

When school starts at age six – a study on how first-grade teachers work with preschool-like time organization within the school's time structure

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for the playtime in everyday school life. I use the first-grade of Norwegian Waldorf schools as a case because, even after the school entry age was lowered from seven years to six in Norway in 1997, a play-based school day without formal reading and writing instruction was maintained in the first grades of Waldorf schools. This prioritization is in line with the original goals of the nationwide *Six-Year Reform* from 1997. The three qualities of chronological time (Chronos), cyclic time (Aion) and critical points in time (Kairos) are used in the analysis of interviews with five first-grade teachers in Waldorf schools in Norway. While school time is largely structured according to Chronos time, in preschool Aion time and Kairos time prevail. The study shows that especially cyclic time forms the basis for the pedagogical work in first-grade at Waldorf schools with playtime at the center, that time is organized rhythmically, and characterized by polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. To practice cyclic time in first-grade within the school's time structure is not self-evident but is possible under certain conditions: Firstly, there must be a fundamental acceptance of a school-independent daily rhythm, in which Aion time and Kairos time are safeguarded. Secondly, the transition to Chronos time must happen gradually throughout the whole first school year, and thirdly, playtime must be prioritized over academic skills.

Keywords: Rhythm; Play; Chronos; Kairos; Aion.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Dieser Artikel untersucht die Voraussetzungen für eine vorschulähnliche Zeitgestaltung in der ersten Klasse innerhalb einer schulischen Zeitstruktur, und welche Bedeutung diese für das Freispiel im Schulalltag hat. Als Fallstudie verwende ich die erste Klasse an norwegischen Waldorfschulen, da diese auch nach der Herabsetzung des Schuleintrittsalters von sieben auf sechs Jahre in Norwegen im Jahr 1997 einen freispielbasierten Schultag ohne formalen Lese- und Schreibunterricht in der ersten Klasse beibehalten haben. Diese Priorisierung entspricht den ursprünglichen Intensionen der landesweiten *Sechsjahresreform* von 1997. Die drei Qualitäten der chronologischen Zeit (Chronos), der zyklischen Zeit (Aion) und der Zeitpunkte günstiger Augenblicke (Kairos) werden in der Analyse von Interviews mit fünf Erstklassenlehrern an norwegischen Waldorfschulen verwendet. Während die Schul-Zeit weitgehend nach der Chronos-Zeit strukturiert ist, herrschen im Kindergarten die Aion- und die Kairos-Zeit vor. Die Studie zeigt, dass besonders die zyklische Zeit die Grundlage für die pädagogische Arbeit in der ersten Klasse an Waldorfschulen mit Freispiel im Zentrum bildet, dass die Zeit rhythmisch organisiert wird, und durch den Gebrauch von Polaritäten, Sequenzen, Ritualen und Timing gekennzeichnet ist. Eine zyklische Zeitgestaltung in der ersten Klasse innerhalb einer schulischen

Zeitstruktur ist keine Selbstverständlichkeit, jedoch unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen möglich: Erstens muss die grundsätzliche Akzeptanz eines schulunabhängigen Tagesrhythmus gegeben sein, in dem Aion- und Kairos-Zeit gewahrt bleiben. Zweitens muss der Übergang zur Chronos-Zeit schrittweise über das gesamte erste Schuljahr erfolgen, und drittens muss die Zeit für Freispiel höher priorisiert werden als die Zeit für Arbeit an Schulfächern.

Schlüsselwörter: Rhythmus; Spiel; Chronos; Kairos; Aion.

Introduction

While school time is controlled by the clock, organized into lessons and recesses, preschool¹ time is more flexible, organized around free play and open to individual adaptations. When the school entrance age in Norway was lowered from seven years to six in 1997², the original intention of the so-called *Six-Year Reform* was that the new “transitional pedagogy [...] should combine the best from preschool and the best from school [and that] six-year-olds should not have an ordinary school offer, but a preschool offer characterized by free and natural play” (Haug, 2015, p. 407)³. However, the reform was controversial from the beginning. Very few people outside the political arena spoke in favor of the reform or recognized the need for it. Almost no one believed that preschool was unsuitable for six-year-olds and there were no evidence-based arguments either.

Ultimately, however, as Haug (2015) points out, the debate was won by those who argued that this public school system also existed in other European countries, that there were unused classrooms in schools, that preschool places would be made available, and that children would be motivated to learn more at school. The Waldorf schools, however, succeeded in keeping their autonomy and were authorized to continue working with Waldorf preschool pedagogy in first-grade (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). 25 years later, the evaluation of the *Six-Year Reform* in public schools shows that the flexible time organization that characterizes preschool pedagogy has deteriorated in the first-grades. Play has been given lower priority, while the focus on subjects and literacy learning has increased considerably (Bjørnstad et al., 2024). This development is confirmed by several researchers. Olsson (2024) documents that today there are fewer opportunities for play in primary school than in preschool. Play has come under increasing pressure (Sirevåg, 2024), and it has caused concern that an increasing number of first-year students perceive the school’s academic requirements as stressful (Lunde & Brodal, 2022).

In this article, I explore the conditions necessary for first-grade teachers to work with preschool-like time and rhythm within the school’s time structure. A suitable place to explore this is the first-grade of Waldorf schools, which over the years have maintained a preschool-like time structure with long daily periods of play, indoors and outdoors, and without formal reading and writing instruction (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023). At Waldorf schools, the organization of time into daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms is of crucial importance for the educational work. Despite the long tradition of Waldorf education, however, there is still little scientifically based knowledge about it (Stabel & Holm, 2019). There is recent research on the use of time and rhythm in Waldorf preschools, for example Aerts (2019) and Aanstad (2025), and in Waldorf schools, for example Selsfors (2024), but there is no specific research on the use of time and rhythm in the Waldorf school’s first-grade where preschool practice and school practice meet. There is little research on the difference between preschool time and school time, but there is some, for example Goble (2020) and Matthews et al. (2016). Thus, a study of time organization in first-grade could provide research-based insights into the significance of time as an educational resource and its potential for working with six-year-

1. The term *preschool* refers to educational institutions for children aged three to five years.

2. In Norway the school year starts in August and ends in June. Since 1997, all children who turn six during the calendar year get enrolled in school. This means that there can be age differences of up to 12 months in a first-grade class, where the oldest children are six years and eight months, the youngest five years and eight months old.

3. All quotations that are not originally in English have been translated by me. This also applies to quotations from my interviews.

olds. On this basis, I will explore the following research question: *What are the prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what does this mean for playtime in everyday school life?* The study is based on interviews with five first-grade teachers in Norwegian Waldorf schools. As an analytical tool I use the three qualities of chronological time (Chronos), cyclic time (Aion) and critical points in time (Kairos), with particular emphasis on how time is organized as rhythms. As I will discuss in this article, these qualities of time are particularly relevant because their differences can also be found in children's experience of time in the first and second seven-year-period of their lives.

First-grade pedagogy in Waldorf schools

Waldorf pedagogy is based on a methodological approach rooted in the idea of holistic development, which takes place through interaction between children's personal development and their environment (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). «A key concept in the Waldorf school curriculum is that the content and form of teaching should be in harmony with children's learning processes and the stages of human development in childhood and adolescence» (Ullrich, 2015, p. 15). The basic idea is that children develop in seven-year rhythms, with each seven-year period having age-specific characteristics and learning styles. While children in the first seven-year period learn best through free imitation, sensory perception, movement, and play, children in the second seven-year period are most receptive to learning through emotional involvement and narratives from the teacher that appeal to their inner imagination. In the third seven-year period, learning is best achieved through cognitive understanding and independent judgment. The Waldorf educational understanding of children's development assumes that development does not take place linearly, but as a metamorphosis, which means a transformation through phases where each phase needs its own distinctive conditions and maturation time for building the foundation for the next phase. If development is forced, it weakens the subsequent phase of life instead of strengthening it (McKeen, 2011). It can be compared to the metamorphosis of a butterfly, which goes through various phases during its development, from egg to caterpillar to pupa, before transforming into a butterfly (Barz, 1990). Based on this developmental idea, time as an educational resource is used differently in each seven-year period.

Six-year-old children, who are in the transition from the first to the second seven-year period, form a category of their own. Although this transition varies from child to child, it follows specific patterns. A characteristic feature of this transition is that the children move away from spontaneous imitation of their surroundings to "new learning and thinking abilities (...); in particular, the possibility now arises to actively recall one's own memories" (McKeen, 2011, p. 69). In terms of the experience of time, this means the transition from a strong experience of the moment to the ability to distinguish between the past, present, and future (Lindholm, 2021).

In Norway, six-year-olds are school students, but to meet the great need of six-year-olds for play, movement, and motor development, Waldorf schools «use and deepen key values and working methods of Waldorf preschool education in first-grade» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45). This practice, which largely corresponds to the original intention of the Six-Year Reform (Bjørnstad et al., 2024), was incorporated into the Waldorf school's curriculum in 1997. Another intention of Waldorf pedagogy is to enable children to live in close connection with nature and the cycle of the seasons. Great importance is attached to the connection between the rhythms of nature and those of human beings, with the school year closely linked to the changing seasons. In general, the great emphasis of rhythms for educational work can be regarded as a distinctive feature of the Waldorf pedagogy (Gelitz, 2025).

Time and rhythm in education

According to Goble (2020), children experience time in a radically different way than adults. While adults primarily experience time as past, present, and future, young children primarily experience time as the «living now» (p. 181). Greek mythology distinguishes between three different characteristics of time and

personifies them as gods, each with their own distinctive features. Chronos, the creator of time itself, is the god of linear, chronological time, which flows continuously from the future through the present into the past (Hermsen, 2023). Chronos is portrayed standing in front of a sundial, holding an hourglass, an image of measurable time. Kairos is the god of opportunity, portrayed with wings on his back and heels, a bald spot on the back of his head, and a lock of hair on the front. Kairos moments are *critical points in time* that seize the opportunity when it arises. Kairos moments occur unannounced, are perceived as eternal, and cannot be planned, measured, or reversed (Tremel & Weigel, 2004). Closely connected to Kairos is Aion, the god of *cyclic time*, who is portrayed standing in the circle of the twelve astrological signs of the zodiac. The essence of cyclic time lies in the infinite cycle without beginning or end, as found, for example, in inhaling and exhaling, in the seasons, or in the tides. Cyclic time is characterized by a rhythmic flow that creates continuity and can have a regulating effect. In contrast to a rigid time measure without flexibility, rhythm has the ability to adapt elastically (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002). Thus, the cyclic time of Aion is closely related to the quality of rhythm. Hoerner (2006) understands rhythm as a solid framework that lends people stability. Rhythms, he underlines, are found in all life processes and are characterized by «polarity and balance, continuous renewal, and elastic adaptation» (p. 24). Steiner (1982, 2009) particularly emphasized the importance of rhythmic life processes for healthy human development. To prevent children from getting exhausted at school, Steiner recommends structuring the school day in a lively and dynamic way (Steiner, 2009; Mathisen, 2015). According to Steiner (1982), harmonizing the relationship between the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects strengthens the child's physical and mental foundation for life. The most important task of the teacher is therefore, to teach children to breathe and to find the right balance between inhaling and exhaling.

Applied to first-grade, chronological time is expressed in the length of the school day or the school year, cyclic time in the cycle of the seasons, and critical moments in time in the timing of the duration of activities throughout the day. The quality of Kairos time holds the potential to preserve the child's presence in the moment. The younger the child, the more it lives in this quality of time. The quality of Aion time holds the potential for regular recurrence and opportunities for practice and repetition. The quality of Chronos time holds the potential for planning and organization. This measurable, linear property of time also has the potential to promote the child's gradually awakening awareness of time as past, present, and future. This awareness goes hand in hand with the ability to connect events with the causes of these events (Lindholm, 2021). Thus, all three qualities of time have a function and a place in education. All three can be found both in preschool and in school. However, whereas Aion time and Kairos time are mainly linked to preschool education, Chronos time is primarily found in school education (Goble, 2020). The question is, thus, how all three time qualities can be expressed and worked with in first-grade without the dominance of Chronos-time.

Method

The case study is based on interviews with five first-grade teachers at four Norwegian Waldorf schools. One of the schools had two parallel first-grade classes, and I interviewed the teachers of both classes. Three of the first-grade teachers were trained teachers whereas two were trained preschool teachers. They all worked exclusively in first-grade, and at the time of the interviews in June 2023, they had respectively one, two, three, five, and ten years of professional experience as first-grade teachers. There is a total of 33 Waldorf schools in Norway spread across the country, about a third of which is located in and around the greater Oslo region (<https://www.steinerskolen.no/vare-skoler/>). Three of the schools I chose were located in and around Oslo and one in Southern Norway; three in rural areas, one in a city. The participants, whom I already knew from before, were informed in advance about the interview topic, the audio recording, and their right of withdrawal. I chose semi-structured interviews, because, in addition to fixed topics and procedures, they allow for unplanned follow-up questions that can reveal nuances and unforeseen aspects (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide covered three topics: 1. How and in which areas first-grade teachers use rhythm in their educational work. 2. How first-grade teachers justify their use of rhythm in their work. 3.

What chances and challenges first-grade teachers experience in their work with rhythm as an educational tool.

Nilssen (2014) points out that researchers who work with qualitative methods need to be aware of their own prejudices, subjectivity, and personal biases. As an employee in preschool teacher training at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, with 16 years of practice visits in preschools and first-grade classes my preunderstanding has both weaknesses and strengths. The weaknesses lie in the danger of having too strong opinions and not keeping enough personal distance to the content of the conversation. The strengths lie in the fact that I have specialist knowledge and can ask relevant follow-up questions, which «can maximize the potential for gathering and producing meaningful information» (p. 29). In order to draw valid conclusions from the data, the basis for one's own analyses and interpretations must be made transparent to the reader in the text (Postholm & Jakobsen, 2021). I have attempted to achieve transparency through a thematic analysis of the empirical material according to Braun and Clarke (2006), who present a six-step method for identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns and themes in data. The method is suitable for my data material because the analysis steps are concrete and at the same time allow for flexibility.

In the first step, I familiarized myself with the material by transcribing it manually and then reading all the interviews. In the second step, I reread the interviews and created an initial list of ideas about what the data contained and what was interesting about it. This data was then sorted into six categories. In this way, the data material was reduced and summarized into units of analysis. In the third step, based on the research question and theory, I developed, out of the six categories, rhythm practice as the one main theme with the following four subthemes: polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. The fourth step involved first examining this theme as the most relevant and determining whether subthemes needed to be combined or split or new subthemes added. Then, validity was assessed, whether there was consistency between the main theme, the subthemes and the dataset. In the fifth step, to avoid overlaps, I determined which aspect of the data was covered by each subtheme. The sixth step consisted of summarizing and discussing the results, as presented in the following chapters.

Interviewing first-grade teachers without observation of their practices means that the results do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about the actual use of time and rhythm, but only about what they say about this use. However, it is valuable to gain an insight into what the teachers themselves say and emphasize about their work with time and rhythm.

Four methodical features of the organization of time and rhythm

The findings show that time and rhythm is a core pedagogical resource in the daily work of all five first-grade teachers. The interviews show a remarkable degree of consensus in the teacher's description of their work with time and rhythm. Their descriptions reveal four methodical features: polarity, sequence, rituals and timing.

Polarity

All first-grade teachers report that throughout the school year they maintain a rhythmic alternation between everyday routines and special events such as the school's seasonal celebrations. They also all report that the seasons of the year form the overall rhythm on which all other rhythms are based. The daily rhythm is organized like a pendulum between adult-directed and child-directed activities, or as the teachers call it, inhaling and exhaling. This implies that «the children have phases where they sit quietly and phases where they are active, and some things are directed by me [the teacher] and others by them (2.1)⁴». Also within children's play time the teachers can observe a rhythm:

I think that free play largely consists of inhaling and exhaling. When children play freely, there are times when they sit quietly and play that they are eating or pretend to eat or just sit and listen to someone else. And then

4. Read: *Interview 2, page 1*. This comment applies to all subsequent quotations from the interviews.

there are other times when they move around and maybe run after each other or roll on the floor (...). So during this time, there is a lot of breathing in and out, I think. (...) Sometimes there are quite a lot of loud voices and a lot of activity, and then it calms down a bit, only to pick up again (2.3).

The concepts of inhalation and exhalation can be interpreted as an expression of the methodological idea in Waldorf pedagogy that the rhythmic alternation between polarities has an energizing power that prevents children from getting exhausted (Steiner, 1982). In first-grade, the rhythm of alternation is different from in the rest of the school. All first-grade teachers report having a preschool-like daily rhythm that is independent of the school and not divided into lessons and recesses:

Recess doesn't work for them [because] they spend a lot of time planning their play first, and if the bell would ring half an hour later, they would never get to play what they had planned (5.2-3).

All first-grade teachers experience the independence of the school's time structure as positive because it allows them to organize time according to the children's needs. However, this independence can also cause challenges when it conflicts with the school's schedule. One teacher mentions outdoor playtime: «Sometimes we go to a place where we can be on our own if I see that it is getting too rough (...) because the older school children can be a little scary» (2.9-10). Another teacher emphasizes on the other hand the advantages of everyone knowing each other:

The fact that we meet each other during the day helps them [first-graders] get to know each other and feel secure. (...) So the fact that I am also familiar with the older children and have a good relationship with my colleagues helps to make the first-graders feel secure (4.1-2).

Another challenge can be that first-grade teachers may feel a bit isolated, for example during the monthly assemblies, which first-graders often do not participate in. These assemblies are events that mark the student's academic progress, «where the whole school comes together to share glimpses of their daily work» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 170). One first-grade teacher describes the experience like this:

We can participate a little bit (...) inside the main hall, for example at Christmas. But we have not been to the regular monthly assemblies for the older children yet, (...) though I would like to see some more monthly assemblies. (...) Yet, they [the students] are not even actively participating in the first half of second grade, so it's not natural for first-graders to be actively participating either (1.3).

The fact that these monthly assemblies are not yet suitable for first-graders is described by one of the first-grade teachers as «a bit of a sore point» (1.3). Others decide not to participate, or to participate only as an audience.

All first-grade teachers report that about half of the school day is set aside for free play, with about an hour indoors in the morning and one to two hours outdoors in the afternoon. In addition, there is at least one outdoor day trip per week, which also mainly consists of free play. According to the teachers, this amount of free play is necessary to balance the adult-directed activities.

Sequence

In the daily rhythm, it is precisely the maintenance of the same, steady sequence of activities that characterizes the rhythmic pattern:

We don't follow the clock; it's more the sequence of the activities that creates a rhythm, rather than it taking a certain amount of time. (...) You must stick to the rhythm. You can't just come in and do things on impulse. (...) That doesn't mean you can't freshen up the rhythm and take little breaks; they [the breaks] help to awaken a little bit, but you must be true to the rhythm (4.17-18).

The weekly rhythm also ensures that the order of activities and meals is always the same on the same day of the week. The fact that baking always takes place on Thursdays, for example, can increase some children's sense of security. Conversely, changing the order, especially in the daily rhythm, can easily create uncertainty:

I notice very clearly that if it's a day that's going to be a little different, the children get very confused, and some of the children who may already be a little restless become even more restless. (...) Then they might ask, 'Aren't

you going to tell a fairytale today?' – 'Of course, but today we told the fairytale at the beginning of the day'. They had already forgotten because they expected the fairytale to come as part of the regular rhythm (2.1).

All first-grade classes have a daily work period directed by adults. However, within certain limits, children can choose how much they want to participate in the activity. On painting day, for example, «everyone sits down at the same time and paints, but they can choose whether they want to paint more than one picture» (1.5-6), because «in parallel with all the set activities, there is free play» (1.8). All teachers say that they do not work with academic progression, but that everything they do is a preparation for what is to come. One first-grade teacher says «it is all about the process and the joy of creating, not the result» (4.8-9). Another teacher points out that...

...we are more concerned with the development of each individual child. That I can compare you with yourself before and now, rather than comparing you with a general 'this is what children your age should be able to do' (5.6-7).

Rituals

All first-grade teachers agree that rituals help create a rhythm, a framework. Among many examples, here is one:

When we have finished tidying up, we go into the fairytale room and I lit the candle, sing the fairytale song, and then tell the fairytale. And then we have the same song to end the fairytale (...) It's not like I ring a bell and say 'now it's time to gather' or anything like that. It's through being suggestive, through little rituals, that the children know what's coming next (4.5).

Rituals are cultural acts that are characterized by being stable over time, repeated regularly, and having a sensuous dimension (Wicklund, 2005). The goal is not to get it done as quickly as possible; on the contrary, those who perform the ritual are «concerned with completing the ritual, at a familiar pace and rhythm, while making sure that the details are included» (p. 48).

Attention is on the sensory experiences of colors, smells, sounds, and people's movements in the present moment. One first-grade teacher says that «we are vibe workers» (4.18) and continues: «The most important thing besides rhythm is what the adults transmit» (4.18). Teachers have an important task in carrying out the rituals in such a way that they appear as clear, atmosphere-creating markers when working with time and rhythms.

Only one teacher mentions a disadvantage to rhythmic work: «As an adult, you can perhaps slip into a kind of dormancy, where you lose awareness of what you are doing» (4.14). Apart from that, all teachers express that they experience significant advantages with a steady rhythm in their educational work: «The rhythm is the foundation; it enfolds everything else» (4.11-12) and: «rhythm creates predictability and security» (1.7-8), which the teachers emphasize as a prerequisite for good relationships and learning. Another advantage mentioned is that as an adult, «you save energy and know what to do at any time» (5.1).

Timing

Rhythmic work in first-grade is all about timing, about doing the right things at the right time. The ability to time things correctly is necessary in various situations. One type is related to the start or end of an activity:

Around 10 o'clock it's tidy-up time, but if I see that they're playing really well, then we wait a little longer (...) I might put it off for 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour because I can see that they need to play longer today. Or if I see that they're just running around and have actually finished playing, then we tidy up earlier. I can't have a rhythm that's completely rigid to the minute. I feel that the rhythm must follow the child (2.6).

Another first-grade teacher describes working with timing in this way:

Then it's tidy-up time, and we have lunch at half past ten. (...) If I had said that it was tidy-up time now, there would have been protests. But when I say there are 10 minutes left [until tidy-up time], they feel like they have

all the time in the world, and then it's up to them. And then it's also a thing that after a while, they start to understand what 10 minutes are (1.8-9).

Another type of situation is linked to long-term projects that can last throughout the entire school year, such as making hobby horses. In such long-term projects, timing becomes more flexible and gives children the opportunity to work at their own pace:

We started finger knitting reins [for the hobby horse] back in November, and some children had finished theirs by December (...) but the last one to finish the finger knitting for the reins finished two weeks ago [in June]. That option existed the whole time, though. The balls of wool and the works [reins] were in a basket, and we took them out once a week. Some children want to finger knit 10 or 20 rounds, while others almost throw up at the thought of doing two. (...) But then they can do just two, because we have plenty of time! If they do two a week, we'll get it done. And we have. It worked out really well for everyone (5.9-10).

A third type of situation where timing is required, is related to the different stages of development within the group of first-graders:

There is such a big difference between these first-graders; some are very into play and the world of fantasy, while others have started to let go a little and want something real. We have some who could have listened to the same fairytale for weeks and who almost enter a state of meditation when I tell it. Others are starting to become a little more alert and want to move on and ask questions, so there is a wide range. So having a very schematic idea that we should get this far by this time, that... I can have an idea, a thought about the path we should take, but then I have to take individual considerations into account (4.7).

While the facilitation of polarities, sequences, and rituals can be planned in Chronos time, timing has the quality of Kairos-time and cannot be planned in advance. The skill of timing requires the adult to be able to read the children individually and as a group (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). Timing requires a watchful eye, good judgement and decisiveness, as well as experience and intuition. According to Steiner (2009), «teachers must have an artistic sense in their soul» (p. 39) because they also deal with things that cannot be weighed or measured, but which are nevertheless of importance.

To judge whether the timing works or not, one teacher says that «it's like music, you notice if something is out of rhythm, if [for example] the children become restless and are unable to play» (4.12-13). Another first-grade teacher puts it this way:

I guess it's just that I have to watch the children, observe them, and I think I notice a certain uneasiness if things take too long or if they never finish things. So then you have to see, ok, where can I make a change so that they can finish? (5.12)

To get the timing right, it is crucial to use the rhythm's ability to adapt elastically (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002; Hoerner, 2006) to create a balanced rhythm between inhalation and exhalation throughout the day. In their daily work, first-grade teachers navigate between the improvised and the structured and stand out as «rhythm artists» (Mathisen & Birkeland, 2017, p.1). While they are present in Kairos time together with the children and follow the rhythm of the group, they also remain conscious of the daily rhythm of Chronos time.

Time and rhythm in the light of Chronos, Kairos and Aion

In order to answer the research question about the prerequisites for preschool-like use of time in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for the position of play in everyday school life, I will discuss some key differences between time use in preschool and school in light of the time qualities in Chronos, Kairos, and Aion, based on the data material.

Free play or recess

Waldorf pedagogy strongly emphasizes free play for children. For the potential of play to unfold, children need both regular opportunities and sufficient time to play. While school time is structured in the precise

alternation between lesson and recess, preschool time consists of more flexible, longer periods of free play and only shorter, adults-directed work sessions. Goble (2020) claims that school pedagogy is characterized by Chronos time, while preschool pedagogy is characterized by Kairos time. The first-grade teachers' statement, that recess does not work for first-graders, can be interpreted as their appreciation and approval of the intrinsic value of play. The long, daily periods of free play in first-grade are one of the areas that clearly distinguish it from the rest of the school's time structure. According to Goble (2020), children's experience of Kairos time is facilitated precisely by giving them plenty of Chronos time. According to the Waldorf school's curriculum (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021), generous time for children's free play should be emphasized, «because it gives them the opportunity to achieve deep concentration and experience the joy of creation» (p. 46).

The fact that play is given such high priority in Waldorf schools' first-grade is unique (Gelitz, 2024). This becomes particularly clear when compared to for example so-called «learning station activities» (Olsson, 2024, p. 37), which are often used in Norwegian public schools. In such arrangements, children switch every 15 minutes between different activities in different places in the classroom, one of which is often called play. Based on what the first-grade teachers expressed in my study, such 15 minutes of playtime would be insufficient to engage children in deep play. The relatively short, limited duration of Chronos time seems to make it difficult to experience Kairos time and leaves little room for a rhythmic flow of inhalation and exhalation. In the first-grade of Waldorf schools, as data show, teachers use observation of inhalation and exhalation processes during playtime as a guideline for determining the right time to start and end playtime.

This illustrates how rhythm as inhalation and exhalation processes can be actively used in daily educational work to promote optimal conditions for play.

The first-grade teachers see the long, daily periods of free play, both indoors and outdoors, in the morning and in the afternoon, as a prerequisite for engaging in deep play. Given that «the practical aspect is strong in first-grade» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45), it can be argued that the time devoted to children's free play reflects the Waldorf pedagogical philosophy that play is considered the most important area of learning for first-graders. Play thus meets the needs of six-year-olds in the here and now and is at the same time essential as a foundation for later academic learning.

Although the high priority given to play in first-grade guarantees children plenty of playtime, this priority, however, can also create a certain distance to the rest of the school. Precisely because first-graders follow their own daily rhythm, they have fewer opportunities to play with other children at school who are not in the same age group. This can be considered a disadvantage. For play to reach its full potential, it is therefore crucial to think about the framework created for playtime and the play-opportunities that this framework provides.

Seasonal festivals or monthly assemblies

At the seasonal festivals, which are a central part of Waldorf schools, the seasons and the associated Christian holidays are celebrated each year. In this rhythmic recurrence of celebrations, the cyclic quality of the Aion time becomes particularly apparent. Seasonal festivals are held in both preschool and school. Thus, first-graders can recognize the festivals from preschool and at the same time experience a sense of belonging to the social community of the rest of the school. In this way, the reliable and familiar cycle of seasonal festivals forms an important bridge between preschool and school. Precisely because first-graders follow a daily rhythm that is independent of the school's timetable, the seasonal festivals celebrated together with the entire school are important to develop a sense of belonging and strengthening the social community at school.

Also the monthly assemblies are held in a recurring cycle, but unlike the seasonal festivals that follow the rhythms of nature, the monthly festivals are «an event at Waldorf schools where students, teachers, and often parents come together to participate and gain insight into what is being worked on in the various subjects and at the different grade levels» (Stene, 2019, p. 259). A key element of monthly assemblies is the academic progress of the students. The measurable, linear quality of Chronos time is clearly evident here.

The educational value of such academic presentations is considered «to strengthen the cohesion between each individual class and the school as a whole» (Stabel & Jørgensen, 2019, p. 63), while giving students a perspective on their personal development path. First-graders who are not yet working on academic progression cannot actively participate in such events; they can only attend as audience. Several first-grade teachers therefore consider participation in the monthly assemblies to be premature and would like to save this experience for the next school year. This means that first-graders face a fundamental limitation in one of the most important tasks of the school, namely working on academic progression. In this sense, the monthly assemblies highlight that the first-grade transitional pedagogy, where «the best of preschool and school [should] characterize the content and working methods», (Haug, 2015) stands as an independent but also somewhat isolated element between preschool and school. Looking at the prerequisites for preschool pedagogy within the school structure, it can be argued that the Chronos-like monthly assemblies that mark academic progression are at odds with preschool-like pedagogy. On the other hand, seasonal festivals that mark recurring celebrations in the annual cycle help to strengthen Aion-like preschool education in first-grade and at the same time create a sense of unity between first-grade and the rest of the school.

Voluntary or mandatory participation

A special feature of the adult-directed activities in the first-grade of Waldorf schools is that the children are given plenty of time and space to work individually on an activity. This is expressed, for example, in long-term projects such as crafting hobby horses. When the basket with the balls of wool for the hobby horse reins is brought out once a week, some children will finger knit ten or more rounds, while others barely manage two. Although it is mandatory for all children to complete their projects during the school year, the large timeframe for this work gives children a choice and allows them considerable control over the process and their own progress. Some six-year-olds are more advanced in their development than others. The procedure shows how teachers can take into account the significant developmental differences among first graders within a class when carrying out projects. This way of working is characteristic of Waldorf preschool pedagogy, where adults do not demand children to participate in activities, but only encourage participation by performing the activity themselves (Ullrich, 2015). In such an open setting, Aion time plays a central role. Taking out the basket with the balls of wool every week throughout the entire school year creates a rhythm that provides predictability and reassurance that there will always recur new opportunities to continue the work and complete it. The predictability of the activities in the weekly rhythm ensures continuity and regularity, in addition to preventing the feeling of engaging in «singular events along a timeline, disconnected from the eternal cycle of time» (Lindholm, 2021, p. 78). However, leaving the pace of work and progression largely up to the children themselves makes it difficult to map their learning progress in Chronos time. The fact that Waldorf school first-grade teaching is more process-oriented than results-oriented (Steinerskoleforbundet 2021, p. 45) can be seen as a weakness, since progress and learning outcome are not immediately measurable. At the same time, it can be seen as a strength, since progress and learning outcome can grow out of the child's inner motivation and thus be more in line with the child's natural experience of Kairos time. A crucial prerequisite for such a volunteer-based way of working is that the time frame for an activity is sufficiently long so that the activity is not primarily governed by chronological time, but rather by the cyclic rhythm of Aion time.

The weekly painting day is another example of giving children plenty of time and freedom in connection with an activity. On painting day, «everyone sits down at the same time and paints, but they can choose whether they want to paint more than one picture» because «in parallel with all the organized activities, there is free play». The painting activity thus begins with a mandatory part, which can be seen as having Chronos time quality because all children are expected to do the same thing at the same time. After the mandatory part, however, the children are free to decide whether they want to continue with painting or not, based on their own motivation. This part of the activity opens for Kairos moments in which children who want to continue painting can do so, engage with the activity, and immerse themselves completely in painting. Children who no longer want to paint can end the activity and go and play. The combination of Chronos and Kairos time in one and the same activity can be described as a characteristic feature of transitional

pedagogy in first-grade, as it considers both the school time structure and the flexible schedule of preschool.

A third example of an activity involving voluntary and mandatory elements is tidying up after free play. The difference between Kairos and Chronos time is particularly clear here: the first-grade teacher is focused on the clock and wants to start the meal on time. The children, on the other hand, are absorbed in their play, in what Goble calls the «living now» (2020, p. 181). The first-grade teacher expects that «if I had said it was time to tidy up, there would have been protests». She therefore tells the children that they can continue playing for 10 minutes before they have to stop. This gives the children a period of time during which they can, but also must, control themselves. By setting a time limit for the transition from play to tidying up, the teacher shows respect for the children's play and avoids protests and unrest in the group. At the same time, the warning serves as a reminder not to start anything that cannot be completed within the next 10 minutes. The first-grade teacher has introduced the children to the logic of Chronos time; it is mandatory that the children finish playing within 10 minutes. At the same time, there is an element of voluntariness in that the children themselves can choose how they want to spend these last 10 minutes of playtime. In this situation, the cyclic quality of Aion time is central. Through the daily reminder, the first-grade teacher gives the first-graders a feel for the quality of Chronos time, which, according to the first-grade teacher, will ultimately lead to an understanding of this quality of time. On the one hand, it can be argued that the logic of Chronos time creeps into the preschool-like time organization of first-grade. On the other hand, the introduction of Chronos time can be seen as a characteristic of transitional pedagogy, where «first-graders should practice good work habits and share new learning experiences and insights with their peers» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45). Another crucial fact is that the situation in which children encounter Chronos time occurs in an everyday, natural context.

As the discussion shows, Chronos time is linked to mandatory participation in an activity, while Kairos and Aion time are more linked to a voluntary participation. Nevertheless, all three qualities of time in Chronos, Kairos and Aion have a function in the everyday school life of first-graders. They do not need to be mutually exclusive, but can complement each other, given that Chronos time does not dominate, but occur in combination with Kairos and Aion time.

Prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade

The first-grade teachers in this study consistently demonstrate active and highly conscious use of time and rhythm as a pedagogical resource. The study of the conditions for preschool-like use of time in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for play-time in everyday school life, has led to several findings: When working with first-graders, it is crucial to organize time rhythmically, which is characterized by the use of polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. Working with time as rhythm based on these four principles helps to ensure and maintain a preschool-like use of time characterized by the qualities of Aion and Kairos time within the school's Chronos-based time structure.

First-grade teachers find it very enriching to work with time and rhythm similar to that of preschool. They do not experience any profound challenges regarding the school's time structure inside the classroom but can do so outside the classroom. This is most evident when first-grade teachers must decide whether six-year-olds should participate in the monthly assemblies, an event that marks academic progress, something that six-year-olds in Waldorf schools are not yet working on. On the one hand, this shows that first-graders are not involved in one of the school's most central concerns, namely academic progress. On the other hand, it also shows that the school accepts the first-grade teachers' choice whether or not to attend the monthly assemblies. The fundamental acceptance of a school-independent daily rhythm, underlying the freedom of choice regarding the participation in school-related events, is a basic prerequisite that must be met in order to enable a preschool-like time organization within the school's time structure. In other words, instead of responding to the school bell, first-grade teachers must have the freedom to respond to the specific needs of each group of children. This freedom allows for a balanced shift between what they call inhalation and exhalation, like the polarity between adult-directed activities and children's self-directed play. The relationship between rhythm and play lies in the flexible duration of playtime in accordance with

the needs of each group. The duration of an activity should not have to be determined in advance; rather, it should be possible to adapt it to the situation at hand. Regarding the timing, doing the right thing at the right time, first-grade teachers must be independent of a Chronos-time schedule like the one used in schools and instead be able to ensure a flexible time organization based on Aion and Kairos time.

Another central prerequisite for the use of preschool-like time within the school's time structure is that the transition to the school's Chronos time happens gradually. This means that the adaption to Chronos-time must be smooth and flexible throughout the entire first school year. This enables learning processes that are governed by the child's individual interests and not primarily by given competence goals.

Also, time and space for activities must be so large scaled that the children can work at their own pace. For first-grade teachers as well, the time frame must be spacious. In the widest sense, this means that first-grade teachers should not have to work with school related academic progression, but instead with the foundation for later academic progression, as it is anchored in the original intentions of the transitional pedagogy (Haug, 2015; Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). Both the first-grade teachers, the Waldorf school curriculum, and the original intentions of the Six-Year Reform agree that sufficient playtime in first-grade lays a solid foundation for later learning. This means that playtime must be prioritized over academic skills.

Overall, the discussion of prerequisites for preschool-like use of time and rhythm in first-grade is a question of what is at stake if playtime and a safeguarding of Aion-time and Kairos-time in first-grade do not get better conditions than it has today. Considering the fact that more and more first-graders experience the school's academic requirements as burdensome (Lunde & Brodal, 2022), there must be fostered an understanding that a play-based school day is for the benefit of the children in first-grade. To preserve the unique feature of transitional pedagogy in first-grade, the quality of Aion-time and Kairos-time must be ensured. Especially today, when many areas of life are characterized by a lack of rhythm, maintaining and promoting rhythms in everyday life can have a regulating, stabilizing and health-promoting effect (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002).

There is, however, a need for further research on what role time and rhythm can have in the school's everyday life and how rhythmic work can best be achieved. Especially for Norwegian Waldorf schools, this study has raised questions about what place the first-grade has within the entire Waldorf preschool and school system. In terms of administration, first-graders are school students, but in terms of education, they get an extra year of preschool pedagogy. Considering the transitional pedagogy, which intends to unite the best from preschool and school (Haug, 2015), it appears that the actual situation could also point in a different direction: First-graders are neither affiliated with preschool anymore nor have they become full members of the school yet. The fact that the children get a new teacher after the first year at school can also be perceived as somewhat disharmonious, since such a change of teacher is not in line with the principle of Waldorf pedagogy, according to which a teacher should teach the same class from the first up to the eighth grade (Ullrich, 2015). Considering the importance of working with time and rhythm in Waldorf pedagogy as a whole, the first-grade may seem like a somewhat unrhythmic element in this entity. An important voice that could bring the research further is the one of the six-year-olds themselves. The children's perspective can provide firsthand insights into how first-graders experience their own school life and the opportunities for play within it.

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