

Module 8: Curriculum Design

Content & Synopsis



One of the primary principles of Steiner Waldorf education is that teachers are autonomous in the creation of the curriculum. Rather than a fixed system of learning, there are creative principles through which each teacher can creatively design a curriculum which simultaneously meets the needs of each and every child in their care. The aim of this module is to enable participants to practice these creative design principles and artistically and innovatively produce a Steiner Waldorf curriculum for classes 1 to 8. To begin with, we will focus on how the theory of Human Nature and its development enables a creative approach to curriculum design. The module will explore how curriculum design is a synthesis of cognitive principles, artistic creativity and practical skill. There will also be practical exercises throughout the module. The goal of this is to: **provide a *first principles* approach which may enable teachers and schools to specialise their own specific forms of the curriculum for their own unique circumstances.**

Below you will find an outline of the contents of this module:

L1a) Human Nature as a Philosophy for Curriculum Design, Learning and Assessment

There are a number of questions surrounding the issue of the Design of a Curriculum in a Steiner Waldorf School including how children learn and how teachers assess them. In the first instance, the design of a Steiner / Waldorf curriculum is not carried out in a vacuum but within the context of how children develop according to the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. It is to this human ontogeny that the curriculum is adapted. In this section, you will find schematic outlines of Steiner's views on ontogeny as well as some possibilities of how the curriculum can be designed from this.

L1b) Steiner / Waldorf Schools and the Legal Framework of Independent Schools: *Synopsis of Relevant Documents.*

The aim here is to explore how a legal framework influences the design of a curriculum. To begin this we will outline elements of the United Nations Declaration of Human rights in relationship to education. Thereafter we will consider the Legal Framework for education in England with special reference to the design of the curriculum in Steiner Waldorf schools. It isn't the intention to discuss every aspect of the Legal Framework, only those which are relevant to curriculum design. Participants from other countries can then explore how the Declaration affects the educational provision in their national settings.

L2) The Coherent Sequencing of the Individual Years of the Sub Phases of Child Development.

In L1b, one of the questions that can arise from the Legal Framework is the *coherence* and *sequencing* of the main lesson *content* with regard to their *aims*: what are they and in what order should, or can, the teacher arrange the lesson blocks? The difficulty is that, within Waldorf Education Philosophy, this is different in each of the phases and sub-phases of child development. As we will see, though, there is a principle coherence and sequencing to the Waldorf curriculum derived from Steiner's philosophy of child development (ontogeny) and pedagogy.

L3) Minor Phases as Key Stages: Aims, Progression and Assessment.

The question of assessment can be a challenging one; 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 within the Legal Framework. 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 which at the same time meets the requirements of the Legal Framework. A comparison is also made with the Key Stage concept in mainstream schools. We will consider the difference between the developmental progression of *abilities* and that of *content*. We will begin here with the progress of abilities in Steiner Waldorf settings.

L4a) Curriculum Content: Progress, Assessment & Schemes

Following on from this we come to that of the **curriculum content and its progression**. Again the learning aims are related to the specific phases of development that are indicative of Steiner / Waldorf Education. This is that part of the Steiner / Waldorf curriculum that bears some similarity to mainstream. Having said that, there is a good degree of difference in terms of the choice of content as well as the way the elements of that content are pedagogically and artistically formed. For example, in the lower school, the approach to the physical sciences would be more phenomenological than theoretical, emphasising the direct experience of the students over the metaphysical components of the content. Consequently, there will also be a greater emphasis on the empirical nature of the physical sciences as well as the artistic representation of them.

L4b): Design and Documentation

As has been discussed, in the UK, Steiner Waldorf Schools are assessed by Ofsted. What we aim to do here is understand some of the means by which this is done with a consideration of the effect of this on Design and Documentation. As discussed, Ofsted instructs its inspectors to use what it calls the “Education Inspection Framework” when making judgements to assess schools. *What we wish to do here is to introduce a pattern for the Design and Documentation that may enable teachers and schools to set up their own systems that can be a part of the assessment by Ofsted or other similar bodies around the globe.*