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Educational Equity in the sphere of *Bildung*? The alternative case for Waldorf education

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ABSTRACT. Inclusive and equitable quality education is one of the Sustainable Development Goals ratified by the General Assembly in 2015. The principle that equity is provided through education has become one of the key values that govern policy in education systems worldwide. This article problematise the development of politicised and instrumental use of equity in educational policies. We argue that the politicised use of equity has entailed instrumentalisation of education, whereby fundamental pedagogical ideals and humane values have been delimited and lost. The politicised rhetorical use of "educational equity" is in the article scrutinised through the lens of *Bildung* and the didactics of Waldorf education. We suggest that the didactical practices established in Waldorf schools exemplify an education that operates according to a broader principle of equity, including "spaces for becoming" and subjectification. The article summons up, suggesting that it is a crucial issue for the future of a democratic and equal society that teaching in schools rests up such a border understanding of education, teaching and learning.

Keywords: Equity, *Bildung*, subjectification, didactic, Waldorf education

Introduction

The notion of educational equity has gained ground since the turn of the millennium, and seems set to replace earlier debates on efficacy, efficiency and quality. The very principle has become one of the key values guiding policy-making in educational systems around the world, and it is a pivotal starting point in comparisons of different educational cultures (OECD, 2013). It brings education for social justice to the fore, in which fairness and inclusion play key roles (Castelli, Ragazzi & Crescentini, 2012).

Educational equity is based on the conviction that access to knowledge and education paves the way for the successful inclusion of individuals in society. One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ratified by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 is "inclusive and equitable quality education". Equity in education is considered vital in the development and improvement of all aspects of individual and national health, identity and prosperity. Education on all levels must be unreservedly inclusive and "leave no one behind" (Qureshi, Malkani, & Rose, 2020, p. 8). In the view of educators and educational policymakers, therefore, educational inequity is seen as a strongly negative factor that affects the potential of pupils in terms of well-being, career path, and both economic and social status. Moreover, the failure of the individual to achieve success and prosperity also affects societal economy. For this reason, equity as a concept has assumed a key role in the debate on educational alignment and comparison not only within but also between countries (Castelli, Ragazzi & Crescentini, 2012; Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008; Palomino, Marrero, & Rodríguez, 2018).

Indeed, very few would oppose educational equity as a central element in a democratic school system. Nevertheless, it would be worth investigating how the politicised and discursive use of the term "educational equity" affects teaching practices. What are the consequences when this idealistic informed language moves between national and international levels of politics and policies to the practices of individual schools and the relationship between teachers and pupils? The levels of politics and jurisdiction are, by nature, distinct from pedagogical practices in classrooms. The assumption that compensatory structures serve to guarantee educational equity is based on political ideology. A further assumption is that classroom practices easily and seamlessly align with these ideals. In reality, this causes conflict and becomes an "impossible mission" for teachers (Ryffé, 2019). The rhetoric underpinning equity through compensatory structures in the school system could be seen as an agenda of political ideology that currently drives educational debate. These structures originate in neoliberal and meritocratic ideals that are inconsistent with humanist-oriented pedagogical philosophy and human ethics (see Crawford, 2010, Biesta, 2013; Willbergh, 2015).

Our aim in this article is to scrutinise the politicised rhetorical use of "educational equity" through the lens of *Bildung* and the didactics of Waldorf education. Through this lens we problematise dominant ideas from previous decades claiming that equity can best be achieved and secured through compensatory structures within the educational system. What happens in schools and education when equity is measured, standardised and apprised, and quality is "secured"? Does educational equity have to be primarily understood in terms of structures, systems and jurisdiction to even out encumbering factors in pupils' backgrounds, rather than to create a space for subjectification and "becoming"?

We argue that the politicised use of the term has entailed the instrumentalization of education whereby fundamental pedagogical ideals and humane values have been delimited and lost. As an alternative, we suggest an emancipatory perspective, rooted in practice on equity from the position of Bildung. A one-sided focus on learning in terms of qualification has led to the disregard of emancipatory educational elements within the pupil's space for subjectification and self-formation. Moreover, we intend to show that the didactic practices established in Waldorf schools exemplify an alternative to the rational-technical view of educational equity, whereby the humanistic view of man from the tradition of *Bildung* comes to the fore.

The article is structured as follows. After this introduction we trace the emergence of compensatory societal structures through equity. We then focus attention on literature claiming that the global discourse on educational equity implies a certain instrumentalization of educational practices. Thereafter, we consider the tradition of *Bildung* in the light of emancipation, and asses its current relevance. Finally, we look at Waldorf education as a case of alternative practice whereby educational equity is conceived of as an attitude in practice, as a point of departure rather than an outcome.

The emergence of compensatory structures through equity

The critical perspective in this article requires some distinct framing. We do not purport to accomplish an in-depth scrutiny of educational politics in recent decades, and rather lean on literature that exemplifies shortcomings in teaching practice attributable to the instrumentalization of educational values. This, in turn, problematises the principle of compensatory structures within the educational system, and its capacity to provide equity and justice for each pupil. We are especially interested in studies examining the consequences for everyday life in classrooms of having an over-regulated, quality-secured and compensatory educational system.

Equity has long been considered a central concept in the development of Nordic welfare states. The Nordic model of education that developed over the decades following WWII was a political project, aimed at modernising society by means of rationality, science and the democratic participation of citizens in a form of societal engineering. Characteristic principles included a high degree of inclusion, social justice and equity (Gustafsson & Blömeke, 2018; Imsen, Blossing & Moos, 2017; Lundahl, 2016; Toropova, 2020).

However, the definition of what counts as inequality has shifted over time. Up until the 1990s, inequity was largely regarded as a circumstance or characteristic beyond the control and responsibility of the individual. Differences in educational quality both in school results and between schools were perceived as quite unchangeable and were thus accepted as such. There was a common understanding of inequity as something given and naturally caused, which reflected societal norms of diversity regarding race, class and gender, for example. The practice of multicultural education and the compensational structures for altering these norms were undeveloped until relatively recently (Castelli, Ragazzi & Crescentini, 2012; Gustafsson & Blömeke, 2018; Florin Sädbom, 2015; Mickwitz, 2015; Toropova, 2020).

According to the more recent perspective on inequality, circumstantial factors do not predict the potential of individuals to enjoy good health, success and prosperity. Neither do they determine the outcome of education. Compensatory structures within the system of education are acknowledged as a levelling tool that could "free" the individual from any encumbering background factors – and provide equal opportunities for all pupils (Crawford, 2010, Gustafsson & Blömeke, 2018; Mickwitz, 2015; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Magurie, 2017; Ryffé, 2017).

Currently, the value of educational equity is a salient feature in policy documents concerning compulsory education within the Nordic countries. Let us take Swedish legislation as an example: the responsibility rests with the individual school to ensure that every pupil receives sufficient support to reach the set goals. The Swedish legislation bill for education from 2010 states: "[e]ducation within the school system shall be equivalent within each form of school, regardless of where in the country it is organised" (Sveriges Riksdag, 2010, section 9). Thus, strong juridical writings point out that educational equity is a legal right for every pupil, regardless of socioeconomic background or life circumstances. Simultaneously, in conformity with many Western countries, educational policy in Sweden is influenced by international trends, including those that focus on competence and given standards for evaluating educational goals. Politicians tend to control the curricular content in schools, whereas the role of teachers is to "transform the given curricular instructions into practice" (Englund & Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 13-14).

The shift in the reception of educational equity in the new millennium emphasises the need to assess educational systems to ensure that each school and each teacher delivers "equal opportunities" for all and everyone (Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Magurie, 2017). A consequence of this is that researchers and politicians are gunning for measures to calibrate the equity of educational opportunities in every detail. Consequently, it is the outcome – the results for each school and for each individual pupil – that measures the extent of equity and the compensatory structures. These results could also be utilised to assess educational alignment between nations (Mickwitz, 2015; Palomino, Marrero, & Rodríguez, 2018). According to an extensive report from the OECD (2013), equity in teaching is a crucial factor in determining validity, trust and efficiency in schools and in education. Equity, for example, functions as a tool for linking teaching appraisal and student outcomes that "... properly identifies teachers who adopt the practices that enhance educational equity in addition to overall efficacy" (OECD, 2013, s. 61). This puts pressure on teachers to ensure that their teaching aligns well with the standards and requirements of compensatory structures, which raises the question of measurement and evaluation.

The diminishing autonomy of teachers and devalued practices

Some recent studies problematise the technical-rational trends in education from the perspective of the potential downsides for classroom practice (Ball, 2016; Biesta, 2007; 2010; Florin Sädbom, 2015; Lilja, 2013; Mickwitz, 2015; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Maguire, 2017; Toropova, 2020; Willbergh, 2015). On the basis of these studies, we argue that the downsides relate to the displacement of educational values, the move from a humanistic and holistic to a technical-rational view of development, learning and education.

This change has manifested mainly on the linguistic level. Through its given privileges, governmental language produces discourses of truth, sheltered from criticism and thorough scrutiny (Ball, 2016; Mickwitz, 2015). The language used in educational policy documents has the power to promise development, progress and success if (and only if) the stated rational principles and guidelines are followed. The technical rationality informing this language creates narratives of educational aims, schools, teachers, teaching and learning as a safe and quality-secured transition towards societal goals (Biesta, 2010; Crawford, 2010; Mickwitz, 2015; Willbergh, 2015). Although concepts such as inclusion, equity, justice and fairness flow through the text of these educational steering documents, fundamental educational values connected to school practice are diminished or even lost (Ball, 2010; 2016; Biesta, 2013; Mickwitz, 2015).

One example of how such value displacement affects teachers on the practical level is the type of narrative that implies their incapability of instating new and rational methods in their teaching (Biesta, 2019; Mickwitz, 2015; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Magurie, 2017). In practice, this means that teachers are not trusted with professional autonomy in terms of planning, deciding on and organising their teaching. As a consequence, they are continually in need of Continued Professional Development (CPD), systematic support, in-service training and supervision to do their job correctly (OECD, 2013). CPD connotes continuous life-long learning, whereby constant "updates" take turns with new and more knowledge. Poor achievement among pupils is attributed to shortcomings in teacher competence. This leads to both professional devaluation and a lack of trust, with potentially negative consequences for classroom practice (Mickwitz, 2015; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Magurie, 2017). It also widens the gap between teachers' own educational judgment and what they feel obliged to do. They refer to tension between doing what the system demands and trusting their own professional knowledge, which leads to emotional and ethical stress and a feeling of inadequacy in their teaching (Bornemark, 2018; Florin Sädbom, 2015; Mickwitz, 2015; Toropova, 2020).

McKernan (2010) describes how a system of educational objectives tends to foster perceptions of curricular objectives as given and fixed categories of knowledge, whereas an experienced teacher tends to treat curricular content as a starting point, an invitation to discuss and even to refute the validity of the content. Qualified teachers also know how to inspire, challenge and widen their pupils' knowledge, and to open their imaginations to future possibilities. When the focus is rather on applying compensatory measures, which often implies the formalisation of content, teachers find that their professional space and teaching autonomy are delimited. (Frelin, 2012; Hansson, 2012; Lilja, 2013; Linderoth, 2016; Toropova, 2020).

In another expression of value displacement, the language of the system-world occupies classroom life-worlds and conceals the voices of subjective uniqueness (cf. Habermas, 2004). The silencing is brought about by shifting the focus of the talk from life in schools, education and teaching towards systems for assessing and measuring the practice. The voices of teachers working in classrooms are silenced through these discourses (Ball, 2016; Mickwitz, 2015). The more subtle ethical deliberations and practical decision-making in classroom interactivity are not to be guided by systems, structures or appraisable factors. The diverse challenges as well as the combination of interaction, adversity and joy that constitutes the life-worlds of learning and development are the basis on which the human understanding that guides day-to-day educational practice is built (Hansson, 2012; Lilja, 2013; Wedin, 2007).

There are qualitative studies that exemplify the complex and multidimensional tasks of teaching and learning from a lifeworld perspective, in which relational and informal dimensions alongside curricular content and formalised goals constitute the intricate ethics and practices of classroom life (Aspelin, 2016; Bingham & Sidokrin, 2010; Frelin, 2012; Hansson, 2012; Lilja, 2013; Rinne, 2015; Wedin, 2007). As these studies show, a wide range of informal professional practices tend to encompass formal learning.[1] This informal professional knowledge is also a key element of teachers' professional autonomy (Tjärnstig, 2020; Tyson, 2017).

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[1] In this article, therefore, we refer to formal learning and formal knowledge in line with Anglo-Saxon usage. We are well aware that the concept of *formal learning* has another meaning within the central European *Didaktik* tradition, according to which material aspects refer to curricular content whereas formal learning refers to fostering the individual (see for instance, Blankertz, 1987).

In sum, we have argued that the rhetoric and politicised discourses of educational equity tend to reduce the pedagogical space of the teacher in two ways. Firstly, it diminishes autonomy by increasingly focusing attention on compensatory measures towards achieving defined goals; and secondly, it silences the voices of teachers by ignoring informal educational practices as an important element of their professional knowledge. What kind of educational implications will emerge from this deficit?

A useful concept in this context is Biesta's (2006; 2010; 2020) notion of subjectification as a fundamental purpose of education that, overshadowed by qualification and socialisation, usually goes unnoticed because it is much more difficult to delimit and evaluate. Subjectification is not about "educational production of the subject" in some form, but rather refers to the teacher's responsibility to bring "the subject-ness 'into play'", and "helping the child or young person not to forget that they can exist as a subject" (Biesta, 2020, 94-95). From this perspective, equity in terms of the future potential of pupils is not merely a technical-rational problem, to be tackled within the system's compensatory structures. To establish a position that allows for constructive criticism and alternative ways of talking and thinking about equity in teaching and learning, therefore, we take an emancipatory approach through the tradition of *Bildung* and the practice of Waldorf education.

The tradition of *Bildung* in the light of emancipation

It is not possible to give a distinct definition of *Bildung* as a concept. It has played an important role in educational and cultural discourses since the Enlightenment, but it is also controversial and contested. Although strongly related to the German language and to early-19th-century educational reforms, it seems to have been rediscovered in contemporary educational discourse and has been the subject of many theoretical explorations in recent decades, not least in the Nordic countries (Burman, 2014; Gustavsson, 2007; Løvlie, 2002; Sörlin, 2019; Siljander & Sutinen, 2012).

Bildung is frequently associated with the intellectual and cultural canon, a body of high culture literature, philosophy and works of art mainly originating in Western society. Despite its religious roots, stemming from medieval Christian mysticism, in modern times it represents a counter-movement –against both one-sided Enlightenment and the dominant role of religious thought (Beiser, 2003). In the 19th century it served a regulative purpose related to different aspects of social change: individualisation, societal modernisation and education. Its principles, ideals and practices were then mainly associated with bourgeois life, academic achievement, and a learned and moral attitude (Myers, 2004).

Interestingly, around the turn of the 20th century the working class also adopted the concept of *Bildung* as an emancipatory ideal. Whereas the upper class conceived of it as a privilege attached to their ways of life, to the working class it was something for all people, a prerequisite of a democratic society (Burman, 2014). Since, then *folkbildning* [Folk-Bildung] has become a central concept in the Nordic countries, meaning non-formal and emancipatory education that is free from political control and voluntary for the participants. The ideological framework for the movement was developed by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872): as the founder of the institution of *folkhögskola* his aim was to educate the lower classes in Denmark, most notably peasants (cf. Gustavsson, Andersdotter & Sjöman, 2009). In other words, *Bildung* relates to the emancipation and liberation of the unprivileged masses from the bondage of illiteracy and poverty.[2]

Given these diverse historical contexts, what kind of relevance does *Bildung* have nowadays? Siljander and Sutinen (2012) refer to two general features in the modern version of the concept. On the one hand, it stands for a creative process in which, by means of his or her own activity, a person shapes and develops him- or herself as well as the surrounding cultural environment; on the other hand, it implies human growth and improvement, which is worth striving for as a more advanced form of life. As Løvlie (2002) points out, the idea of human self-formation according to an immanent *telos* is no longer current. It should therefore be emphasised that *Bildung* refers to a process by means of which human beings become subjects through free interplay *with* the world.

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[2] "Folkbildning" has also had a big impact on the development of different social conditions, including voting rights, women's emancipation, gender equality and workers' rights.

The idea of human autonomy and freedom intertwines with the pedagogical idea of *Bildung*. However, within the liberal philosophical tradition freedom usually connotes freedom from constraints whereby societal institutions impose restrictions on human action and the freedom to choose. On the other hand, there is a strong (communitarian) tradition according to which social institutions and communities are seen as *enabling* human freedom, in the sense of human development and transformation. The former notion has been referred to as negative freedom, and the latter as positive freedom (Berlin, 1969). It is from this latter perspective that Hannah Arendt (1993) claims that the idea of human freedom is distorted when it is removed from the social or intersubjective sphere to the inner sphere of the human being. It is only in this intersubjective sense that human autonomy and freedom are meaningful in relation to *Bildung*, and it is in this light that the process of *Bildung* is "a prerequisite for the advent of democracy, as all human beings must be equipped to be self-responsible, responsible for others and for society as a whole" (Willbergh, 2015, p. 341).

There is an interesting interpretation of both the intersubjective and emancipatory elements of *Bildung* in a small book from Finland written by Reijo Wilenius (1982) and entitled *Ihminen ja sivistys* [The Human Being and Bildung]. Wilenius makes a distinction between what he calls three capacities of *Bildung*,[3] which function as overarching ideals for education and correspond to the view of humans as thinking, feeling and willing beings.

The first capacity is familiar from the Socratic era, and refers to the inherent capability among humans to examine themselves and their traditions with a critical eye. Socratic education had an emancipatory aim, namely, to encourage pupils to be responsible for their own thinking. It is crucial in a democracy to have citizens who think for themselves, and do not blindly follow authorities (cf. Nussbaum, 2010). As Wilenius (1982) points out, this is not about learning specific contents, it is about thinking in a wider sense and constantly being ready to change formerly held conceptions (p. 23). This requires an attitude towards the world whereby different perspectives are perceived as varying points of reference. Such thinking needs to be active and lively to be able to navigate in this open field.

The second capacity identified by Wilenius concerns feeling and sensing the world. The more empathy and feeling one brings into the world, the more meaningful one's relationship with it becomes. This requires the development of imagination, to feel and sense what it is like to be in another person's shoes. Literature and artistic activity more generally play a major role in developing human sensitivity and imagination (cf. Nussbaum, 2010; Eisner, 2002). According to Wilenius (1982), such a capacity makes people more receptive to different qualities in the world. He even holds that every human being has a unique quality, which is acquired as an aesthetic experience (p. 27).

The third capacity of *Bildung* is the ability to conceive of oneself as part of a bigger whole, specifically concerning how one places oneself in relation to 'the other'. It is desirable that people integrate into the world, and do not place themselves at its centre. Such thinking embraces responsibility and ethical demands (cf. Biesta, 2019). According to Wilenius (1982), it is a capacity that is somewhat difficult to influence: it is deep-seated and expresses itself as the direction of the will. Nevertheless, those who develop it come to regard it as natural to act for the good of other people, or nature as a whole, rather than only with regard to themselves.

In this context, the three capacities of *Bildung* exemplify elements that matter in education, but that are rarely operationalised as measurable learning contents. They exemplify how pedagogical processes and practices may contribute to the development of human subjectivity in the sense of a unique individual 'coming into being' in responsiveness to alterity and difference. In that sense, these capacities have an emancipatory function in integrating the individual into the world, in an individualised way. It is a question of developing educational experiences of thinking *alongside* others, feeling *with* others and acting *for* others.

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[3] fi. sivistysominaisuuksia.

From such a perspective, *Bildung* also has political-democratic undertones: it is about how people should live together, guided by the ideal of the communicative, reflective, responsible and participative human being (cf. Sörlin, 2019, p. 22-23).

The concept of *Bildung* is clearly incompatible with a strong system-oriented view on education. It is also clear that there is a close relationship between *Bildung* and Biesta's concept of subjectification: both imply that education "should provide spaces for the possibility of becoming someone you are not, which is an open-ended, unpredictable, and risky process, through practices of resistance against neoliberal subjectivities" (Rawson, 2019, p. 7). An education that is oriented towards *Bildung* and subjectification emphasises ethics and interaction in everyday educational practice, and it brings the voices of teachers and pupils to the fore. We now turn to Waldorf education as an example of such a practice.

Waldorf education as a case of alternative practice promoting educational equity

We suggest that Waldorf education leans on many ideals and educational principles in line with the tradition of *Bildung*, providing pupils with equal and just educational opportunities - without a strong emphasis on compensatory structures. Although there is comparatively little empirical research on the teaching in Waldorf schools, existing studies describe open-ended alternatives and didactical designs that exemplify how the principles of *Bildung* are applicable to didactic practices.

Waldorf education evolved from the need for social change, introducing a radical and new form of pedagogy that would bring education and emancipation to the under-privileged. This social pathos was strongly present in the inauguration of the Waldorf School in 1919. Before its opening, Rudolf Steiner gave several lectures on the social tasks for this new school. The emphasis was on equal education for both sexes and a common school for children from all social classes. The basic task was to bring about social change in society, promoting liberation and equity for all (see Steiner, 1989).

One noticeable characteristic of Waldorf education is the overall curricular structure. The comprehensive thematic progression over the school years in which all subjects are covered and interrelated constitutes a pedagogical framework aimed at supporting and mirroring the development of the child to adulthood. The practical foundations of such a framework lie in a century of trying out, adapting and refining the contents and progressions, based on Rudolf Steiner's anthropological[4] view of human beings (Sommer, 2014). Given its deep-rooted anthropological origin, the Waldorf school curriculum is not a curriculum in the traditional sense: there are no explicit goals, grades or measures, nor does the content selection reflect national political programmes or ambitions. Instead, the structure, the progression and the thematic content are understood as a common, universal framework within which the individual pupil undertakes his or her individual journey – and in which freedom and self-formation play a significant role (Boland, 2017; Mansikka, 2007; Mazzone 1999; Rawson, 2019; Sommer, 2014; Tjärnstig, 2020).

Another distinguishable feature of Waldorf education is its holistic approach to learning (Boland, 2017). The basic idea guiding the didactics is that teaching should not be limited to the pupil's intellectual faculties, "the head", and should also engage in developing emotions, feelings, motor skills and will. It is just as important to engage in practical work involving arts and crafts or learning to master specific tools as it is to do academic work. Schieren (2012) points to the need for "limb learning" instead of just "head learning", which expands the concept of learning beyond conceptual knowledge. Instead, learning begins with engagement, new attentiveness and interactivity within this domain. The aim is to enable each pupil to relate to new concepts and to understand their origin in the outside world. Teachers in Waldorf schools draw on a broad didactical repertoire, encouraging the multidimensional engagement of pupils with the educational content presented (Schireren, 2010; Sommer, 2014).

As Rawson (2019) points out in his study of Waldorf education, practical engagement allows pupils to immerse themselves fully in new domains of knowledge, giving them a "bodily experience that stimulates all the senses" (p.10). Such an approach to learning, which strives to balance the pupil's ability to act, emotional engagement and thought expression, cannot be limited to predefined goals within curricular categories. Learning is perceived as open-ended, focusing on the pupil's indefinite future rather than striving for predefined goals in terms of conceptual categories of knowledge.

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[4] Steiner (1996) expounds his spiritual view of the human being as anthropological, based upon his theory of the wholeness of the bodily, emotional and spiritual aspects of human existence.

It is clear that the teaching in Waldorf schools focuses equally on creating meaningful relations with the world and enhancing conceptual understanding. The role of the teacher is therefore to open up the content, using a broad range of pedagogical means such as artistic expression, drama, music and crafts. Waldorf teachers must have the capacity to address and engage the class in active participation with something new and unknown. In this, the Waldorf approach largely relies on the teacher's presence in front of the class. The teacher should be seen as a trustworthy authority in that student learning builds on activity with the new and the unknown (see Binetti, 2020; Nielsen, 2004; Solomon 2017; Stene, 2018).

Teachers consulted in Tjärnstig's (2020) study of Waldorf didactics describe their relationship with the class as an "informal contract" of trust. The pupils' experiences of meaningfulness in the classroom are directly related to their confidence in devoting themselves to the activities that teachers introduce. The contract that maintains the teacher's authority has to be re-negotiated continuously, as the trust between the teacher and the pupils must be confirmed every day. The teacher's authority is therefore not formally given, and it has to be re-established by the pupils repeatedly.

Both Nielsen's (2004) and Solomon's (2017) studies also relate the teacher's authority, in a Waldorf context, to the ability to convey the content to be taught imaginatively, characteristically in vivid and personal oral presentations. This didactic practice leans on the presupposition that teachers who create an atmosphere in the classroom that stimulates the formation of "imaginations"[5] in their pupils' minds inspire in them "wholeness and completeness of experience" (Nielsen, 2004, p. 2). Imaginative presentations by teachers could open up and allow students access to a world that is very different from their home situation or background.

Nevertheless, the educational aims extend beyond submission to specific activities or immersion in an imaginative wholeness of the subject conveyed, to the establishment of a point of departure for the pupils' own reflections and self-formation. The longer-term and overall objective is to foster the pupils' capacity for autonomous and self-regulated reflection, judgment and action (Schieren, 2010). We exemplify this with reference to Tjärnstig's (2020) study in which four experienced Waldorf teachers reflect upon their own didactic practices. According to one teacher, commenting on a teaching situation in which the pupil does everything the teacher has prepared for, "[s]he [the pupil] doesn't learn anything here, [she] just does everything I have planned for. She must overcome my teaching" (Tjärnstig, 2020, p. 142). The open-ended objective of Waldorf education, which is closely linked with the tradition of *Bildung*, is visible in this comment.

In sum, pupils at Waldorf schools are not expected simply to reproduce or assimilate curricular content (see Boland, 2017; Binetti, 2020; Nielsen, 2004; Solomon, 2017; Stene, 2018, Tjärnstig, 2020). Learning is primarily understood as experience, encompassing and engaging with the richness of nature and human culture, awakening responsibility and the capacity to show empathy and decisiveness (see Steiner, 1996). The educational aims connected with such an approach to learning are to allow for a dynamic and personal relationship with the curricular content, the world and oneself. From this perspective, the aim of teaching is to invite pupils into a pedagogical space in which they enact curricular content and become active.

In this sense, the didactive approach of Waldorf education is "critical and constructive" (cf. Klafki, 2014, also in Sommer, 2014), whereby the personal and active construction of meaning in relation to specific content enables the pupil to examine it critically. Moreover, and in line with the concept of *Bildung*, learning is not solely an individual and cognitive matter: it requires emotional and social engagement. Individual self-realisation must be conceived of in relation to integration into society as a whole. The aim of education is to realise the potential of pupils in themselves so that they may connect with the world and society in "general, lively and free interaction" (cf. Klafki, 2014, p. 38).

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[5] The idea of presenting teaching content as imaginations is important in Waldorf education and was emphasised in Rudolf Steiner's lectures on education (see Steiner1996).

Conclusions

Our starting point in this article was to problematise the politicise and instrumental use of equity in educational policies. With support from the literature, we argue that inherent in the idea that each school and every teacher should apply compensatory arrangements are practical limitations and downsides (Ball, 2010; 2016; Crawford, 2010; Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008; Palomino, Marrero, & Rodríguez, 2018; Ryffé, 2017; Toropova, 2020). Among other negative consequences, teachers are torn between allocating a large proportion of resources to a few pupils or using them to benefit the whole group (see Raffé, 2019), which may arouse feeling of insecurity and "ethical stress" among them (Bornemark, 2018).

References to equity in educational steering documents tend to be limited to equal opportunities in reaching certain goals (Palomino, Marrero, & Rodríguez, 2018; Ryffé, 2019; Toropova, 2020). In practice, therefore, it is understood as an objective such that all pupils achieve pre-established learning outcomes. Equity is thus conceived of as equal opportunities for each individual, and pupils' learning becomes are formalised and considered only in the light of individual traits and achievements. The problem with such an understanding is that it leads to a certain instrumentalization of education, which in turn fosters inequality in that those who privately have access to a dynamic and vivid social context are at an advantage. Thereby, the dimensions of meaningfulness and individual growth in interplay with the social context become invisible.

The definition of educational equity should therefore be broadened, which we have attempted to do through the concept of *Bildung*. From this perspective, education is not only about individual learning: it is also a matter of individual integration in a broader social context whereby individuals deepen their relationship with the world by appearing as unique subjects. As Biesta (2006; 2019; 2020) argues, the process of subjectification is an essential dimension of education, but it is too subtle to be treated as if it was evidence-informed or quality-secured. Care should therefore be taken not to adopt educational concepts such that the subtler aspects of education disappear and render teaching and learning merely a tool for "producing citizens" (cf. Ball, 2010; Biesta 2019; Lawy & Biesta, 2006).

We suggest that the didactical practices established in Waldorf schools exemplify education that operates according to a broader principle of equity. As many examples show, the basic ideas of Waldorf education have spread around the world and have become established in different cultures, religions and social settings. One of its main characteristics is the high degree of adaptation of both the original pedagogical principles and the range of didactical practices (Boland, 2017; Rawson, 2019; Stene, 2018; Nielsen, 2004).

Qualitative studies of life in Waldorf classrooms yield examples of how teachers struggle with the informal and fostering aspects of teaching, which are closely linked to the process of *Bildung* and subjectification. Teachers reviewing their own work in these classrooms emphasise education for growth and the development of the whole person (cf. Tjärnstig, 2020; Tyson, 2017). This open-ended education differs in direction from compensatory arrangements that guide individual pupils towards pre-given goals. The studies also show that it is not possible, as a teacher in a classroom, simultaneously to provide an open-ended, risky space for undefined becoming and to secure a safe transition to strongly standardised qualification.

We have shown that putting too much emphasis on the system level within educational discourse easily results in deafness towards day-to-day educational practice. The ideals and principles of *Bildung* may constitute a counter-narrative to this deafness. The educational praxis of *Bildung* gives voice and professional autonomy back to teachers and increases respect for contextual and diverse classrooms. In this sense, Waldorf education as a *Bildung*-oriented alternative avoids the limitations of standardisation and could foster openness to future possibilities. We argue that this fundamental dimension of educational equity cannot be accommodated within a system of compensatory structures.

Securing education that is genuinely fair and equal requires a bottom-up perspective on teaching and learning. We can see the advantage of strong, value-based pedagogical practice, ensuring autonomous didactic space for schools and teachers. Such a value orientation broadens the scope of education on a general level. Nevertheless, teaching in schools is a practical matter, and it is essential that the ideals and values that inform the educational system do not "fly over the head" of the teachers and restrict rather than encourage them.

The case of Waldorf education is a viable and interesting example to examine further. How can the ideals of Bildung and the view of human existence inspire teachers today? We argue here that these issues are crucial for the future of a democratic and equal societ

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