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Travels in education: Towards Waldorf 2.0

Neil Boland

Neil Boland

Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

This article documents an exploratory, values-based process involving culture, society and contemporaneity in Steiner Waldorf education. I do this by using my own developing values as a lens through which I assess and critique Steiner educational practice. Through the growing awareness and articulation of my own values, I look at notions of representation in Steiner education, and investigate the degree to which it responds to ideas of equity and social justice. I illustrate the development of my living-theory by using an action research model, working through cycles which expand gradually from personal reflection to international discussion; I articulate how these developing values in turn influence people I work with and those further afield. This process is of its nature unfinished; I record here the first seven years.

Keywords: Waldorf; Steiner; Social justice; Place-based education.

Introduction

This article explores and records aspects of my work over the past seven years. It documents a personal journey showing how I became aware of increasing tensions between my own values and ones I saw being enacted in Steiner settings. It reveals how this then challenged me to confront, disrupt and review my own previously held opinions, to view familiar things through different lenses (see **Figure 1**) and to identify and develop my responses further. This led me to challenge the uncritical acceptance of opinion sometimes found within proponents of Steiner education, aiming instead to help cultivate authentic, respectful, contemporaneous values.

Figure 1. Familiar situations viewed through different lenses

Steiner, or Waldorf, education is based on the work of Austrian philosopher and polymath, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Since the first school was founded in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany, there are now over a thousand schools around the world. It has been described as the world's largest non-denominational education movement (Reinsmith, 2008). The original school was begun for the children of the workers of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory; from the outset, the Waldorf movement has contained a strong element of social justice (Section for Social Sciences, 2017). I have been involved in Waldorf education for over 35 years as an early childhood, primary and secondary teacher, as well as working as a teacher educator on five continents. I am currently employed as senior lecturer in education at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand, where I am coordinator of the undergraduate and graduate programmes.

At the same time as looking at my own development, I try to illustrate how it is linked to, or has had an effect on, the development of ideas within the Steiner educational community internationally. The aim of this international process is the development of what I here call Waldorf 2.0.

What are the influences on my own learning?

In going through this process, I have had to identify and analyse my own thinking, feelings and actions and deepen my engagement with a wide body of literature, far beyond the wider discipline of education. Before documenting the process and to set the scene, as it were, I would like to identify and isolate ideas and people that have had and continue to have a significant influence on my thinking and the way in which I view the world.

I agree with Bullough and Pinnegar when they state that, '... the consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research' (2004, p. 319). One of the reasons for writing this article is to evidence the central importance of ontology, as I hope to create ripple effects on, '... sociocultural and socio-pedagogical others' (Qutoshi, 2016, p. 1) and perhaps influence their learning.

Anthroposophy

Anthroposophy, Steiner's philosophy or cosmology, is the foundation of Steiner education. It is difficult to explain in few words. Perhaps the most concise definition is, 'Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge which seeks to unite the spiritual in the human being with the spiritual in the universe' (Steiner, 1924, p. 14).

First and foremost, it is a path of knowledge, an active path which each individual needs to tread in the way she or he chooses. It is cognitive, conscious, clear and defined. This does not negate the great importance of the arts, of inspiration, imagination and intuition, which are vital but, as any artist will tell you, practising the arts requires a huge amount of hard work and will-power. I originally trained as a musician and have many times come across the notion from others that I must somehow have emerged from the womb as an accomplished pianist, conveniently ignoring the thousands of hours of hard work and stressful competition which allowed me to be successful. Anthroposophy is similarly hard work.

The underpinning aspect of anthroposophical work and of Steiner's hopes for the teacher is an active inner life. It was and is an expectation that all Steiner teachers are on a path of inner development, are striving to become better human beings. Steiner gave many indications for how this could be done (among others, Steiner, 1904; 2004), but the choice of path is up to the individual. If anthroposophy is experienced as this path of honest, inner striving, it becomes a lived spirituality, which is then what Steiner intended.

Like Thayer-Bacon, 'I want to caution us against equating spirituality with religion, for religion is connected to particular religious expressions such as Judeo-Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist traditions' (2017, p. 2). I support Lingley (2016) when she states:

> The defining elements of spirituality … are an engagement in a search for purpose and meaning; an orientation of faith in regards to something larger than oneself …; a capacity for self-aware consciousness; experiences of awe, love, and transcendence; an interest in ethical or moral commitments; and a disposition of wonder and inquiry. (p. 2)

If this spirituality is not lived and experienced, it can become a mere handing on of traditions, ever more poorly understood and empty, saying the right words, conforming to a series of norms to be thought of as, '... a good Waldorf teacher' (Denjean, 2014). I believe this runs fundamentally counter to the impulse that Steiner initiated. There is then a limit to the number of generations across which tradition can successfully be handed on. I believe this is what is behind the current drive to refocus Waldorf teacher education (Osswald, 2017), to create Waldorf 2.0.

Authentic, values-led practice speaks of authenticity to others (Sparrowe, 2005) and has a great chance of affecting change in others. In order to be a lived spirituality, it has to be alive; being alive, it has to be contemporary – it has to discover what is contemporary. I do not believe that one is able to embody a lived spirituality and be of the past. Authentic, lived practice is, of necessity, contemporaneous:

> Knowledge does not keep any better than fish. You may be dealing with knowledge of the old species, with some old truth; but somehow it must come to the students, as it were, just drawn out of the sea and with the freshness of its immediate importance. (Whitehead, 1929, p. 98)

The exploratory striving for this freshness is a significant aspect of this study.

Concepts of social justice

I was born and brought up in the northeast of England in Middlesbrough, a town known in the UK for high rates of social deprivation (Anon., 2012; Bell, 2016). Years later, I have found that experiences in my early and school years have strongly affected my sense of social justice. What the term 'social justice' means to me is that all members of society are acknowledged as of equal merit, value and importance. It means that social, monetary and land resources and rights need to be shared equitably. In addition, no group or groups within society should be privileged to the detriment of others, be that based on gender, class, wealth, resource ownership, culture, belief or non-belief, ethnicity, sexual or gender orientation, epistemological viewpoint or other identifying characteristics. The idea of a level playing-field for all is an idealistic aim, but one which speaks to something deep within me. Initially, one of the strongest intolerances I have had was observing how wealth and land/house ownership created privileged layers within society, the members of which have much greater opportunities than others of lesser wealth. In particular, I had difficulty when these opportunities create distance between groups within society and are seen as a 'right' that their wealth affords them. This creates a discernible sense of self-satisfaction and entitlement, at the same time as an emotional distance from, and lack of empathy towards, those less privileged. Poverty and social exclusion become the 'fault' of the poor (Collins, Cox, & Leonard, 2015). My wish for a more just society, initially limited to lessening divisions between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', has greatly broadened in time to include other groups which are under-represented, repressed and discriminated against (McLennan, McManus, & Spoonley, 2010). Some of the ways this began to develop within me are detailed below.

I fully acknowledge that I write as someone undoubtedly privileged by the society I work and live in on many levels, as male, white, middle-aged, educated, able-bodied,

employed, and so on. I also acknowledge that this status creates multiple levels of contradiction within me which will not be fully resolved. As McLaren (2004) says:

> My whiteness (and my maleness) is something I cannot escape no matter how hard I try. [I come to terms with my whiteness] in living my own life as a traitor to whiteness. I cannot become lazy; if all whites are racist at some level, then we must struggle to become anti-racist racists.

Tangata whenua, indigeneity

I work in New Zealand, a country whose *tangata whenua*[1] were 'colonised' by Europeans from the early 1800s onwards. Questions, issues, injustices, contradictions and minor successes in the area of post-colonialism are familiar to me and ones which I encounter many times a day.[2] Many of my students identify as Māori, as do friends, colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances. The contested history of Aotearoa New Zealand (see for example Walker, 1984, and King, 2013) and the rich multi-cultural demographic of where I live and work in Auckland is a constant source of inspiration for me to work towards social justice through anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices. It is of course a work in progress.

I am grateful to have been able to meet, work and correspond with representatives of other Indigenous groups, among them Australian Aboriginal, Hawaiian, Inca and Cree, and to discuss concepts of education as lived spirituality with them. These rich experiences have strongly influenced aspects of my thinking, as has the work of decolonisation theorists (among others, Smith, 2012).

Colleagues

There is a *whakataukī* (proverb) in Māori which comes to mind when I think of influences on my learning:

> *He aha te mea nui o te ao?*
> *He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.*
> What is the most important thing in the world?
> It is people, it is people, it is people.

Some of the most powerful learning I have experienced has been thanks to colleagues I have had at different stages in my life. The learning was the more powerful because it was not formal. I am privileged to have worked with many people who are fundamentally different to me, with different outlooks, life experiences, from different backgrounds and cultures, having different educational journeys and from whom I have been able to learn an immense amount. This has never been more the case than in my

[1] Māori, 'people of the land'

[2] Post-colonialism means different things to different people. I use it here to refer to the period in which there is 'an engagement with, and contestation of, colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies' (Gilbert, & Tompkins, 1996, p. 13).

present position in which I mix with many highly talented, creative and inspirational people. I am grateful for their experience and insight on a daily basis. It has expanded my understanding of education in its broader sense immensely which in turn has benefited my understanding of education in general and of Steiner education.

In attempting to articulate my living-theory, I identify multiple positionalities in relation to the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I experience them as follows (the list is likely incomplete):

- I am working alone, studying my own practice, past as well as present, directing my attention inward as I attempt to isolate, identify and map my own values
- My long experience working in Steiner education allows me to think of myself and act as an insider, one who belongs, working collaboratively with other insiders
- At the same time, as I no longer work in a Steiner school but in a mainstream university, I am an outsider working collaboratively with insiders
- I am also an outsider observing insiders (and their work) at a distance.

This multifaceted positionality gives me a privileged position, allowing me to observe issues from multiple sides, triangulating them constantly. The simultaneous experience of intimacy and distance reminds me of Eliot's (1942) *Little Gidding:*

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> (p. 240)

Someone said to me once that a fish is not aware of the water it swims in. I have left the water of the Steiner school and perceive it differently to when I was immersed in it.

Wider network

Finally, I am grateful for other formative and significant meetings and conversations during this time, which have fed into the action research loop. These include with Florian Osswald and Claus-Peter Röh, leaders of the Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum, Switzerland; with countless colleagues and friends in Australia and New Zealand; with Professor Dr. Hornfay Cherng of the National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan; Dr Martyn Rawson of Germany; Dr Jocelyn Romero Demirbag of Hawaiʻi, Dale Saddleworth of the University of Edmonton, Canada; and others too many to name. Individually and together they have challenged and encouraged me at all stages of my work, served as sounding boards for me to bounce ideas off, told me of their own projects and interests and helped me keep a global perspective during my largely solitary work in the Antipodes. My heartfelt thanks go to them all.

I would like particularly to thank and acknowledge my colleague Dr Lynette Reid of Ngāti Porou3 for reading this article from a perspective of *te ao Māori* and for her suggestions and comments.

I would also like to acknowledge those people who have challenged or disagreed with what I have said over the years and those with whom I have clashed or, more often, who have clashed with me. These challenges and opposition have been an important stimulus to my thinking, making me question my work strongly. They have (I believe) been for a number of reasons, all of which I acknowledge as areas of actual or potential living contradiction within me.

They include me:

- troubling accepted norms, either too strongly or not strongly enough (and of course I too clung to accepted forms when I was working as a teacher);
- 'dispelling the dream' of an idealised education;
- being a European male, challenging gendered, European traditions (as McLaren says (2004), 'My whiteness (and my maleness) is something I cannot escape no matter how hard I try');
- being white while challenging colonial legacies (ditto).

I do not see, however, that I should not speak out because I come from and represent privileged groups within the society in which I live. Like McLaren, this likely acts as a goad to make me 'not become lazy' or to relax into the *status quo*. I have observed myself become something of an agitator, a *provocant*, someone who seeks – likely assisted by being white, European and male in a position of some visibility – to challenge the *status quo* and highlight areas of what I perceive to be injustice. I have sometimes stated at the beginning of keynotes that it is my hope to irritate my audience, to challenge them so that they will challenge their own mind-sets. This is essentially the wish to be the grain of sand or dirt in an oyster which may, in time, make some pearls appear. Others will form their own pearls; I am content to be the irritant.

To quote Thayer-Bacon (2003):

> No scholar has a perfect view into the lives of others, regardless of cultural and historical affiliations. I take heart in knowing the ideas I [discuss] here are powerful enough to stand on their own, without help from me and regardless of the harm I may unwittingly cause them. (p. 154)

I thank these critics for the interest they took and take in what I have to say and for engaging with me in conversation about it. Their counterviews are important and have helped in the writing of this article.

[3] The Ngāti Porou *iwi* or tribe is traditionally located in the East Cape region of Aotearoa.

The context and the challenge

Steiner Waldorf Education began in Germany in 1919. The founding of the first school, for factory workers' children, contained a strong gesture to social justice. The social fabric of Germany had suffered greatly during the First World War, and the first school came from an impulse to create an education, which would help counter aggressive nationalism, predatory capitalism and social injustice (Steiner, 1919).[4] The education has since spread around the world and is expanding into new areas, especially in Asia (Cherry, 2014). This gradual expansion has not come without questions and challenges, specifically around the degree to which the accepted curriculum is Eurocentric and to what degree the values of Waldorf education as it is currently practised in many locations are European/Western values (see Bishop, 1996, for a New Zealand perspective on the importance of research responsive to non-Western viewpoints). There is a growing body of literature questioning the speed and degree to which Steiner education is adapting to new cultures, environments and times (among others, Boland, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017c, 2017d; Cherng, 2016; de Souza, 2012; Dewey, 2012; Hoffmann, 2015, 2016, 2017; Rawson, 2010; Stemann, 2017; Tang, 2010; Ullrich, 2008; Willmann, 2014).

In what follows, I '... draw from [my] own personal biography, struggles, and attempts to understand [my] own contradictions in the context of the contradictions of schooling'. (Torres, 1998, p. 7).

The method(ology)

I have taken the exploration of my own values and creation of my living-theory and examined it as if it were action research in its broadest sense, constantly developing and in a process of becoming. This action research has taken place over a period of 35 years; however, the large majority has been unconscious and undocumented. It was the striving of a practising teacher trying to improve his classroom practice, his understanding of the human being, and of education.

The path I have sought to tread is more solitary, in that it is an inner journey and not a physical one. It takes place in the soul and in the mind. The isolation this can cause is both a stimulus and a burden. Lack of immediate colleagues stimulates me because, alone, I can go in any direction, think any thought free of immediate influence and strike out in bold new directions. It is a burden because it is lonely work, and I can miss the stimulus or support of others. Discovering colleagues on their own journeys is a moment of mutual celebration. Thanks to the power of the internet and Google, these travellers increasingly take the form

[4] These are negative tendencies which Steiner identified as symptomatic of society in 1919 and which accounted for many of the ills of society. I suggest that they are even more symptomatic of the current world situation. They are possibly self-explanatory, but I explain what they mean to me. Aggressive nationalism – expansionism, lack of cooperation with or interest in others, lack of concern for people of other nations or groups; predatory capitalism – a non-sustainable form of capitalism in which corporate gain is paramount and private profit is encouraged at the expense of public good; social injustice – ignorance, apathy or acceptance that some groups within society are underprivileged, discriminated against and oppressed by others ('that's just how it is').

of postgraduate students around the world, leading to fruitful digital conversations and cyber-collaboration.

Over the past seven years, my work has become more targeted and deliberate as I engaged more consciously with the topic. It has been focussed around lectures given to various audiences around the world on notions of stagnation-adaptation, fixity-flexibility, and inclusion-exclusion, among others, using my own values and understandings as the stimulus. Giving these keynotes has been a very public way of explaining my values to others, often to hundreds of people at a time. They are occasions in which I give details of what is behind me saying what I do and then showing how I attempt to live up to this in what I do and what I say. I am more than aware of my own shortcomings in this regard. During and after each set of lectures, I have discussed topics with friends and colleagues, received email feedback, verbal challenges, as well as protest from some. All of these have pushed my thinking further as I prepared for the next series of talks. My teaching practice and the content of my lectures have undergone a similar evolution. The process has become a standard action research loop.

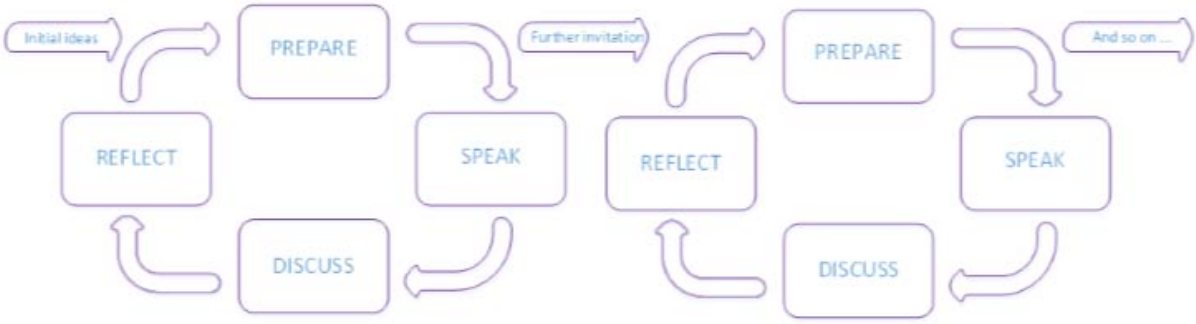

Figure 2. The research sequence

Added to this have been two research projects which fed into the process. The first has been published in an article *The globalisation of Steiner education: Some considerations* (Boland, 2015). It details an investigation into experiences of Māori, Indigenous New Zealanders within Steiner education. The participants were ex-students of mine, all Māori, registered teachers and trained in Steiner education. The second was a more extensive action research project with the faculty of the Honolulu Waldorf School looking at how their notions of place and belonging in Waldorf education changed over time (Boland & Demirbag, EJOLTS, 2017). It shows how a whole faculty responds to critical questioning as a spur to carry their thinking further.

These two projects have allowed me to see how others adopt/adapt my initial thoughts into concrete action with teachers and students. The consequences and results of this have helped me refine my thinking, become more aware of the values I hope to embody and take things further.

> You are now able to demonstrate how your actions are underpinned by moral commitment, and how you are aiming to help other people, also to understand the need for moral

> accountability. You are aiming to transform practice into praxis at an individual and collective level (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 191)

These projects, countless conversations and email conversations, talks on Skype, long international phone calls and shared meals in cities around the globe have all fed into this action research cycle.

The journey

As mentioned before, the milestones in this process are talks and publications. They have all been preceded by lengthy periods of introspection, study and investigation. I have identified five stages moving from local to global.

Cycle one: the topic makes itself visible 2011–2012

I returned to work in New Zealand in 2011 after 14 years overseas. I was employed mainly to lecture in Steiner education at a large university. Two things were immediately apparent: the demographic of Auckland had changed significantly in this period and diversity was now the norm in many areas of life, particularly in the student population of the city[5]; secondly, in the time I had been away, educational priorities in New Zealand had changed and that *te reo Māori*, *tikanga Māori* and *te ao Māori* (Māori language, customs and worldview) were acknowledged to a far greater extent than hitherto. As part of my own professional development, it was necessary for me to undertake some swift learning. Steiner education is strongly underpinned by a view of the developing child which acknowledges the body, soul and spirit. Making strong connections between Māori cosmology and anthroposophy was not difficult.

A detailed exploration of this is far beyond the scope of this article. However, something I wrote several years ago for an application to the Ministry of Education in New Zealand is relevant here (Boland, 2014c, pp. 1–3).

> The most fundamental similarity is that the world pictures, the cosmologies of Māori and Steiner, acknowledge the reality and complete interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds (Fraser, 2004). May and Aikman (2003) comment that schooling which does not acknowledge this reality as a core feature '... has contributed significantly to the loss of indigenous identity, control and self-determination.' (p. 143). For Steiner (1924), the task of life is to guide '... the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe' (p. 14) to (re-)unite one with the other.
>
> In Rudolf Steiner's philosophy, the human being is looked upon as threefold: body, soul and spirit (Steiner, 1910). This aligns closely with Durie's well-known model of Māori health and well being, *te whare tapa whā* (the four walls of the house, Figure 2).

[5] Auckland is acknowledged as one of the most diverse cities in the world (Chen, 2015). 40% of the population was born overseas (a percentage which is rising) and bi- and multilingualism is becoming the norm in schools. Approximately 50% of the population identify as of European heritage, 25% Māori and Pacific Island and 25% Asian, with the latter two groups becoming increasingly better represented. Developing educational models which support and are sensitive to this growing level of diversity is a pressing need (Harvey, 2015).

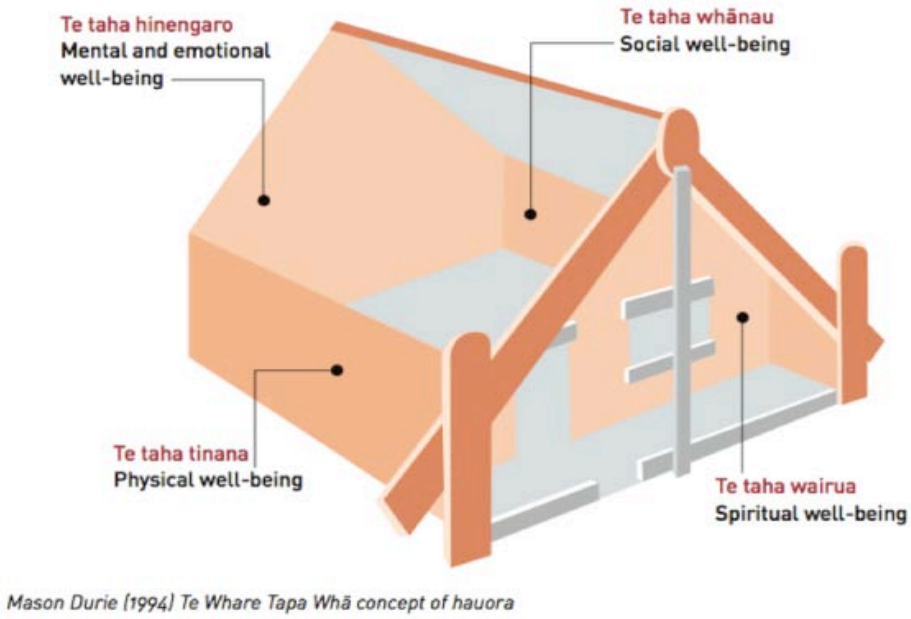

Figure 2. *te whare tapa whā*

Te ao Māori	Steiner terminology
te taha wairua	**spirit**
te taha hinengaro	**soul**
te taha tinana	**body**
te taha whānau	**social well-being** (see below)

This view of the human being as a spiritual being of body, soul and spirit, that one aspect cannot exist without the others, is common to both Steiner education and Māori cosmology (Denford-Wood, 2005; McLoughlin, 2007; Metge, 1995).

Regarding *te taha whānau*, parents and *whānau*[6] are involved in the organisation of Steiner schools to a higher degree than is found in most other schools. The importance of this relational model is carried over into the pedagogy, where it is common for a teacher to 'loop', i.e. to be the main teacher (class teacher) of the same group of children throughout their primary/intermediate schooling (Clouder & Rawson, 1998), leading to close and lasting links between the students, students' *whānau* and the teacher. Steiner wrote what is called the motto of the social ethic, which sums up this relational model: 'The healthy social life is found when, in the mirror of each human soul, the community can find its reflection, and when, in the community, the virtue of each one is living' (Steiner, 1912–1924, p. 182).

It would be interesting to explore *te taha whānau* in this regard.

[6] Māori: most simply translated into English as 'extended family'.

In conversation with Dr Jocelyn Romero Demirbag of Hawaiʻi, I discuss in video 1 how I became increasingly aware of a tension between what I saw being valued in schools, and what I saw outside the school gates.

Video 1. Growing dissonance

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWFpeJKxQwk

The following year, I travelled to Switzerland to the World Conference of Steiner Teachers. Some 1000 teachers were present from over 50 countries. I took part in a four-day workshop on the localisation of Steiner education into different cultures. What I heard there troubled me, in that it appeared that a European outlook was being suggested as the standard. My impressions were validated by fellow participants from the southern hemisphere, all of whom were familiar with European and northern viewpoints dominating discussion (Barreto, 2014; Connell, 2013, 2014). De Sousa Santos has gone so far as to term this 'epistemicide' (2007, 2014). We spoke about our observations at length outside the workshop. At the beginning of the final day, I raised my hand and said that I had a rock which I needed to toss into the pool, that it did not need to be discussed but that I had to say it. I then stated that it seemed to me that Europeans were being held up as the standard to which other cultures should aspire and that, as a New Zealander, working in a multi-cultural environment with Indigenous peoples who did not want in the slightest to become European, this was difficult. This statement caused a degree of consternation and voices were raised for several minutes, denying that a Eurocentric viewpoint was being promoted.

Later on in the day, when I had made my peace with the facilitator of the workshop, been called names by one participant, scowled at by a few and slapped on the back and congratulated by some more, a South African lady came up to me and we began to talk. At the end she told me that she had heard what I had said that morning and that she wanted to see for herself if I was '... very brave or just mad'. Her verdict was that I was very brave. This was my introduction to the complexities of the territory I have been traversing since. It was also the first time I had spoken out clearly in public in a situation in which my values were in conflict with what I was hearing and in which I saw the need to stand up for myself and for others, both in the room and not. In retrospect, it reminds me of a quotation attributed to Desmond Tutu: 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor' (cited in Horde, 2017, p. 17). It was a tiny step, but significant for me (Huxtable, 2012).

Cycle two: investigating at home 2013–2014

My experience of similarities between *te ao Māori* and '*te ao Steiner*' (Māori worldview and anthroposophy) was echoed by my students, some of whom identified as Māori. This led to a research project about experiences of Māori teachers and parents in Steiner education (Boland, 2015). The findings were stimulating, being both highly appreciative and highly critical, and indicating that Māori viewpoints were, on the whole and at the time, not well represented within New Zealand Steiner schools.[7] In 2014, I attended a meeting in Christchurch of representatives of all the Steiner schools in New Zealand and reported verbally on the findings. I linked them to standard academic notions of a dominator culture not open to other ways of knowing (Smith, 2012). When speaking, I was aware that I was addressing teachers from schools in which aspects of *te ao Māori* were incorporated and valorised and in some of which specialist Māori language teachers had been employed for years, a far higher level of Māori language provision than in most state schools. Nonetheless, my research had shown that there was much still to be done. As I enumerated characteristics of a dominator culture and asked the people listening to assess to what extent any of this applied to their situations, I was aware that the atmosphere in the room was becoming heavier and people appeared absorbed in their own thoughts. When I stopped, no one spoke for what seemed to me to be a long time; I could not describe the atmosphere as buoyant. Finally, one man broke the silence saying, 'Well, I think we tick all the boxes, don't you?' This I believe marked the beginning of a new phase in Steiner education in New Zealand in which the Māori language, customs and worldview became more overtly visible and valorised in all the schools. I outlined the data again in a national conference on diversity in Auckland later that year and asked for the decolonisation of Steiner education to be considered. I remember that this took some courage. After the talk, one of the Māori at the conference came up to me, shared a *hongi*,[8] gave me a hug and said, 'We need more Māori like you, bro''. As in Switzerland, this small post-talk affirmation meant a great deal to me.

Looking back, I think this was the time at which I began to notice within myself the need to speak out, not especially loudly or often, but more frequently than I had till then in my life. This need has only grown over time. I notice similarities to what Foucault calls *parrhesia* or truth telling (Flynn, 1994; Foucault, 1980, 1983; Bernauer, 1994; Ross, 2008). To a degree it is part of my current job at a university. The 1989 New Zealand Education Act goes so far as to state that tertiary institutions '... accept a role as critic and conscience of society'. (Part 14, s 162, 4(v)) though this is contested (Jones, Galvin, & Woodhouse, 2000; Openshaw & Rata, 2007). The way in which I apply it here is as the requirement of the individual (me) to speak the truth[9] to themselves and of themselves to others. It can expose the speaker (me again) to danger: the danger of ridicule, of misunderstanding, of ostracism, of loss of face. All these have happened to me at some time or other, at least to a small

[7] It would be interesting to discuss the degree to which these were and are represented in state schools in New Zealand, but this is beyond the scope of this article.
[8] The traditional Māori greeting, pressing noses.
[9] Truth is of course a complex notion. I think of it here as a small-t truth – my truth, what is true to me. This changes over time. It is essentially an academic honesty. Big-T Truth would then be statements of eternal truths and values to which I make no claim.

degree. At the same time, it is a matter of honesty, both to myself and to others, about my thoughts and values. This echoes other authors who write about the importance of speaking 'truth' as an academic. For McNiff, it helps define her professional worth (2008); for Kagan (1998) '... our inner connection to an infinity which reaches beyond our individuality is not an incidental attribute or an icon of a particular culture. This connection defines our humanity: it is the only characteristic which distinguishes us' (p. 19).

I attended a congress in Vienna organised by the European Network of Academic Steiner Teacher Educators (ENASTE). This congress draws an equal number of non-Steiner academics as Steiner ones. I presented the data from New Zealand and stated that the evidence was clear that there was a need for Steiner education to undergo a decolonisation process, to ensure that local, minority and especially Indigenous voices were heard and given value. There was an immediate response from non-Western Europeans in the room (from India, Ukraine, Philippines, Australia) in strong support of the notion and confirming that, in their views, this was overdue.

I expressed some of the same ideas over five keynote lectures at the Scandinavian Teachers' Conference in Oslo a few months after Vienna. A topic that teachers wanted to talk about was the increasing numbers of refugee children in Scandinavia; many of the same questions around minority representation and acknowledgement were valid: As a Steiner educator, how can I better educate children from minority groups? How do I appear to minority groups? What can I do to better meet their needs? (The similarity of European and Australasian questions was reconfirmed the following year when I spoke to the Danish Teachers' Conference in Aarhus.)

Cycle three: the agèd caterpillar 2014–2015

The findings of the Māori study had discomfited me and I spent many months thinking about them. Though I was not proud to admit it, it was rare that I took part in a series of conversations in which I was wholly receptive, just sitting listening, asking questions only in order to elicit further responses to which I could then listen. I realised that as a white male, as an educator, I was more used to distributing or sharing knowledge than receiving it. (I hold on to a possibly naïve hope that I am not a 'mansplainer'.[10]) Opening my mind to a different worldview strongly articulated by people I knew well was transformative. The process made me reassess my values and my relationship to members of a minority group in a way I had not considered before. I had thought I was already doing it, but I wasn't (*cf.* Laidlaw, 1997). Archibald (2008) tells of how her research into Canadian First People's music making led her to strongly question herself and her education before any meaningful study could be undertaken. This is clear from the title of her article: *Don't study us, study yourself*. The need for people who see and understand the world differently to work together is put strongly by Australian Aboriginal artist and educator, Lilla Watson, when she said, 'If you have come to help me, I don't need your help. But if you have come because your liberation

[10] Mansplaining is a contraction of men+explaining – a recently popularised term referring to the tendency of many men to want to explain things to women; it involves aspects of arrogance, lack of self-knowledge, dominance, lack of respect and patronage. It is unfortunately widespread (Rothman, 2013).

is tied to mine, come, let us work together' (cited in Leonen, 2004). My encounters with and response to my own project made me see the overwhelming importance of working my way through issues of decolonisation, to attempt to decolonise my own mind-set, and to deepen my understanding and commitment to social justice, identifying, as far as possible, my own ethnocentric and other biases. Over time, it fundamentally changed my thinking (*cf.* Al-Natour & Mears, 2016) and led me to reconsider the values I saw Steiner education embodying in practice.

Out of this work, I wrote a graduate paper entitled *Steiner education in Aotearoa New Zealand* and ran it outside Auckland with ten practising teachers taking part. The strength of engagement by the participants and the depth of thinking about the topic was impressive, reaffirming to me that this work was needed in New Zealand Steiner schools. At the same time, the Federation of Steiner schools in New Zealand began writing a Māori curriculum, led by Māori teachers and staff, running parallel to the 'traditional' Waldorf curriculum; this was published the following year (Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, 2015). I realised that, while strengthening *tikanga Māori* and *te reo Māori* in the schools was to be strongly commended, it could never be sufficient without a simultaneous fundamental and deep-seated change of outlook throughout all levels of a school, not just regarding Māori. I had seen no evidence of that being attempted. To this end, I wrote a small article and called it *Sticking wings on a caterpillar* (Boland, 2014b). This image has stayed with me till now.

In 2015 I attended and presented at another ENASTE conference in Vienna on the same theme of Steiner education and decolonisation. As previously, my ideas appeared to generate interest and I had many stimulating conversations with attendees. Not all comments were in support of my approach, however. I highlight two in this regard, both voiced by respected academics. The first was a comment that what I proposed was unrealistic and ill-advised because, in the speaker's birth country, some Indigenous inhabitants were 'scarcely human'. The second was a statement that Māori should be grateful to Europeans for colonising New Zealand and 'bringing civilisation', as it 'saved them from themselves'.

Comments like these are from what I think of as the Margaret Thatcher school of neo-colonialism[11]; in my experience, they are highly un-representative of the attitudes and values I have heard expressed by the hundreds of Steiner educators I have talked with on the topic. No one challenged the speakers, other than me saying that I disagreed, though it was interesting to watch some (Antipodean and other) listeners' eyebrows as they reacted to what they were hearing. I afterwards wondered, and still wonder, if I should have reacted more strongly to/against these comments; I think I would likely do the same again. I do not

[11] 'Too often the history of Europe is described as a series of interminable wars and quarrels. Yet from our perspective today surely what strikes us most is our common experience. For instance, the story of how Europeans explored and colonised and – yes, without apology – civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage.' (Thatcher, speech to the Council of Europe, 1988), *cf.* Gilley's recent article (2017) *The case for colonialism*, which was withdrawn after widespread protest at its content. As Kahn (2017) comments, 'Academia has a duty to inform with integrity, honesty, and evidence. If scholars and journals alike are not held to this standard, it provides an opening for falsehoods and misinformation to take hold, shape perceptions, and dictate policies'.

see that I decide what people think or vet the opinions they hold, but rather I try to encourage debate and critical engagement with the topic.

In 2015 I was invited to the annual conference of Australian Steiner teachers in Byron Bay. I decided to develop the metaphor of the caterpillar and butterfly. The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly is a fundamental transformation. The two states have few if any similarities. The transformation takes place in a specially created space, the cocoon, which is protected, sealed off from the world. The bodily material of the caterpillar breaks down completely before the butterfly begins to take shape, still inside the cocoon. Eventually, it emerges into the light of day, seemingly a new creature.

I decided to take the image and apply it to my work in and with Waldorf education, challenging some of the norms and attitudes I found troubling. What was unknown was who or what would form the cocoon in which Waldorf education could be broken down, so to speak. What was clear was that the formative forces, the energies which would provide the constructive forces for the butterfly-to-be, a Waldorf 2.0 butterfly, had to include among other things decolonisation theory, and elements of education for social justice.

At the conference I received conflicting feedback on my workshops: outrage from one of the older participants at the suggestion that aspects of Waldorf education were unintentionally colonial and discriminatory, and, a couple of hours later, outspoken frustration from one of the younger ones that I was not speaking more plainly: 'You don't need to be careful. We're ready for this'. (Personal communication, Byron Bay, Australia, July 7, 2015). This resulted in me becoming conflicted for a while; the diplomat in me wanted to smooth things over, to find a position in which everyone could be happy, while I realised at the same time that this was clearly impossible. It resulted in me standing my (inner) ground and confirming my own point of view. Looking back at a couple of years' distance, being strongly confronted by these two viewpoints was the moment at which I knew that a fundamental reworking of key issues within the education was necessary, and that I might need to play a part in it.

Cycle four: a process emerges 2015–2016

As tools to assist in this process, I took an idea for audits first suggested by Aonghus Gordon (cited in Hougham, 2012):

> There are many different levels of colonialism, and not only the economic model but also the spiritual mode, and it would be imperative in any school right now, in my view, to actually do its own audit of the time and place (p. 70).

These audits would become a means by which to assess the current state of the education, a temperature-taking, a diagnostic tool. To audits of time and place, I added one of community, how schools relate to communities within and around them.

I talked to Florian Osswald, co-leader of the Pedagogical Section, asking him whom he saw as forming the protective 'cocoon'; this led to me drawing up of a list of possible qualities as I saw them for the members of such a group. These included:

- A deep understanding of Steiner's work and anthroposophy

- Disobedient thinkers
- Keen appreciation of discomfort
- Ability to work through chaos, uncertainty
- Not traditionalists
- Deep interest in the world
- Big-picture thinkers, not limited to 'things Steiner'
- Clear thinkers, heart thinkers
- See the challenge not as just for the benefit of Waldorf schools, but for the benefit of humanity in the 21st century and beyond.

In early 2016 I travelled to Honolulu, Hawaiʻi to speak at the Pacific Rim Conference of Waldorf Teachers. Dr Jocelyn Romero Demirbag, the principal of the Honolulu Waldorf School, had invited me. She had heard of my suggestion of auditing Waldorf education and invited me to Hawaiʻi to spend three days doing just that (Boland, 2016, 2017b, 2017e). After I left, Jocelyn took up the challenge of audits with the whole faculty who worked on it as a community process; I returned six months later to work more intensely with the faculty. Essentially, this involved facilitating the staff of the school (teaching and professional staff) as they worked through aspects of their own values, principles, hopes for the school and for the education and children.

Whitehead (2004) mentions how working in diverse groups can generate 'energy' otherwise not there – how the whole can become greater than the sum of the parts.

> While we recognise our uniqueness in who we are and what we are doing as individuals influenced by Islamic, Christian, Buddhist and Humanistic values and beliefs, we also recognise and experience an inclusional (Rayner, 2002) flow of life-affirming energy from each other. We each experience this energy differently in the expression of our embodied, spiritual and other values and recognise a desire in each other to work with each other's inclusional ways of being.

This is reminiscent of an invitational approach, in which a group of people construct the framework of the community they work in:

> The goal of the inviting approach is to have people work together to construct the ethical character, social practices, and educational institutions that promote a fulfilling shared life. Implied here is a respect for people and their abilities to articulate their concerns as they act responsibly on issues that impact their lives. Deeply embedded in this respect for persons is a commitment to the ideal that people who are affected by decisions should have a say in formulating those decisions. (Shaw & Siegel, 2010)

This in turn resonates strongly with Steiner's ideal of a school governance model, in which the teaching community is responsible for the running of the school as a non-hierarchical structure in which all bear responsibility for the whole (Bento, 2015; Rawson, 2011, 2014).

An article about the process and (initial) findings is included in this volume of the *Education Journal of Living Theories* (Boland & Demirbag, 2017).

Cycle five: from the current reflection loop 2017

This action research model is perpetually cycling through; sometimes there are multiple cycles on the go at once, each at a different stage. This is acknowledged by Griffiths (1990) who says that, 'The spiral is one in which feedback is going on in many ways at once. This is recognisable as the messy real world of practice' (p. 43). She challenges the standard, clean and likely sanitised action research loop, updating it to reflect the untidy, 'messy' world of the researcher's mind at any given time.

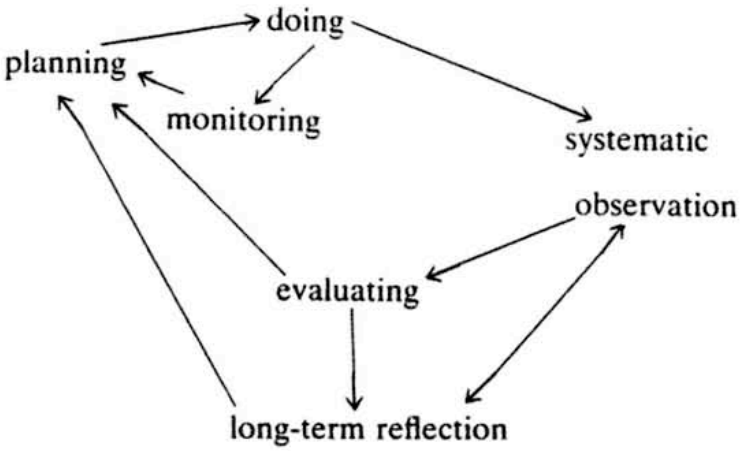

Figure 4. Griffiths' action research loop (1990, p. 43)

I would like to extract some thoughts or 'side spirals' (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996) from the latest reflecting phase. This is unpolished, but is the raw material of future planning and action.

When Waldorf education began, it was for the children of factory workers, for the children of the poor, at a time of social and societal crisis. Financial necessity has demanded that it evolve into an educational movement for the non-poor (with praiseworthy exceptions), except in those countries where it is fully funded and there are no fees, though even then I do not know of reliable data about what proportion of children from low socio-economic families attend. In the process, it seems that something important and precious has been lost.

I have a quiet hope that social justice will become an ever-stronger element of Waldorf education. I have the same hope for all education, but my concern here is with Waldorf. After seeing schools all over the world, Waldorf and not, I do not have the slightest hesitation in saying that Waldorf education has the potential to greatly benefit children of all countries, all ethnicities, all religions and none, and all socioeconomic groups. Some of the greatest potential I have seen is with the least privileged in society.

What is missing to a degree is for teachers, schools and national bodies to realise more actively ideas of anti-oppression, teaching for anti-discrimination within their everyday

practice. These are not 'Waldorf' qualities, they are universal ones, which point us towards a fairer society and a better world (Kumashiro, 2015).

Where I see Waldorf education having become 'stuck' is in this area. Pedagogically, it has much to offer, though I have many observations to make around that at some other time. I see that Waldorf teaching has not kept pace with all the changes which have happened in society at multiple levels over past decades and that this is an area of weakness and unintentional injustice. There are still huge tracts of unexplored ground around the treatment of ethnicity, gender, class, race and culture in Waldorf education – all areas which need addressing. The recognition and articulation of these lacks are the first steps towards changing the situation. Again this is equally true of many other schools in my experience, but they are not my focus. This is not a comment on the potential of the education, but on how change has (and has not) been responded to. Nor is it a criticism of the teachers of whom I was one, just an observation of work to be done, a recognition and articulation of a lack as a first step towards its remediation. While I am confident that there are individual teachers and schools doing stalwart jobs tackling these areas, I strongly suspect that the images of society, of the family, of gender and of sexuality held and projected by some Waldorf teachers and in some schools are anachronistic and 'out of sync.' with what lies beyond the school gates (and indeed within them).

Mentioning the work of Grandt & Grandt (2001), Jeske outlines some of these points in her doctoral thesis, *Raising awareness of sex-gender stereotyping.*

> Waldorf education is sectarian in nature and its advocates are often reluctant to take new ideas on board. For this reason sexism still prevails in some British Waldorf schools although, admittedly, its severity depends very much on the outlook of the teachers who run the school. (2004, p. 180)

To whatever degree this portrayal is accurate, students will experience a disconnection between what happens in the classroom and what they see in the world around them. This is not a healthy thing for anyone.[12]

Many authors have written about what they see as the disconnection between teachers and the students they teach (among others, Gilbert, 2005; Howard, 2016). In a New Zealand context, Cahill (2006) points out that this negatively affects the learning process of students from minority backgrounds. 'What it does do is make identification with learning processes and methods viewed through a different lens more difficult for Samoan children to grasp, while posing an added challenge to classroom educations' (p. 60, cited in Bruce Ferguson *et al.*, 2008). Postman and Weingartner (1969) wrote of the notion of 'future shock' (1969), in which teachers '... are confronted by the fact that the world [they] were educated to believe in doesn't exist' (p. 14); this future shock is an on-going experience for

[12] More positively, a 2006 case study published in Germany (involving 20,000 high school students of whom 530 attended Waldorf schools) indicated that Waldorf students showed significantly higher levels of racial acceptance than any other kind of school (ECSWE, n.d.; SDZ, 2010). There is some irony to this, as some comments of Steiner have been strongly criticised as discriminatory (for a thorough overview of this, see the extensive report published by the Commissie Antroposofie en het Vraagstuk van de Rassen, 2000).

many. Schoone (2016), a New Zealand colleague, reports it from the part of a student (Amosa):

> if i had had a teacher who was more like me
> i would really have enjoyed it
> (p. 51)

Value development

I notice that *parrhesia* (truth telling) is becoming increasing important to me (or perhaps just more practised). I have become increasingly bold when giving my opinion in areas where I think I have something to say. As an academic, reading Foucault on the topic has released hesitations I might have had and encouraged me to speak out in forums in which I would formerly have remained quiet.

A further classical value reclaimed by Foucault which resonates with me is that of *askesis*. *Askesis* is the process of examining one's life through conscious application (Foucault, 1980). In a 21st century educational context, this can mean decolonising one's thought processes, however little one thinks one needs it – most when one thinks one does not need it. And then doing the same regarding all assumptions, biases, preconceptions, preferences, prejudices and fears around class, gender, race, ethnicity. For me it has also meant reading a huge amount of history from different points of view. There is a proverb along the lines of *Until the lions have their historians, history will always be told by the hunters*. Reading and hearing history told by the lions has changed my outlook on the world.

Askesis here works against the transmission of unexamined practice and unexamined values, which is at the heart of what I am trying to address. Transforming this alone would change any school. It is work which needs doing by every teacher in every school, and I believe that in Waldorf schools we may have ground to catch up on due to a record of partial inaction. I acknowledge in myself an earlier wish to be a 'good' Steiner teacher, in which I strove hard to faithfully (re)produce what I had seen and learned as 'right'; in this process I subdued or blunted some of my instincts for experimentation and adaptation. I believe this does not only apply to my earlier practice (Boland & Demirbag, 2017). If this is the case, this self-imposed obligation to be dutiful needs to change. The tendency towards the reification of Steiner education is not what was intended:

> We … must seek ever new ways, look for new forms over and over again … however good the right may be that you want to bring to realisation – it will turn into a wrong in the course of time. (Steiner, 1917, p. 66)

This is, in essence, Steiner presaging A. N. Whitehead's statement that knowledge keeps no better than fish.

My influence on the social formations in which I live and work

As a university lecturer in education, I have the privilege of working with many individuals at a time of their lives when they are seeking new approaches and are finding their way in life. The lecturing and supervising I do across programmes undoubtedly influence many. I, of course, learn a huge amount in turn from my students.

Within the specific arena of Waldorf education, there are several noteworthy initiatives which I believe show how my current work is influencing others:

- The 2017 Asian conference of Waldorf teachers I attended in Chengdu, China had as its focus, *Cultural identity and individualisation in educational practice*. This is an indication that something which was an unwelcome statement in 2012 has over time transformed into a question taken up by the world movement.
- I have been asked to be keynote speaker at the 2018 conference in Washington D.C. of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (which includes Canada and Mexico). The theme is *Social justice: Place, race, gender and class in Waldorf education*. This placing of social justice at the heart of Waldorf education speaks directly to my work in recent years. I will co-present with Dr. Linda Williams, a teacher of colour working in Detroit.
- I have long-standing invitations to work with Indigenous educators in North and South America and requests from universities to give lectures or spend time there working on aspects of Waldorf education, usually from a critical standpoint. These await the creation of the 48-hour day.
- My talks from Honolulu on the auditing of Steiner education have been made available on the website Waldorf-Resources.org, put out by the International Forum for Steiner Waldorf Education (2017). This is a curated resource for Steiner teachers worldwide. They appear in German and Spanish as well as in English.

Pupation imminent?

Lastly, the Pedagogical Section of the *Goetheanum*, the central body of Waldorf education, has launched *Projekt Ausbildung* (Teacher education project) to be completed for the centenary of Waldorf education in 2019 (Osswald, 2017). The intention is to form a small group (a cocoon?) drawn from around the world within which Steiner teacher education can be reconceptualised and guidelines suggested to the world Waldorf community. Specifically, localisation and contemporaneity are prominent – 'It was you who first put us on to this' (personal communication, Florian Osswald, co-leader of the Pedagogical Section of the *Goetheanum*, Switzerland, Chengdu, China, May 1, 2017).

The question posed by the Pedagogical Section is: *How do we develop people who can adapt Steiner's educational impulse to their own cultures* [including Indigenous and minority viewpoints] *and implement it in a contemporary way*? Views on this are being sought and gathered from around the world and it is intended that the results are published, made available online and publicised in time for the worldwide celebrations for Waldorf100 in September 2019.

Conclusion

Reading over what I have written, I see that I would need to write several articles to do justice to the initial aim of showing how my embodied values become evident in my work and have evolved themselves into a living (and developing) theory. I have written most about social justice as it highlights aspects of Steiner education, which are important, largely

unexplored and certainly little documented. I would (or will?) need to write another that looks into the heart of the pedagogy, and how I understand and experience the lived spirituality, which Steiner hoped all teachers would embody.

As Waldorf education heads into its second century, its sustained growth speaks to a lasting resilience of the pedagogy and a lasting ability to meet the needs of families and children in a wide range of social, cultural and geographic situations. To continue to do this effectively, it is imperative that the education is contemporary, relevant and respectful to all and that it represents a path towards a more socially just future. Just as the world has moved on since 1919, it behoves Steiner education to take strenuous steps to ensure that it has moved on at least as far. Only if it can do this will it be able to reach its potential to help its graduates cultivate innovative and integral ways of knowing and being so they can meet the complex and systemic challenges they face.

Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) acknowledge a need to replace outdated forms, less by challenging them than by 'presencing' positive future models. Presencing is used here to mean sensing to then make present, sensing emergent possibilities and working towards the best outcomes for society and the planet. 'The ability to shift from reacting against the past to leaning into and presencing an emerging future is probably the single most important leadership capacity today' (Introduction, p. ii).

I read this short passage only recently, seven years after beginning this journey. For me it encapsulates the hesitant steps I have made towards presencing possible future forms for Waldorf education as it moves into its next century. Through this exploratory process I used my own evolving values as a lens through which to look at Steiner education with the aim of realising a movement for social justice, growing out of Steiner's deep understanding of the human being, suitable for its time and able to respond to the varied needs of people across the world. When I began, I had no idea that the small, uncertain steps I was taking would resonate with people in ever-wider circles and would have the possibility of contributing to a larger process of change, as a catalyst, potentially affecting the education of countless present and future students. My hope is that the processes I have gone through, and am still going through, will help facilitate the presencing of the yet-to-be-discovered Waldorf 2.0.

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