in accordance with the nature of the developing child:

"I also believe it is possible to determine the curriculum and learning goals for **each grade** in the elementary school **out of the nature of the human being**. For that reason it is of great importance that the teacher be the genuine master of the school, if I may use the term "master." I do not mean that there should be any teaching directives. Instead the teacher should be a part not only of the methods but also of the plans of the school."

Steiner, R (1920): The Renewal of Education, Anthroposophic Press, p. 98. (My bold)

It has to be added that this needs to be done by each teacher and in relationship to the individual children in their class in order to meet their needs in their particular phase of development as well as individuals.

So the first “compromise” Steiner made was in **four stages** across the then emerging classes 1 to 12. Within this, there were **three stages** for the lower school, i.e. that the students would have attained the **comparable level** as in state schools, but only at the end of three time periods: classes 1 to 3; 3 to 6; 6 to 8:

Period	
Classes 1 to 3	Comparable to Mainstream Education Levels in each case.
Classes 3 to 6	
Classes 6 to 8	

Those very familiar with his child development principles may not be surprised by this: the first three periods coincide with the three sub-phases of major phase 2 within his child development idea (years ca 7 to 14): sub-phase 4, sub-phase 5 and sub-phase 6. His “compromise” with the education authorities tied in with his intentions for these sub-phases of the lower school. The last of the sub-phases, 14 to 18 years, he saw the need to prepare students so that they could do the equivalent of the “Abitur”, somewhat similar to the *International Baccalaureate*, (A-level equivalent) and thereby gain entry to higher education at university or college.

It would not be out of rationale then to make some similar comparisons with the education system of **our** time. In the UK, this means the Key Stage concept.

The table below then is a rough guide to the equivalences between Steiner Education and Mainstream Education. Please remember though that this refers only to age, not the specific content of the curriculum or the pedagogy or assessment types.

It also needs to be kept in mind that this is only by way of comparison, in reality the Kindergartens in Steiner Waldorf settings have a special arrangement in the UK, so do not fall under comparable assessment conditions as in State Schools. What follows is primarily aimed at an understanding of assessment in the Lower School, every thing else is merely by way of comparison:

Steiner Waldorf Major Phase	Steiner Phases / Key Stages in terms of approximate Age and Sub Phases	Equivalence	Mainstream Key Stages in terms of Age
Phase 1 Kindergarten	(Sub Phase 1 age 0 - 2 ^{1/3}) (Sub Phase 2 age 2 ^{1/3} - 4 ^{2/3}) (Sub Phase 3 age 4 ^{2/3} - 7)		KS 1 (ages 5-7)
Phase 2 Lower School	(Sub Phase 4 age 7-9) (Sub Phase 5 age 9-11) (Sub Phase 6 age 11-14)		KS 2 (ages 7-11) KS 3 (ages 11-14)
Phase 3 Upper School	(Sub Phase 7 age 14-16) (Sub Phase 8 age 16-18) (Sub Phase 9 age 18-21)		KS 4 (ages 14-16) KS 5 (ages 16-18) A - levels, International Baccalaureate or equivalent
			University Degree

Lower School Considerations

What this means then for the Steiner / Waldorf *lower school* (plus a little from the Kindergarten) is that this covers the equivalent to key stages 1, 2 & 3. Please bear in mind that these are only approximate in a number of different ways. However, if we were so inclined, we could arrange the sub-phases in Steiner schools into Steiner Key Stages (SKS), so long as it is understood that these correspond to the stages of child development and the pedagogical methods that accompany them. It also needs to be noted that in Waldorf schools there is some overlap of the phases across school years (for reasons beyond the scope here Steiner Kindergartens are designated as a “0” key stage):

Sub-Phase & Age Range	Steiner Waldorf	Equivalence	Mainstream
Sub Phases 2-3 Approx Age: $4^{2/3} - 7$	Steiner Key Stage 0 Kindergarten		KS 1 (ages 5-7) (Years 1 & 2)
Sub Phase 4 Approx Age: $7-9^{1/3}$	Steiner Key Stage 1 Lower School Classes 1, 2, 3		KS 2 (ages 7-9) (Years 2, 3, 4)
Sub Phase 5 Approx Age: $9^{1/3}-11^{2/3}$	Steiner Key Stage 2 Lower School Classes 3, 4, 5		KS 2 (ages 9-11) (Years 4, 5, 6)
Sub Phase 6 Approx Age: $11^{2/3}-14$	Steiner Key Stage 3 Lower School Classes 6, 7, 8		KS 3 (ages 11-14) (Years 7, 8, 9)

A Philosophy of Assessment: *Abilities and Content, Self (Teacher) and Other (Student): the question of Progression.*

It has to be kept in mind here that the aim of this section is to outline the basic **philosophy**, or principles, of assessment that is consistent with the concept of child development in Steiner / Waldorf settings. That is, the aim here is not to provide a detailed **plan** for the assessment, this is the job for individual teachers and schools. Within these principles an assessment framework can be derived that can help children learn **progressively**. At the same time, the framework leaves each teacher and school free to specialise this framework for their own unique case. This is somewhat comparable to how artists all have the same laws of colour mixing in common whilst giving them freedom to exercise their imagination in being creative; or like construction engineers all use the same laws of mechanics whilst still being able to be innovative.

In the “key stages” in Waldorf settings outlined above, we have a starting point for introducing some principles of a system of assessment and progression in line with them. In mainstream settings, it is fairly normal that assessment is about the content of what a student has learned. Tests and other forms are set up with this in mind. In Waldorf schools this is a little different. Here we not only have to do with the assessment of **content** but also **abilities**. We will start with the latter returning to the former in the next lecture.

Human Nature in Development as a Model for Progression in Abilities

In L1 of this module we introduced the developmental model of the human being according to the philosophy of Steiner / Waldorf Education. It is re-presented in the next slide. As can be seen, the Learning Principles are directly related to how the human being develops their abilities over the four major phases. The slide presents the primary Learning Principles that come into focus over these major phases. Three further aspects need to borne in mind:

- 1) That each of these Learning Principles undergoes subtle variations within each sub-phase and
- 2) Each and every aspect of the human being is always present in each sub-phase: perception, feeling, will, imagination, thinking and the “I”; but they take on a minor focus to that of the major focus of the specific phase concerned.
- 3) These have consequences for how children develop and how they may be assessed.

Consider the following slide:

Developing Levels and Abilities of the Human Being



Human Development	Phase 1 Physical Body 0 - 7 yrs	Phase 2 Life Body 7 - 14 yrs	Phase 3 Soul 14 - 21 yrs	Phase 4 I / Spirit 21 - 28 yrs
Schooling Level	Home & Kindergarten	Lower School	Upper School/ University	University / Life
Primary / Major Learning Principles	Imitation – Perception to Action	Imagination, Feeling and Memory	Independent Thinking and Soul and The Self-determined ideal.	Self – Activated Learning Cognitive & Ethical Individualism
Teaching Relationship	The Good Example	The Natural Authority	Respecting Freedom	Individual development of Freedom

Let us focus on the Learning Principles for the school years and add in the other general human abilities:

Human Development	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	Physical Body 0 - 7 yrs	Life Body 7 - 14 yrs	Soul 14 - 21 yrs
Learning Principles	<p>General Human Faculties (also phased into the above):</p> <p>Perception</p> <p>Feeling</p> <p>Memory</p> <p>Imagination</p> <p>Will</p> <p>Thought</p>  <p>“Soul”</p>		

In terms of assessment based on the spectrum of human abilities we have not only the major developmental abilities of any given phase but also the general ones which play a more gentle role in each and every phase. In this way, this spectrum of human abilities also plays a diagnostic role in how human beings develop differentially over time.

In light of this, teachers may ask assessment related questions using these human abilities which lead directly to what might be called specific “Windows of Learning”:

Windows of Learning

Perception: Is the student perceiving things in the right way?

Feeling: Is the student developing the appropriate feelings for the situation?

Memory: Is the student remembering things correctly?

Imagination: Is the student capable of imagining creative situations?

Will: Is the student able to carry out a deed according to purpose?

Thought: Is the student able to understand something from the agency of others or through their own agency?

Abilities in Progress across the Lower School

As the previous slides and power points show, in Steiner Waldorf education it is proposed that the abilities of the child progress across the lower school (classes 1 to 8). It is not the case that each and every ability is present at the same level in each of the sub-phases of development but that they have a primary focus and evolution across the lower school. The nature of the content is tied in with this and is a means through which these abilities can grow and develop. In addition, the teacher is expected to assess themselves as the student's development is essentially dependent on what and how of the curriculum subjects .

Bearing this in mind, the following scheme is only generic and will need to be specialised by each teacher for themselves and in relationship to each class and student. Also, only the primary learning modes are mentioned, i.e. **anthropomorphic imagination, fact-centred imagination and cause – effect imagination**. The other faculties such as **perception, thought, feeling and will** would also need to be included in a more extensive assessment scheme as previously presented. Indications for these extended abilities have been given in previous slides included here as well as in the power points for previous modules.

The slide below gives an outline of possible levels of progression across the lower school in terms of **abilities or capacities**:

Phase 2 Lower School	Assessment Questions	Teacher Self-Assessment Questions
Sub Phase 4 Ages 7-9^{1/3} Classes 1 to 3 SKS 1	<p>Has the pupil developed an imaginative ability in relation to the of the contents of the lesson? Meaning, has the pupil developed their anthropomorphic imagination through the lessons and have they cultivated their understanding of the content?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 1 to class 3, is there evidence that these abilities and content have developed in increasing complexity?</p>	<p>Have I created learning spaces within which the pupil can develop their anthropomorphic imagination in relationship to the contents of the lessons?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 1 to class 3, have I introduced the pupils to an increasing complexity in imagination and curriculum contents?</p>
Sub Phase 5 Ages 9^{1/3}-11^{2/3} Classes 3 to 6 SKS 2	<p>Has the pupil developed an imaginative ability in relation to the contents of the lesson? Meaning, has the pupil developed their fact-centred imagination through the lessons and have they cultivated their understanding of the content?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 3 to class 6, is there evidence that these abilities and content have developed in increasing complexity?</p>	<p>Have I created learning spaces within which the pupil can develop their fact based imagination in relationship to the contents of the lessons?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 6 to class 6, have I introduced the pupils to an increasing complexity in fact based imagination and curriculum contents?</p>
Sub Phase 6 Ages 11^{2/3}-14 Class 6 to 8 SKS 3	<p>Has the pupil developed an imaginative ability in relation to the contents of the lesson? Meaning, has the pupil developed their Ideas based, cause - effect imagination through the lessons and have they cultivated their understanding of the content?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 6 to class 8, is there evidence that these abilities and content have developed in increasing complexity?</p>	<p>Have I created learning spaces within which the pupil can develop their cause-effect imagination in relationship to the contents of the lessons?</p> <p>In terms of progression from class 6 to class 8, have I introduced the pupils to an increasing complexity in cause-effect imagination and curriculum contents?</p>

You may now wish to read the pdf on pupil assessment from:
“SWSF Research Group Pupil Assessment”,
“Avison and Rawson (20014): The Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum book”, Floris Books, beginning on p. 30, but especially chapter 4.
“Assessment Theory and Practice, Characterisations and processes”,
Martyn Rawson and Kath Bransby (UK, Germany) (2021), With a practical appendix by Sven Saar (*assembled by Sven Saar, swipp.org.uk*)

These texts can be very valuable to bounce your own ideas off, or from which you can develop your own systems of assessment.

In addition, a deeper exploration and analysis of modules 5 to 7 can also give an extended understanding of what could be meant by subject aims, coherence, sequencing, progress and assessment in Steiner / Waldorf settings.

Exercises

- 1) Imagine you are a class 1 teacher. You are trying to devise an assessment scheme for your class. What type of understanding / learning would you expect your class to be able to do? What would you do to enable this to happen?
- 2) You are developing a progressive assessment scheme for the lower school. How would you explain the different abilities in light of development and progression across the years?
- 3) You are near completion of class 8. In terms of the accomplishments of the children in relation to their abilities, what would you hope for both in terms of the Waldorf philosophy and in terms of yourself?