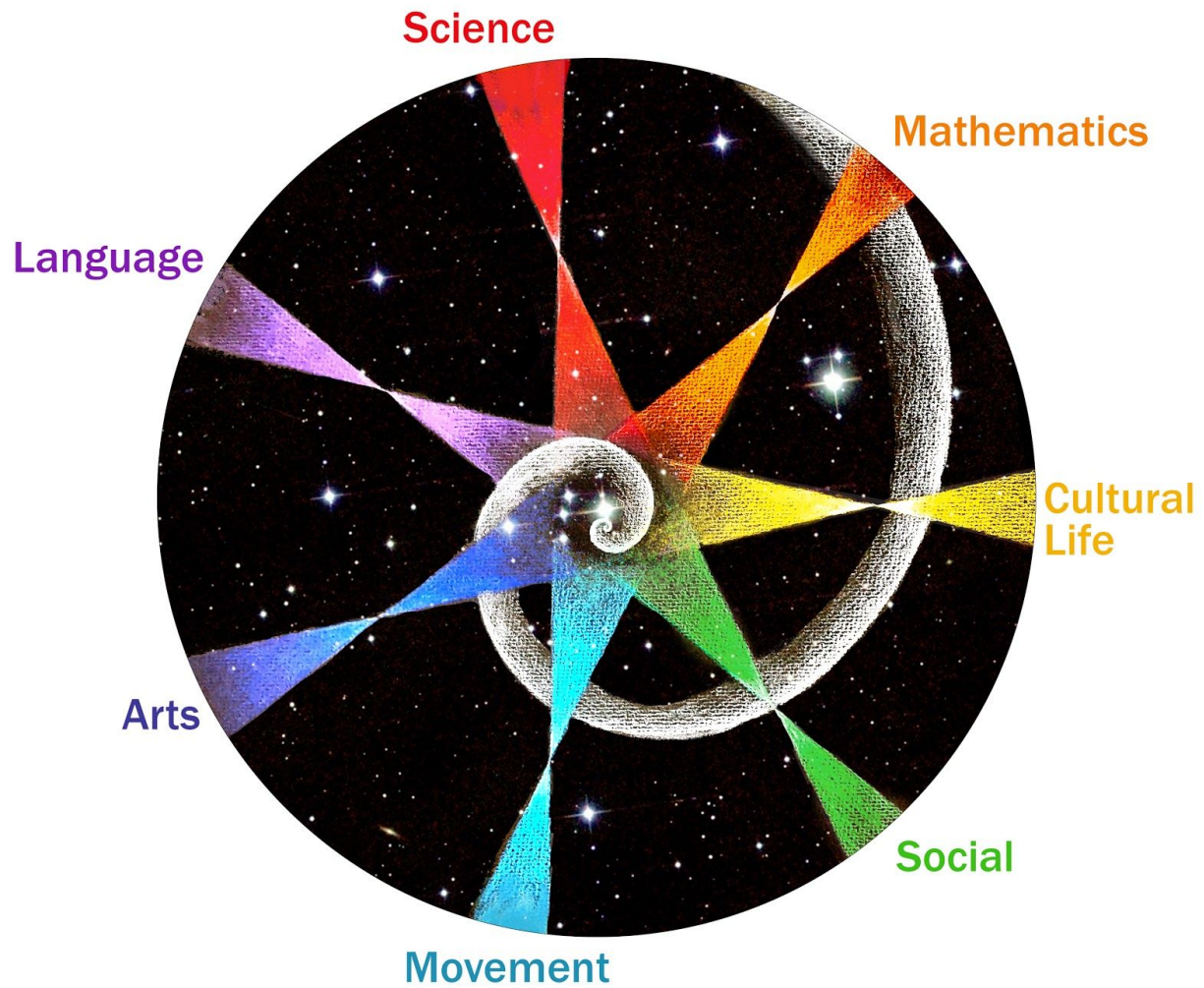


The Curriculum Seal



Imagine inventing yellow,

Or moving for the first time through a cherry curve.'

M. C. Richards

Inner pictures are at the root of our imagination and our thinking. The world lies at the feet of our imagination. Our ideas make them a reality when coupled with our will. The root of the word 'idea' is "mental image or picture." The Greek word for it was *ennoia*, as in a "concept of something to be done; concept of what ought to be, differing from what is observed." How do we make an art out of education? The word 'art' means "to join." Art begs to be brought to birth anew, over and over again, with the light of mind and heart and a touch of the divine into the mix. With these words in mind let me share a form that speaks to an art of educating out of the whole to the parts, simultaneously with the parts unifying with that of the whole.

If you could bottle up the entirety of the Waldorf School curriculum, give it a shake and let it fly, what would it look like? A colourful pinwheel that blows in the wind, delighting children and adults alike? Or a giant lollipop? Or a star shining bright for humanity when it shines deep into the night? Imagination, creativity, and universality are at the core of the Waldorf School curriculum. It encompasses both a liberal and a lateral thinking of space and time through all that lies behind the phenomena of the world. This seedbed of imaginative worlds continues through the story of human culture, from ancient to modern ages to the current and forthcoming age of trans-humanism. Sciences and mathematics are given equal weight in this approach. They are cleverly introduced through stories of invention and accomplishment, through rhythm, and music. Waldorf education methods rise from the 'bottom up, from limb-based will activities in the feet to the power of thought. This curriculum accompanies the stages of child development from kindergarten to grade 12 in an amazing array of creative endeavour, earnest presentations, and artistic approaches to learning.

After 25 years of class teaching, I dreamt of a seven-pointed star, each point a colour of the rainbow and within it, always moving, was the centre of learning itself. At the time I was reflecting on how I could best teach from the back of the classroom rather than the front, leaving room for the students to engage in the lessons as active participants rather than then passive observers. I was playing with a multi-faceted approach to language, math, history and science all wrapped up into the lesson at hand, a participatory strategy to engage all my students wherever they were at; something every teacher aspires to do.

As dreams go, this one stayed with me into the next day as a clear image and the Curriculum Seal was born. Inspired by the subject-centered instruction modalities of Parker Palmer, and deeply informed by Rudolf Steiner's insights into child development, I put the title or theme of a main lesson, such as history or geography, into the center of the seal and each ray encompassed an aspect of learning.

History, science, mathematics, language, movement, art, and the social life, span all subjects in interconnected, integrative learning modalities. The possibilities are infinite and generative when taught by and with the art of 'learning alongside the students' where the teacher takes more and more a facilitator role rather than one of a presenter.

For example let's take a brief look at Botany. I will only hint at some of the considerations and avenues of connection related to other disciplines. If Botany was placed in the center of the curriculum seal with all the subjects spanning out, students would find that there is not only a **science** of plant metamorphosis but a **language** unique to the study of Botanical terms. Indeed a foray into wikipedia revealed scores of alphabetical terms known to the field. **Math** also lives within Botany and becomes apparent and can be taught through the Fibonacci spiral of a pine cone or a tree, the geometry of a leaf or flower. The artistic beauty of plants and flowers have inspired artists past to present, such as Elizabeth Gertrude Knight's contribution to mosses, or Carl Linnaeus, the father of taxonomy. Botany through **Movement** is a hike through a forest, a mushroom hunt, a flower identification scavenger hunt; the earth holds abundant opportunities for exploration. Rudolf Steiner once said that children do not need to go to school to learn. Children need to go to school to socialize. So the **social** aspect is an integral part of the curriculum in all schools. When thinking about this aspect of learning, I realize that the social aspect of school shows up in the skills of listening, inquiry and relationship building. The art of listening and the cultivation of interest in all subjects fosters living curiosity about ourselves and the world, allowing further exploration into self and our relationship with one another on this planet of ours. The effect of employing a variety of modalities around one subject, however lightly, widens the field of general awareness of the topic. Concurrent with aspects of child development, the curriculum seal can be tailored to meet grade 1-12 learners.

The root image of the word 'school' and 'schooling' is that of a pause. A pause! To school our attention into a focus while seeing the interconnectivity of the whole picture is like a musical rest in a symphony of instruments; it offers a chance to breathe, to listen, to collect oneself, to come into relationship with what is going on around us, to take hold of learning in a new way, or to let something go. The inner pictures which give us strength and truth to live by come from a wholeness of life and all the forms within it, like a seed waiting to emerge. Human wisdom surfaces again and again in times of crisis and adversity. It has been well documented in times of war and strife that greatness of spirit shines through. Though currently isolated, we can remember that we belong to the great wheel of deep life wisdoms which are shining through our interests, our activities, our compassion and our courage. In schooling for wholeness - a lifelong pursuit - we may learn to balance our current limitations and inner frustrations with a turn to creative endeavor. Imagine turning this seven pointed star and a new way of seeing and teaching a topic appears. What can reunite knowledge, art, and our human striving for connection with our earth, our communities and ourselves but inspired creativity through reaching for the stars? Creativity and our learning is a gift to ourselves and to others. To transform vision into behavior is an ideal we serve while we have our feet on the ground and our head full of imagination. We live in the center and in the periphery when we are whole. The Curriculum Seal holds both opposites and connections. Our human collaboration inside the seal extends to endless possibilities for expression; it's an educational ecosystem. Or, as Robert Browning's line illumines "Our reach should exceed our grasp/ or what's a heaven for?"

Diane Walters

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