Eurocentrism in Steiner/Waldorf education – a literature review and postcolonial critique

Ruhi Tyson

Waldorf University College and Stockholm University, Department of Education, Sweden

ABSTRACT. Steiner/Waldorf education has seen an increasing discussion regarding Eurocentrism, especially with regards to the so-called theory of cultural epochs that can be found in anthroposophy. This paper is an attempt to present a complete review of current research and the various perspectives represented in it. The framework is, roughly, postcolonial theory and its critique of Eurocentrism masking itself as universalizations as well as essentialisms. The review is structured into four categories: research on postcolonial frameworks and globalization; research on subject-didactics from a decolonial perspective, especially history and language; research on integrating Steiner education with indigenous education and intercultural education; and critical studies regarding the concept of the human being in Steiner education. It concludes with a discussion of the commonalities and differences between the various perspectives represented as well as some thoughts on themes left large unexplored.

Keywords: Steiner/Waldorf education, postcolonialism, Eurocentrism, literature review, indigenous education, intercultural education

Introduction

The issue of Eurocentrism in Steiner/Waldorf education[1] has been increasingly discussed over the past 10 years, not only in academic research on Steiner education (eg. Steinwachs 2022; Boland & Munoz 2021; Rawson 2022a; Tang 2011), but also in more popular forms such as youtube lectures (eg. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT9olwe1JhE&t=3272s), in periodicals (eg. *Erziehungskunst*, March 2023) or at teacher education institutions (eg. Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo that recently, 8-11th May 2023, hosted a week of Sami studies with a majority of lecturers and practitioners invited from the Sami University College). An early voice, it should be noted, was Linda Williams, who, already in 1994 published a brief article in the periodical *Renewal* calling for an American curriculum. Its direct influence is difficult to gauge but it was reprinted in 2001as well as 2021.

In the scholarly debate Eurocentrism has been at the forefront of discussions regarding the history-curriculum as well as language and literature, two areas where cultural differences are clearly visible (eg. Barkved 2018; Steinwachs 2022). But there are also extended discussions regarding Steiner education and indigenous education (eg. Muñoz 2016; Mor 2017) and critical examinations of Eurocentric views regarding the child (eg. Knight 2022a; Wilson 2011).

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1. Henceforth called Steiner education and Steiner pedagogy.

The volume of literature has grown large enough that a review is warranted, especially given that there are now also several critical studies in the field (Knight 2022a, b; Mayuzumi 2011; Tang 2011; Wilson 2022, 2014, 2011) and, as Steinwachs (2022, p. 33) notes, the internal discussion in Steiner educational circles is conflicted.

If Steiner education is to fulfil its claim to being an international, intercultural educational impulse it is of fundamental importance that it is critically examined to ensure that it can be fully adapted to a historical situation that, since 1919 (the founding year of the first Steiner school), has seen full scale decolonization, the beginning and end of the cold war, civil rights movements, the end of apartheid, etc. This issue is particularly relevant since it can be argued that it is precisely in the social arena that Steiner education has not lived up to its original intent (a school for the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory) but instead, as Knight (2022a) and Wilson (2011) argue, become part of white, middle- and upper-class, elite education. I will return to this in the concluding reflections.

In the following, a comprehensive review of the research literature (as well as some relevant non- and semi-academic publications) will be undertaken. This review is extensive enough that a discussion of the wider debate on Eurocentrism in education goes beyond the article format (cf. eg. Adam & Schmelzer 2019; Muñoz 2016; Rawson 2022a for this). However, two central issues in postcolonial thought need to be at least mentioned.

First, it is important to note that colonialism has created several very different "Others". There is the matter of indigenous peoples who have often experienced a diversity of colonizing or marginalizing histories. In the Americas, colonization together with slavery created societies that were largely rootless and where cultures developed that were amalgamations of elements from all over the world. In contrast, most parts of Africa and Asia retained large parts of the traditional culture but the colonizers, especially the British and the French exported elements of their cultures, not least their school-systems. Postcolonial writing reflects this diversity (eg. Bhambra 2014, Quijano 2008). Added to this is the matter of traditional and modern kinds of patriarchy, broad cultural influences across societies, that intersect with each other and with colonial history. Many of the issues raised in the studies to be discussed also reflect this diversity and what is relevant for one context is often irrelevant to another.

Second, postcolonial thought with its roots in feminist and critical studies tends to be wary of claims towards universalism and essentialism (cf. eg. Andreotti 2011; Harding 2006). Universalism on the grounds that these generalizations often amount to the generalization of a male, European, perspective. This doesn't mean that universalism is always and completely rejected (cf. eg. Nazir 2018) but rather that any universal claim is viewed with some suspicion. One problem here is that in the time when Rudolf Steiner lived it was relatively common in Europe to express one's views in general terms and Steiner has a tendency in his lectures to speak this way. This has given anthroposophy and Steiner education a seemingly strong universalist foundation and the debate outlined below reflects this. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the degree to which Steiner was a philosophical universalist and if this has Eurocentric elements. Suffice it to say that this is a stumbling block in the interpretation of his work and one that at least warrants some care when making strong statements either for or against. Essentialism represents the view that for example cultures or genders have essential, often immutable, characteristics that are also often thought to be deterministic in their influence on a participant of a culture or gender. The discussion is, of course, much more nuanced than this but the point I wish to make here is that Steiner's anthroposophy contains much that is easy to interpret as essentialist. This is something discussed in part in the studies below and I am highlighting it here mainly because, again, one's views of essentialism and habits of interpreting statements as confirming or denying an essentialist position also influence one's understanding of Steiner education. I will return to these issues in the concluding discussion.

Before moving on to review the literature a few reflections on the method for selecting what to discuss are needed.

Method

It is not entirely straightforward what *kinds* of research to include in this review. Those articles, books and dissertations that explicitly mention "colonial", "postcolonial", "Eurocentric", "indigenous", etc. are easy to include. But there are other studies that are not as obvious, where the theme is for example festivals in non-European Steiner schools (Hoffman 2016). In this example culture is clearly at the center, but it is unclear from just the title and the abstract if it discusses or even mentions the issue of Eurocentrism (it does). It can be assumed that some such research has been overlooked. Another set of studies concern themselves with intercultural education without necessarily going into a critical discussion or mentioning Eurocentrism or (post)colonialism. I have included those that I have found here but dealt with them more briefly.

Several of the authors who are represented with larger works also have brief chapters in various handbooks that I have not systematically listed here (eg. Schmelzer 2016).

Furthermore, the question of *what* to count as research is not as clear-cut as one might think. Doctoral dissertations for sure, but both books and articles sometimes exist in a grey-zone where the authors are scholars, the editors as well, but they might not have passed through a strict peer-review process (I have noted this when relevant). Anyone who has some experience with the peer-review system knows that it is far from a guarantee of quality in research, so I have been relatively generous with my decisions what to count here. Having read through most of these works it is clear that their quality varies and that this variation depends also on one's point of view and values. I have not tried to evaluate each work, all of them strive to engage in a serious dialogue and this, in my view, is the most relevant criterion.

Although the research literature on Steiner education has grown considerably it is still possible to gain an overview by using the terms "Steiner", and "Waldorf" in search engines such as *Academic search premier* or *Eric*. Most difficult to find were the dissertations, a few of which turned up as references as I was reading. This work has yielded 6 books (at least two of which are based on dissertations: Büchele 2014 and Zech 2012), 5 dissertations (not including the ones published as books) and ca. 28 articles and book-chapters (depending a little on how one counts certain periodicals). The reference-list is longer, these are just the main works. They can be ordered in the following categories (although perhaps other ways of structuring suggest themselves to the reader):

- Globalization, intercultural and postcolonial theory

- Subject-studies (mostly history and language)

- Integrative studies (such as combining indigenous and Steiner education)

- Critical studies on how the human being is conceptualized or understood

In what follows I will present each category and discuss the works it covers.

Postcolonial perspectives on Steiner education

Globalization, intercultural and postcolonial theory

These studies are the most heterogeneous (Boland & Muñoz 2021; Boland 2017, 2015; Boland & Demirbag 2017; Büchele 2014; Rawson 2022a, 2020, 2017; Schmelzer 2015; cf. also Oberman 2008).

Neil Boland and Joaquin Muñoz (2021) and Martyn Rawson (2022a) have engaged in the most explicit theoretical discussion of Steiner education from a postcolonial perspective. Boland and Muñoz begin by introducing concepts such as culturally responsive pedagogy, critical theory, critical pedagogy and decolonization before going on to discuss what these perspectives might mean for Steiner education. This includes a critical questioning of its central tenet, an education towards freedom, where from these perspectives it is a matter of considering how deeply systemic inequities have been explored, questioned and disrupted if one is serious about freedom not just for an elite.

Rawson (2022a, see also 2022b) has written a chapter in a book about Steiner pedagogy and the education of adolescents where he discusses how postcolonialism can be brought into the Steiner curriculum. This includes brief discussions about how the history curriculum in Steiner schools needs to change, for example teaching medieval history today requires an expanded focus that includes more of: "China, Central Asia, South-and West Asia, the Sahel-zone of Africa (eg. Mali) and West Africa (eg. Ghana) and especially concentrating on trade routes (Silk-roads) and cultural connections between these regions" (Rawson, 2022a, p. 211, my translation).

In an article from 2017, Boland engages in a review of his own critical development as a Steiner teacher and teacher educator. It is an important piece of autobiographical research because it surfaces how the issue of postcolonialism is entwined in the life-story of those participating in Steiner education. Rawson (2022b) has produced a similar but briefer account as has Linda Williams in Williams and Boland (2018). In Boland and Demirbag (2017) this is taken a step further through a narrative of how a Hawai'ian Steiner school explored issues of culture, place and history.

There are several studies discussing Steiner education's potential as an intercultural education. Albert Schmelzer (2015) has written an article on the topic of intercultural education and Steiner education. In it Schmelzer pursues the question of if, and how, Steiner education can contribute to inter- or transcultural education. He considers several core elements of Steiner education to be of relevance: its support of developing individual autonomy; valuing of cultural diversity; inclusion of universal aspects regarding physical development; phenomenologically oriented method; as well as the strong presence of arts and crafts as specific subjects and as elements of all subject-teaching.

The article summarizes the state of research on intercultural education and Steiner education referencing the dissertation by Büchele (2014) and the studies by Brater, et al. from 2009. However, there is no mention of Eurocentrism or postcolonialism and for example Schmelzer's argument (2015, p. 179, reiterated in Schmelzer 2019, p. 32-35) that Steiner education proceeds from universal or culturally transcendent developmental processes regarding the body and that this provides it with a globally relevant basis would probably be contested from a postcolonial perspective. The example of universal development he gives from research, Puhani and Weber's (2005) study on the educational effects of age of school entry, is a German study meaning it is not self-evident that the results can be generalized across the globe. Studies on the psychobiological development of human beings are often made with largely European or North American populations and generalizing from these needs to be done with care if at all. Some things might well be universal but this needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Mandala Büchele's (2014) study on intercultural education and Steiner pedagogy is a comprehensively and systematically researched work on the extent to which Steiner education is compatible with contemporary ideas of inter- or transcultural education. Like Schmelzer, Büchele does not explicitly deal with postcolonial theory and the issue of Eurocentrism is raised sparingly. What Büchele does is to engage in an extended discussion of Steiner's anthroposophy (a discussion that, if it had been considered by the critical studies in the section with that heading, might have provided their accounts of Steiner education and anthroposophy with more nuance and also some corrections). This includes an in-depth discussion of racist tropes and views, questions that are central to this article. Büchele (2014, p. 149-163), after outlining the arguments of the "accusers" and "defenders", concludes that there is evidence of both racist and anti-racist views in Steiner's work (ibid, p. 160). Furthermore, she argues that it is difficult to deny that Steiner's theory of evolution initially included a theory of hierarchical race-development and Büchele goes on to ask why, given that Steiner himself gradually distanced himself from these ideas after 1910, some contemporary anthroposophists have difficulty doing the same. Büchele notes that even a critic of Steiner like Helmut Zander argues that Steiner cannot be considered a racist, not least because he actively did not want to be one and that he prefers to speak of Steiner's race-theory rather than racism (ibid, p. 161).

Büchele then goes on to differentiate between Steiner's descriptive presentation of human evolution and his moral or normative discussion of where we need to go. The descriptive narrative with its cultural epochs and root-races, presented in a comparatively deterministic and essentialist way (I would add universalizing in

the Eurocentric sense) is at the least ethnocentric and likely racist. But this narrative is not foundational to Steiner's understanding of culture and therefore not, in principle, a hindrance to Steiner education being an intercultural education (it clearly has been, and still is, a hindrance in practice for some). Steiner's normative understanding of culture is, in contrast to the descriptive one, in accordance with theories of transculturalism, where cultural and national determining factors are to be overcome in order to allow the free development of the individual (Büchele 2014, p. 162).

Büchele concludes that the anthroposophical world view should be considered anti-racist, in particular since Steiner viewed the human individuality as a spiritual being that cannot be understood from the point of view of a species (or race, or ethnic group, or gender, etc.). Culture, Büchele writes, is from an anthroposophical perspective not a biologically determined category but rather a shared or common spirituality ("geistige Gemeinschaft" is difficult to translate, it could also be translated as shared view or context or frame of mind, etc. Büchele 2014, p. 163). Furthermore, the anthroposophical understanding of culture is anti-nationalist (ibid, p. 164).

In the final parts of the study Büchele (2014, p. 253-315) has an extended discussion on the recurrent postcolonial topic of universalism. Büchele argues that the anthroposophical understanding of culture and humanity allows for a non-Eurocentric kind of universalism. Cultures (religions, nations) are viewed neither as biological nor as social determinants (ibid, p. 262). In this context, education as such is viewed as transcultural in the sense that it is not the task of education to uphold a specific set of values, norms or traditions that are declared to be "the best". Rather education is about valuing culture for its potential to further growth and development (Bildung) and this, in turn, is furthered by a pluralist experience of cultures, values, norms, traditions, perspectives, etc. Büchele writes (ibid, p. 263, my translation, emphasis in original):

> "The individual is thus not beholden to a culture but to herself regarding her morality. She has the obligation to use her own intellect in order to evaluate judgements and decisions. As orientation for this she has the universal principle of *humanity* that is based on a morality that transcends culture and that emerges from the question: What serves humanity as a whole?"

This implies a different view of socialization than one in which a person becomes part of a given social order (Büchele 2014, p. 265). From the perspective of critical pedagogy and traditional cultural knowledge (as outlined below by eg. Muñoz and Mor respectively) this can be viewed as especially relevant for minority- and indigenous groups given that they more often than not have experiences of the violence that such socialization can entail. However, it remains to be more fully explored how these claims to universality can be understood and critiqued from a contemporary postcolonial perspective.

In 2019, Christiane Adam and Albert Schmelzer edited a volume on intercultural education and Steiner education where several chapters provide further practical and theoretical considerations of this topic. The volume covers these subjects from several very different angles, and these will be considered throughout this review. One chapter by Berndt Ruf (2019) deserves mention here because he outlines his work on trauma pedagogy where Steiner pedagogy has been adapted to support people living with traumatic experiences. This work, which was begun at the Parzival-Zentrum founded in Karlsruhe 1999, has spread across the world and represents one of the more important initiatives to come out of Steiner education over the past decades. Even if it doesn't engage in any extended discussions about colonialism and Eurocentrism it represents an attempt to use Steiner education for purposes of healing and these activities have also included wounds caused by colonial and neo-colonial practices.

Rawson (2017) has written a paper where he, through some personal reflections, explicitly deals with the issue of the globalization of Steiner education and how to develop a locally adapted curriculum. In it he discusses story-telling and cultural development (here the text is identical to his 2019 article) as well as crafts and art and their local adaptation. Eurocentric pitfalls and risks are considered throughout in a practice-oriented way. Boland (2015) engages in an overarching discussion of the globalization of Steiner education and the issues faced, highlighting the ways in which it tends to remain Eurocentric. In the article he then goes on to recount what some former teacher-students of his that identify as Maori have to say on the topic. They

were drawn to Steiner education because of its spiritual view of the human being resonated with perceived Maori cultural values. This is also similar to what the works of Muñoz and Mor highlight in more extensive discussions (see further below). Critical views ranged from needing to see "brown faces among the teachers, parents and students" (Boland 2015, p. 195), to the need to experience cultural safety where cultural values were respected and promoted throughout. The interviewed Maori also noted that they had experiences with Steiner education as being mono-cultural and Eurocentric and people they encountered were sometimes experienced as, among other things: privileged middle class, over-reliant on tradition, disinterested in others and in learning from others and unconsciously arrogant. Boland further mentions that when asking Steiner teachers around the world if they would like to see more diversity in their schools some answer that they would prefer to have children who "belong" in Steiner schools and that diversity can cause problems. As he notes "belong" is really another word for white and middle class (Boland 2015, p. 197). That such an answer was not just a bizarre exception in 2015 is, from my point of view, highly problematic.

Both Rawson and Boland also provide separate and interesting suggestions on how to, in effect, decolonize Steiner pedagogy and its curriculum.

Subject-studies

The subject-studies cover history (Barkved 2020, 2018; Zech 2020, 2019, 2015, 2014, 2012), language and literature (Goddard & Boland 2023; Pavlov-West 2023; Rawson 2023; Steinwachs 2022) and festivals (Hoffman 2016).

Regarding history, Frode Barkved has written a couple of articles outlining views of history and history teaching in Steiner education (2018) and on Rudolf Steiner's concept of history (2020). The latter is mainly relevant here because Barkved discusses tensions inherent in Steiner's concept of history touching on matters important from a postcolonial perspective regarding essentialism and universalist teleology (and the degree to which these issues might resurface in Steiner education). One of the problems with Steiner's concept of history is that he discusses history both as the expression of human intentionality and as expression of a divine plan or purpose (in other words: teleology). In several of the critical studies mentioned below these tensions are not fully appreciated and Steiner's views tend to be simplified as straightforward essentialism, with a universalist teleology connected to recapitulation theory: the idea that the child repeats the cultural development of mankind in its own development (an idea Steiner explicitly rejected, cf. Barkved 2018). This is then helpfully corroborated when it turns out that Steiner schools often have a curriculum that clearly mirrors his so-called "cultural epochs" (cf. eg. Kovacs 2008).[2] Barkved (2018) goes into this question more specifically, explicitly touching on the issue of Eurocentrism and views on development connected to this in the history subject in Steiner education. Barkved, in a reading of the various versions of the Norwegian Steiner school curriculum, shows that the earlier versions have clear formulations about how the child's development mirrors mankind's historical development. By the early 2000s such connections have more or less disappeared. Barkved then argues that Steiner himself never suggested that the anthroposophical sequence of cultural epochs should be the basis for the Steiner school curriculum and, quoting Mazzone's dissertation on the topic, that Steiner in fact expressed the opposite view (2018, p. 110). However, this claim is directly countered in Zech's dissertation (2012, p. 137, 153) where he shows that one of the early teachers at the first Steiner school, E. A. Karl Stockmeyer, received from Steiner the suggestion to proceed from the cultural epochs and where he quotes Steiner from the conferences with the teachers (17th June, 1921) giving that exact outline for 10th grade.

Barkved summarizes that even though Steiner very explicitly rejected national history in favor of global or general history as an aim of history teaching, in practice there are significant elements of Eurocentrism within both his thought and Steiner educational practice that need to be dealt with. Zech (2020, 2012) has argued that history teaching in Steiner education aims at comparative cultural studies, the goal of which is

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2. Cultural epochs and childhood as a recapitulation of them are, it should be noted, not original to Steiner but part of the general thought-milieu of his time (Barkved 2018, p. 108). However, Steiner's version of the cultural epochs is not identical with that of eg. Herbart (cf. Fallace 2012 for a discussion of the racist roots of recapitulation theory).

to lay the foundation for the understanding and appreciation of one's own and other's cultures. However, as Barkved (2018, p. 114) notes, when Zech considers history as a global step-by-step process towards individuation and emancipation, this is close to a Eurocentric idea of freedom (liberalism). And so it remains an issue both of theory and practice to clarify how such a universal progression towards individuality and freedom is compatible with the particularity of diverse cultures (discussed also by Steinwachs 2022, p. 29).

Michael Zech has worked with the history didactics and history curriculum of Steiner education in a series of books and articles (2020, 2019, 2015, 2014, 2012). None of them deal in a comprehensive way with postcolonial perspectives but they all touch on the issue of Eurocentrism in the history curriculum and discuss ways in which to deal with it (most explicitly and extensively in 2019 where the chapter is focused on the topic). Perhaps the most important part of this is in discussing the cultural epochs given that every critic of Steiner education considered below emphasizes their central role and problematizes their Eurocentrism. It belongs to the important contributions that Zech has made to the history curriculum in Steiner education to argue that Steiner's cultural epochs cannot be understood literally as he outlined them if only because present day research has made some of his statements obsolete (Zech 2023, 2012, and in *Erziehungskunst* April 2022). Instead, he offers a more inclusive and general approach where he, for example, considers cultural history as embodying four qualities (Zech 2019, p. 145): the magical-ritualized memory tied to place-time (events in time are reenacted through ritual in a place meaning there is no real past or future); the oral and written traditions of mythical-imaginal narratives; history-writing as a matter of perspective and argument as it emerges with Herodotus; and, finally, a pluralistic, multi-perspectival open discourse of transcultural dialogues. By considering these as qualities it is also easier to notice how they are all present in contemporary society (eg. the magical-ritualized memory in parades) and are not to be understood as a "progression" in the sense earlier cultural-epoch theories viewed things.

An effort has also been made here over the past decade to consider some of the anthroposophical historical views in the light of contemporary research eg. in Hesse et. al. (2011), Osterrieder and Boss (2009), Osterrieder and Guttenhöfer (2010), Rawson and Schumacher (2013), Schad, et. al. (2009).

When it comes to literature, Martyn Rawson (2022a) and Frank Steinwachs (2022) have recently written about postcolonial perspectives on teaching language and literature in Steiner schools. Both agree that a postcolonial pedagogy needs to aim at developing contents that allow for a process of individuation in a global society (Rawson 2022a quoted in Steinwachs 2022, p. 25). For Steinwachs this amounts to a series of concrete didactical perspectives (2022, p. 27):

• Letting go of the narrative that translated texts are not original and thus not suitable for teaching literature in one's own language.

• Deconstruction of one's literature-canon and a shift of paradigm in choosing what to read.

• Aim for inter- and transcultural as well as inter- and transreligious connections or experiences.

• Emphasize universal themes with a selection of reading that is cross-lingual and cross-cultural (at least this point might well be contested by some postcolonial thinkers who question the existence of universals).

• Support critical reflection of the habitual through texts written by people who lead unusual lives, for example literature written by people with migration-backgrounds in order to awaken questions regarding experiences and norms taken for granted in a pluralistic society.

• Reflections and research into the concept of "World literature".

• Identity formation through literature in a polycultural literary world.

• New perspectives on the concepts of individuality and identity (both across cultures and across time).

• Closer connection between language and literature teaching as well as between geography and history.

• Questioning of the inherited canon of teaching-methods for treating language, literature, and cultural codes.

Furthermore, Steinwachs argues, (as does Boland 2015, p. 196) there is a need to engage more reflectively with the hidden curriculum (something that the empirical studies discussed below of Knight 2022a and Wilson 2011, 2014, 2022 also indicate). He goes on to discuss the institutional conditions for a decolonization of the teaching of literature arguing that the present educational policy (in Germany) is not well suited to supporting this.

Pawlov-West (2023) and Rawson (2023) go into further detail by considering English-teaching (both as a foreign language and as main language), describing how they work with teacher-students in order to decolonize the language-curriculum and with postcolonial short-story reading in school respectively. Finally, Goddard and Boland (2023) engage in a conversation about teaching indigenous language.

In the last study Vera Hoffmann (2016) has done an ethnographic exploration of how two non-European Steiner schools (in Peru and Kenya respectively) have worked to change the Eurocentric and Christian content of the festivals traditionally celebrated. The schools studied changed the festivals through approaches that connected to local culture, nature, and indigenous spiritual traditions, thus localizing the Steiner curriculum in different ways. In the Peruvian school, Kusi Kawsay, the indigenous perspective required a thorough rethinking of the Steiner curriculum, not least the festivals. Hoffmann writes (2016, p. 94) about how colonization had destroyed much of traditional agriculture together with its diversity and cosmology. The founders of the school went higher up in the mountains where people, less influenced by the church and contemporary society lived and from them they learned about traditional agricultural festivals as well as rituals connected to the seasons. These they adapted to fit in a school-setting (the festivals were also celebrated with the adults although it is unclear here if Hoffmann means parents or teachers or both). Hoffmann goes on to describe these festivals finishing the account of the Kusi Kawsay school (2016, p. 96) with a recount of how the teachers strive for the students to develop free thinking and how they connect this to the celebrations. They view the Andean traditional festivals as in a sense universal, comparing them to Celtic or Aboriginal ceremonies, saying that they, fundamentally, are about the same thing. At this point a postcolonial perspective might challenge the need to make the festivals part of a universal and neutral spirituality saying that this is a vestige of Eurocentric thought experiencing the need to justify things by claiming they are somehow "the same" or "the norm".

In discussing the Nairobi Waldorf School, Hoffmann highlights the very different issues that arises in a fully multicultural setting in which four religions are represented: Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. To create a meaningful festival in this situation has, for them, meant finding a common theme in the four religions' most important festivals: Divali, Eid al-Fitr, Hannukkah and Christmas. This they have called the Festival of Light. Hoffmann writes (2016, p. 97f.):

"The teachers looked anew, every year, for a multicultural or transreligious story line representing a path from darkness to light. The story should enable the teachers to artistically include elements of all main religions and cultural traditions in a theatrical presentation of all classes."

She then recounts how the festival was celebrated in 2014 and after that how the kindergarten set up a series of festivals based on the local cycles of nature.

Taken together then, there is an extensive discussion regarding Eurocentrism and curriculum reform in Steiner education today and enough groundwork has been laid for further studies where explicitly postcolonial perspectives on history and language didactics are related to contemporary Steiner education. Some of these are presently in a state of planning (Zech 2023).

Integrative studies

The integrative studies cover Mesoamerica (Aceves 2008, 2004; Muñoz 2016), Nepal (Mor 2017), Taiwan (Tang 2011) and the Intercultural school in Mannheim, Germany (Brater et al. 2009). The descriptions of Sekem in Egypt (Abouleish & Kirchgessner 2005), Inkanyesi in Johannesburg South Africa (Geraets

1993) and Favela Monte Azul in Sao Paulo Brazil (Craemer 1987, 1980) should be mentioned here as well although they are not academic texts.

In a couple of articles Carlos Aceves (2008, 2004) describes his work in developing a Mesoamerican pedagogy that includes "undoing whiteness in the classroom". In his work he mentions, briefly, incorporating some of Rudolf Steiner's ideas. It is, however, not until Joaquin Muñoz (2016) dissertation *The circle of mind and heart: Integrating Waldorf education, indigenous epistemologies, and critical pedagogy* that the theme receives a more in-depth treatment. In the dissertation Muñoz (2016, p. 11): "examines the potential congruencies and complementarities of Waldorf education, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS), Critical Pedagogy and Native American and Indigenous education." This is done through a variety of empirical studies resulting in the overall conclusion that Steiner education has the potential to support diverse students and Native American/Indigenous students in particular.

Muñoz began this exploration of Steiner education from the perspective of being a Native American educator. He encountered Steiner education in the process of doing his doctoral studies so there was no prior bias. This is particularly interesting since, on the one hand, Muñoz was well positioned to critique Steiner education's Eurocentric elements while on the other hand, through ethnographic research (ie. not simply through reading), he ended up concluding that it is especially well suited for Native American/Indigenous students. This is in sharp contrast to the studies below by Tang (2011), Knight (2022a) and Wilson (2022, 2014, 2008) who all reached the conclusion that Steiner education has little to offer here and seems rather to be hopelessly Eurocentric.

Muñoz regards Steiner education as particularly relevant to Native American/Indigenous education because it places a strong emphasis on healing and on spirituality. Again, given the repeated arguments (that Hoffmann also alludes to) that anthroposophy is largely Christian in orientation and as such ill-suited to other spiritual streams, this is noteworthy. Muñoz (2016, p. 40) chooses to define spirituality, following Boone (2008) as that which connects us to each other and to all living things and to the universe. It is about appreciating life's mystery and calls attention to experiences of wonder, love, happiness, goodness, peace, and compassion. This is close to the understanding Owen Barfield (1988) developed of a participating consciousness which, in turn, draws on Steiner's anthroposophy but brings it further, at least conceptually, in some ways.

In the first part of the dissertation Muñoz explores Steiner education as a critical pedagogy (CP) noting that this might not seem straightforward to those familiar with CP but that the interviews he did with former students at a Steiner school support this. In effect Muñoz with the support of the student interviews positions Steiner education as a critical pedagogy because it introduces a spiritual element, in the above-mentioned sense of Boone (2008), that constitutes a highly critical perspective on mainstream education today. The absence of this spiritual element is at the same time a partial source for how many communities experience exclusion in mainstream education.

In the second part Muñoz outlines a course he taught at a community college using Steiner educational methods and the experiences that this brought to students and teacher colleagues. The transformation of the course is described as one from a traditional lecture style to one involving art, drama and other elements learnt at the Rudolf Steiner College. These changes and their generally positive evaluations by students are discussed in relation to several critical perspectives relating to mainstream education.

In the third part Muñoz reflects more extensively on the potential for Steiner education to enrich the education of Native American communities. Both the oft criticized developmental stages of the child and the Eurocentric contents of the curriculum are relativized and an extended discussion of how Steiner education is a framework that has the potential to adapt to other cultural contexts is provided. Muñoz explores how this works when incorporating Steiner educational elements into one of the literacy courses at a Summer Bridge Program where many participants are Native Americans. Muñoz also discusses the Lakota Waldorf school initiative as an example of how Steiner education has already been made the foundation of Native American education.

Muñoz concludes with a critical questioning of how Steiner education and anthroposophy align with traditional tribal spirituality and culture. In this he considers issues of racism, classism and the tension between evolution and orthodoxy in Steiner education. Although couched in significantly less contentious language, Muñoz raises much the same issues as the more critical writers do and the main difference is, at least in my view, that his way of expressing these questions leaves the reader more hopeful that the issues can be resolved, and the tensions dealt with constructively.

Meyrav Mor's (2017) dissertation is concerned with how traditional cultural knowledge (TCK) can contribute to sustainable education. Sustainable education, in turn, is understood as holistic education and Steiner education is explored as one such holistic approach where TCK can be adequately understood and taught. The thesis is an ethnographic study among the *Bahing* people in Nepal and as such not empirically concerned with Steiner education. Before doing the research Mor spent 20 years in Nepal, learnt the language and worked setting up a Steiner school in Kathmandu where the curriculum integrates Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Since Mor's investigation is largely concerned with developing an understanding of TCK and how sustainable education can become enriched by it, the discussion centered on Steiner education is mostly about its spiritual views of childhood. The basis for this is that sustainable education requires an education that promotes the evolution of our consciousness since the present one is incapable of creating a sustainable existence. Echoing Muñoz, Mor also emphasizes that one of the important overlaps between Steiner education and sustainable education is its focus on healing (2017, p. 88f.). Another one is the value placed on education as deeply transformative (ibid, p. 89). Apart from a brief remark that some elements of Steiner education are outdated (ibid, p. 88), Mor is not concerned with issues of Eurocentrism and colonialism choosing to engage in her discussion with those parts of Steiner education that are free from these matters. Her focus is on Steiner education as a method that can provide the theoretical framework of sustainable education with a concrete practice. This places her comparatively far away from Steiner educational orthodoxy in contrast to what seems to be the case with the next study by Tang (2011). What Mor has done (2017, p. 317f.) is to create a framework for how to design a sustainable education program that can be used both as a conceptual tool for analyzing existing Steiner schools and their curricula as well as for systematically working with their development. In the concluding reflections (ibid, p. 321), Mor ends up touching on the issue of Eurocentrism in stating that Steiner education is embedded in Western European cultures and traditions and thus in need of "unpacking" from its original cultural context. She mentions that until the time of writing this has seldom been done to the necessary degree in non-European Steiner educational contexts resulting in: "an unadjusted curriculum that has more of a 'tourist cultural performance' of these school communities' own culture", including Germanic cultural imports. This takes me to the next study which appears to confirm Mor's conclusion.

In Kungpei Tang's (2011) study of how Steiner education was brought to Taiwan, the conflict between indigenous Taiwanese culture and Han-Chinese (with, among other things, a strong Confucian strand) stands in the foreground. This serves to highlight a central element of postcolonial thought, that context is paramount. Confucian tradition might in one context function as part of a vibrant cultural tradition and in another as a colonizing cultural force. Tang's focus is how Steiner education is able to adapt to, and enrich, indigenous education (although some aspects of this are irrelevant to the present study such as how Steiner's ideas of state independent schools run as "teacher-republics" have been enacted in the Taiwanese schools). One significant point that Tang makes is to examine if the claim made by *Freunde der Erziehungskunst Steiners* (Tang 2011, p. 1) that Steiner education is fundamentally transcultural has a basis in practice or if it proves to be almost irreducibly Eurocentric. The research was done by comparing documents and through interviews as well as visits to the Steiner schools in Taiwan.

Tang first examines potential Eurocentric elements in the teacher education initiatives that he visits, noting that the teacher students are extensively engaged in learning about anthroposophy eg. in the lecture entitled: "The history of human civilization and the development of the child". It is unclear if this lecture included any connections between the two as discussed above. Tang emphasizes that the teachers are expected to immerse themselves in Steiner's cultural epoch model something that is reflected in images on the walls of the 5th grade in one school of Greek antiquity and in 6th grade in another of Roman soldiers. Tang then

argues in a comparison of anthroposophically inspired architecture and interior design based on feng-shui that there is little overlap and no interest from the part of the Taiwanese Steiner schools to incorporate feng-shui perspectives.

In contrast with Hoffmann's (2016) study, Tang notes that a lecturer speaks about the winter festival as it is celebrated in Europe as culturally relevant also in Taiwan. This is repeated when it comes to the narrative contents in the lower grades which seem to have been identical with what is taught in European Steiner schools (Tang 2011, p. 52ff.). When Tang (ibid, p. 70ff.) returns to the issue of festivals the text becomes somewhat contentious. On the one hand it is clear that the schools celebrate traditional Taiwanese festivals and engage in telling stories related to them as well as cooking foods traditionally made for them. On the other hand, the schools had also instituted celebrations of the four seasons. Tang claims that the seasonal festivities lack a connection to Taiwanese culture and that they are based on a fixation with an anthroposophical worldview. This seems a bit much, especially since Tang makes no real effort to qualify his statements (Taiwan does have four distinct seasons a brief google search confirms, albeit with short springs and autumns) and it is easy to argue that seasonal celebrations are a way of connecting to nature and that not everything needs to be sourced in local culture.[3] Tang also notes the presence of songs and recitations about the four elements something that contrasts with the five-elements tradition from China. This is mentioned in passing and it remains unclear if the schools also deal with the traditional East Asian teaching, it is simply assumed they don't. Tang also notes that theatre is an important part of the Steiner school practice in Taiwan and mentions three plays he saw, one based on Norse mythology, one based on the Trojan war and the final one based on the Oberufer Christmas-plays. Unless Tang actively omits other plays, it is difficult to understand this as anything else but a Eurocentric practice. In discussing the contents of the curriculum further Tang generally notes a tendency where the traditional Eurocentric curriculum is largely preserved but with attempts to integrate or rather tack on Taiwanese and Chinese cultural goods.

At one point he refers to a dialogue with a teacher who chose to recount the story of Exodus because she could not find a story with a corresponding content from East Asia (Tang 2011, p. 92). This illustrates the issues that can arise when the traditional Eurocentric Steiner curriculum is understood in a strongly determinant way, ie. in a way where the parallelism between the contents of the curriculum and the development of the child is deemed both universal across time and space and intensely causal in the sense that unless they receive certain contents at a certain age, deficits in their development are likely to appear.

As can be surmised, Tang's central thesis (2011, p. 139) is that Steiner education, owing to the dominant role of anthroposophy and especially the cultural epoch theory, is not transferrable to a non-European culture. Interestingly, there is evidence that Tang's view, even if it is taken as correct regarding the state of things in 2011, is now in need of revision. Martyn Rawson, in a recorded presentation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8x9wr1j5Bo), gives an example from an upper secondary history teacher at one of the schools that Tang studied who gave a history block on ancient culture. In the traditional Steiner curriculum this would have included Egypt, Babylon, etc. In the Taiwanese example this was done entirely through Chinese archeology and history with no recourse to the cultural epoch theory. Rawson (2019) takes up the challenge that Tang poses and explicitly states that there are only local curricula (ibid, p. 11) and that the search for equivalents in other cultures to what was proposed in early European curricula is problematic at best. As Rawson goes on to note (ibid, p. 14f.), several students have worked to explore East Asian mythology and storytelling and how it relates to the developmental tasks in the Steiner curriculum. His point is echoed by Röh (2019) and Cherry (2019). Both describe a development within Steiner education in China where the Eurocentrism of the original curriculum is rapidly being dealt with. Röh, for example, mentions the Asian-Waldorf-Teachers-Conference in 2013 in Seoul where the curriculum for third grade was discussed. Next to the traditional Old Testament mythological content were presentations of Korean, Indian, Japanese and

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3. Tang is alone among the critical researchers to use language that is close to pejorative, several times referring, for example, to "the initiates of Waldorf education" (den Eingeweihten der Waldorfpädagogik, 2011, p. 54, 73) as if Steiner education engaged in some kind of mystical initiatory practice. There is no effort to explain these phrasings. Instead, Tang goes further, drawing conclusions about cultish practices based not so much on strong evidence as on the choice to interpret anything having to do with reading verses as a-priori cultish activity. This detracts from the scholarly value of the thesis, at least in my opinion.

Chinese-Taiwanese creation myths (2019, p. 210). Hopefully, with time a fuller picture will emerge of how these developments have proceeded.

The final case study here is the Interkulturelle Waldorfschule in Mannheim-Neckarstadt founded in 2003 (Brater et al. 2009; Schmelzer 2012), where more than 50% of the student-population have a migrant-background. Similar cases are the integration of interculturally oriented Steiner education at a state school in Hamburg discussed by Leiste (2019) and The Community school for creative education in Oakland, California discussed by Oberman (2019).

The Intercultural school in Mannheim was evaluated in 2004-2006 (Brater et al. 2009) demonstrating significant success and leading to the foundation of several similar Steiner educational initiatives across Germany (Schmelzer 2015, p. 176).

Albert Schmelzer (2012, p. 129f.) describes the concept of the Intercultural school as:

1. About 50% children with German background and 50% with a migrant background, this is optimal for maintaining German as a common language.

2. An international college of teachers with about 40% having a migrant background.

3. A learning environment free of stress and anxiety where the students are not segregated according to accomplishments, grades, behavior or (dis)abilities.

4. Having the same class-teacher through the first eight years. The often chaotic family situations and experiences of leaving one's home makes this particularly valuable as a "place of rest" and it gives the teacher time to develop a strong trusting relationship with the students and their parents.

5. School open the whole day (Ganztagsschule). This is connected by Schmelzer to chronobiological considerations on how to rhythmically structure the day.

German language teaching has been developed to include a significant amount of recitation, singing and other artistic elements where the students can both practice the language, pronunciation, and diction, as well as come to enjoy it. A pedagogical innovation within Steiner education is the subject "Begegnungssprache" meaning encounter- or meeting- language. In practice it means that for the first three years in school the students with a migrant background are given lessons in their own language which the German children attend as well. These lessons include learning songs, verses, stories, etc. in the mother-tongues of the children with migrant-background as well as playing typical instruments from their culture, or engaging with the culture's festivals, cooking, and dancing. This is described (Schmelzer 2012, p. 131) as a way of inviting the children with migrant backgrounds to experience and appreciate their cultural roots and to give the children with a German background an experience of other cultures as enriching and interesting rather than foreign and threatening. The role-reversal is also important since these lessons allow the children with migrant backgrounds to feel at home and it is the children with a German background who must find their way in a foreign context.

Although at the time of writing his article (Schmelzer 2012, p. 132) the school was deemed so young that it was hard to draw many conclusions about its strengths and weaknesses, the evaluation done in 2004-2006 indicated that 90% of the children who initially had deficits in their knowledge of German after two years had become fluent enough that there were no longer any statistically significant differences. During the longitudinal evaluation a significant improvement in the area of social integration was observed. Finally, the majority of parents (86%) were content with the development of their children in school and felt welcomed in the school as community being motivated to support the school in its further development. Adam (2019) has also presented an in-depth biographical study of some former students from the Intercultural school providing valuable contextualization for otherwise abstract numbers.

Critical studies on how the human being is conceptualized

These studies are concerned with how the human being is understood in Steiner education (Knight 2022a, b; Mayuzumi 2011; Wilson 2011, 2014, 2022).

Both Hunter Knight and Marguerite Ann Fillion Wilson are concerned with how the image of the child in Steiner education is entangled in colonial thought structures and have explored this through empirical studies (cf. also Whedon 2007 who discusses the topic of childhood in relation to esotericism in her dissertation). They ask: What are the taken for granted truths that Steiner educators give voice to when queried about the child? In particular, they interrogate the preconceptions involved in the idea of "protecting childhood" that is common in Steiner-educational circles. They proceed from a common critique of Western universalizing narratives about childhood: As a blank slate following Locke; or as an age of innocence following Rosseau; or as a developmental arc towards rationality following psychology. Common to these narratives is their universal claim across time and cultures. The degree to which Steiner education expresses similarly universalizing narratives and how educators navigate this colonial discourse in their understanding of the child is basic to their investigations.

Knight's (2022a, b) study rests on a total of eight participants from two early childhood and elementary schools as well as one teacher education institution, all in North America. It focuses on Steiner education because this pedagogy has an unusually strong view of the need to allow children to be children and thus reflects colonial entanglements in interesting ways. As such it is not really a case study of Steiner education for Steiner education's own sake but rather an interrogation of more general "Western" universalizations about the child. Throughout the thesis, concepts such as "nature", "family", "home", "childhood innocence", "stories of redemption", "natural growth" and "development" are discussed and it is clear that the educators being interviewed present an uneasy narrative where, eg. disabilities are sometimes discussed as "deviations" from the "norm" implying, among other things, that there are students fit for Steiner schools and other students for whom the curriculum is not well suited.

Wilson's (2022, 2014, 2011) studies are ethnographic explorations of a Steiner kindergarten in North America. They are especially concerned with the gender aspect of colonial entanglements. At the kindergarten where Wilson did her field studies she was able to observe clear processes of reproducing traditional gender roles exemplified in ideas such as that girls are more relational or social and boys more individualistic and competitive, more energetic (2011, p. 12) or that girls in particular need protection from the culture at large (an example is given from the movie *Madagascar* and the song with the refrain "I like to move it, move it" that is characterized as real "jivey" meaning highly inappropriate for little girls to dance to, ibid, p. 15).

This dichotomous view is also shown to be part of some literature on Steiner education where Blunt (1995, p. 83) is quoted as writing that boys have a natural tendency to withdraw at age 6-7 and girls to be more extroverted, something the teacher must pay attention to. Even if a thorough review of the literature presenting Steiner education should show that such statements are rather rare their occurrence makes a critical discussion both warranted and necessary. Wilson also discusses extensively (2008, 2011) the apparent conception of the female pre-school teacher and ways in which the activities and roles of the teacher are gendered in Steiner educational practices in kindergartens. It reflects, as she terms it, a: "mother knows best discourse" (2011, p. 17). Many of the practices Wilson observed also reinforce traditional gender roles and privilege heterosexual middle-class nuclear family discourses (something that is also noted by Knight 2022a, b). In Wilson (2014, 2022) the analysis extends more in-depth to the way authority is constructed in the observed kindergarten, presenting an environment that is strictly controlled (the teachers there would probably say strongly rhythmic) and where there was little room left for child creativity or initiative. Even minor transgressions such as getting up before their names were called elicited disciplinary responses. The conceptualization of Steiner education as child-centered is also discussed critically as a universalist statement that in practice means: "reifying a Western, White, middle-class protected childhood as the most legitimate and healthy" (2022, p. 119).

At this point it should be noted that Sara Frödén (2019, 2012), who has also done ethnographic research in a Steiner preschool (in Sweden), argues for close to the opposite of Wilson. She notes, (2019, p. 122) that

the environment in question rather seems to support a "situated decoding of gender", ie. a process in which gender is progressively de-emphasized. She bases this on observations of the children all playing together in different constellations and all engaging in the same role-taking without any marked gender-stereotypes appearing or being reinforced. She writes (ibid, p. 123): "Regardless of age, the possibilities of gaining access to different ways of being a boy or a girl were numerous, in that transgressive performances of gender were either not noticed or commented on by peers or adults". The intensely negative attitude towards mainstream culture reported by Knight and Wilson also seems to be less articulated when the teachers talk about how the children can use the toys to play star wars or superman and where the whole group was engaged in star wars play during the field studies. Incidentally one in which: "They retained the names of the spaceships, places and leading roles, but created new stories that differed substantially from the original story. Many of the male characters were played by girls or turned into females and their personalities modified."

Perhaps more than anything the dissonance between Wilson's and Frödén's experiences lays out how different Steiner (pre)schools can be in practice. They present strong evidence that there isn't a singular truth to be found here. They also raise some important issues regarding the role of anthroposophy and orthodoxy in Steiner education. Both Knight and Wilson emphasize the central role that Steiner's original thoughts play for the teachers being interviewed. Frödén is not directly concerned with this and so a comparison cannot be made. The same holds for matters such as the educational background of the teachers, their ages, the different contexts of running a private kindergarten from one's own home (Wilson) and a publicly funded preschool (Frödén).

One need not agree with Knight's and Wilson's specific analysis of Steiner education (Schmelzer 2021, for example, offers quite a different description of what makes Steiner education inclusive), to see the value in exploring how the concepts used become universalizing, totalitarian, and problematic. Their critical discussions regarding the image of the child open the door to a more reflective and dynamic approach. Or as Knight (2022a, p. 59) puts it:

> "The … choices that I make here are part of an attempt to work against this [colonial] violence while necessarily working within it, hoping that my search for hauntings that are concealed or denied can open new possibilities for imagining what the child could be."

Finally, a common thread in their research is Steiner schools as elite institutions catering mainly to the white middle and upper classes of North America. Although Steiner education is rapidly spreading outside of Europe and North America this remains an issue that isn't only a matter of practice but that also tends to allow for conceptualizations to remain in Steiner educational discourse that are, to put it mildly, problematic. Perhaps similar critical ethnographical studies of Steiner kindergartens in other cultures would relativize their claims, at present this remains a matter to explore (although cf. Perazzo 2019 for a description of an intercultural preschool). In any case their work argues for the caveat: "In European contexts one hundred years ago" to be amended to any statement regarding the child and its development as it was articulated by Rudolf Steiner unless evidence exists that it is still valid, and then, furthermore, if it is to be understood as universally valid or more or less culturally conditioned. This last issue becomes especially poignant in Kimine Mayuzumi's study (2011).

Mayuzumi, in a paper entitled *Re/Membering In-Between "Japan" and "the West". A decolonizing journey through the indigenous knowledge framework,* writes about her experiences as a female graduate student born and raised in rural Japan. As such it is not immediately linked to Steiner education. However, in the process of discussing indigenous knowledge and decolonization Mayuzumi recounts reading a chapter by Yoshida (2005) about how Steiner education can be applied to Japanese education. Yoshida brings up the overlapping spiritual values that exist and which Mayuzumi can relate to (2011, p. 360) but also bases his chapter on statements from Steiner such as (quoted in Mayuzumi 2011, p. 360):

> "The Eastern view is exactly the opposite. The Oriental remains, in a sense, at the level of childhood, not allowing his astral body and ego to plunge down into the physical and etheric bodies although at the present epoch it is fore-ordained that humanity should do so."

After some critical remarks Mayuzumi notes that to her the most disturbing issue in this is that Yoshida doesn't really question the colonial text he quotes but rather agrees with it by stating that the ego is, at least in Japan, relatively weakly developed providing further examples of this. Although the text barely touches on Steiner education it underscores not just how Eurocentric Steiner's statements can be[4] but also how difficult it can be even for those of other cultures to critique them when they have been more generally convinced of the anthroposophical world view.

Steiner, who did not travel further east than Eastern Europe and whose direct experiences of people from other parts of the world was never in their contexts, cannot be considered an authority in these matters. Rather, judging from the abstractness of his statements regarding non-European cultures and the often very negative views expressed regarding them in the few statements actually made, it is likely that they are mostly irrelevant or mistaken. This does not detract from the value of other things said and done, but it does call for a critical examination of both anthroposophy and Steiner education with the purpose of identifying overt and implicit Eurocentric forms and contents. Georg Feuser (2021) has argued for exactly this in his critical but appreciative review of Steiner education and its claims to be inclusive. His article reiterates most of the critique already discussed (especially the developmental model of Steiner education to the extent that it is based in anthroposophy) and if anything, given that Feuser's account is comparatively balanced, is worth taking seriously.

Concluding remarks

Commonalities and discrepancies

This review has been an attempt to give a first summary of where we stand regarding scholarly writing on the topic of postcolonial perspectives on Steiner education. In these concluding remarks I will highlight some commonalities and questions resulting from the review as well as some reflections on matters that remain undertheorized.

It seems clear to me that the various authors considered, both the more critical ones and those more positive to the intercultural potentials of Steiner education, are in general agreement regarding the fundamental issues as well as the problems that sometimes emerge in practice. The fundamental issues are: The cultural epoch theory that is outdated and in need of either extensive revisions or complete rejection and the implied or claimed universalism of anthroposophy that needs to either be nuanced or rejected (likewise for its essentialism). Some of the authors such as Büchele (2014), have also proposed at least partial solutions to these issues meaning that this is a matter already being tackled. The problems of practice are well illustrated in Knight (2022a, b) which, being a very recent study, indicates that they are far from dealt with.

I think the fundamental disagreement between critics and advocates concerns the evaluation of anthroposophy on the one hand and on the other its relationship to practice. This gives rise to several different conclusions or stances:

1. If anthroposophy is considered hopelessly Eurocentric (and occult, etc.) this means that, at best, Steiner education can be a meaningful impulse internationally if it disavows its origins. At worst, Steiner education is so beholden to its roots that there can be no redemption.

2. If the connection of ideas (anthroposophy) and practice is considered in a determinist way and anthroposophy is viewed critically, then socialization into an anthroposophical environment will, for the most part, be socialization into Eurocentrism and possible racism. Critics such as Tang (2011) seem to hold this view.

3. If anthroposophy and Steiner education are considered to have Eurocentric elements but these are not foundational and thus possible to expunge and, furthermore, the positive anti-nationalist stance that is

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4. A more extensive study of Steiner's orientalism can be found in Myers (2006).

also part of the tradition is rather emphasized (as in Büchele 2014) this means that Steiner education can be a valuable impulse internationally.

4. If the connection of ideas and practice is considered in a determinist way and anthroposophy is viewed positively then socialization into an anthroposophical environment will, for the most part, be socialization into an inclusive and humanist world view where Eurocentrism and racism are unfortunate exceptions (this tends to lead to apologetic arguments).

5. If the connection between ideas and practice is viewed as less deterministic then the socialization into an anthroposophical environment cannot immediately be connected to negative *or* positive practices. Instead, practice as it unfolds in various instances, is a much more complex confluence of different factors, not least the moral and practical imagination of those enacting it. I will return to this matter shortly.

These different stances are not always critically examined but are likely to be the preconception which is then to be proven. They often rest on strongly held value-judgments concerning spirituality, what constitutes science, as well as habits of interpretation based on the hermeneutics of suspicion or deconstruction and the hermeneutics of faith or trust (cf. Josselsson 2004).

It is worth noting that the most extensive empirical studies to date reach highly divergent conclusions. Four (Brater et al. Frödén, Hoffmann, Muñoz) end up with strongly positive ones and three (Knight, Tang, Wilson) end up with strongly negative (I am not including Mor's study here because it is not directly concerned with empirically exploring Steiner education). This cannot be simply a matter of insider-outsider perspectives, Frödén had no extensive experiences inside of Steiner education prior to her study nor did Muñoz. It is also not easily attributed to choice of institutions to study such as only European/North American schools, since Tang just like Hoffmann deals with non-European Steiner schools and they reach different conclusions.

One thing that does stand out is that all three critical researchers share views where a) anthroposophy is strongly connected to daily practice as outlined above as the 2nd stance and b) it appears to them in a dogmatic form confirming their suspicion. This might be more an issue of "finding what you are already looking for" than it is a reflection of actual practice but after having read the studies it is difficult to dismiss the matter quickly even though I found the presentations of Steiner educational theory that were made sometimes incorrect. One of the problems is that the informants can be understood as confirming these negative or incorrect versions of Steiner educational theory making it hard to argue the matter. It is perhaps significant that Frödén presents very little about Steiner preschool educational theory in her dissertation staying almost entirely with the observable practice. Hoffmann does discuss a lecture cycle by Steiner on the cycles of the year but it turns out to have little bearing on the empirical parts of her study.

The desire to draw a strong causal connection between Steiner's educational theory and anthroposophy on the one hand, and perceived practice on the other is perhaps one of the main issues.[5] As I have argued elsewhere (Tyson 2017), based on Jonsen and Toulmin (1988), in relation to different matters, the relation between idea and practice is mediated by our imagination and our socialization. Rarely is it causal in any clear sense. Jonsen and Toulmin make the case for this (1988, p. 16ff.) in discussing the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research set up in 1974 which included

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5. This seems to be a recurring theme among critics. Ullrich's 2015 critical introduction to Steiner education spends almost 60 out of 175 pages outlining anthroposophy and discussing its critical scientific reception. I think it is worth considering that Ullrich has done a remarkable job covering most of the main elements of anthroposophy in such a limited space but that this also serves to illustrate how difficult it is to gain a nuanced understanding of anthroposophy. And with Ullrich this is only limited to Steiner's outlines, the extensive literature that has been produced afterwards is left completely by the side, something that means overlooking both original scholarly work such as that of Owen Barfield (1988, 2010/1928), Henri Bortoft (2012) or Andrew Welburn (2004) and claims to original spiritual research such as that of ben Aharon (1995), Keyserlingk (1983) or Weber (2016). I think this is a significant issue to explore historically. Earlier Steiner school teachers had an extensive knowledge of anthroposophy which also means that it was at least potentially relatively nuanced. To gain this kind of depth today is not easy and the way that both Steiner educational practice and the demands on teacher education have changed things has led to a situation where a more traditional study only of Steiner's books and lectures as a foundation for teaching seems more and more anachronistic.

people with drastically different world-views (or traditions), Catholics, Protestants, Jews and atheists. They write (1988, p. 17f.):

> In all, five commissioners had scientific interests and six did not; and before they started work, few onlookers expected them to have much basis for agreement, either about general moral principles or about the application of these principles to particular problems. … All the same, things never worked out that way in practice. At no time in its activities did the commission's opinion divide cleanly along a line between scientists and laypeople; nor did the other differences of background have anything resembling their expected effect on the practical discussions. Quite the contrary; so long as the commissioners stayed on the taxonomic or casuistical [ie. case-based] level, they usually agreed in their practical conclusions.

> Even when the commissioners disagreed, furthermore, the nature and extent of their disagreement were always quite clear. Faced, for example, with marginal or difficult issues, some members were inclined to take a somewhat more conservative view, whereas others were more liberal. … Serious differences of opinion began to appear only when individual commissioners went beyond the stage of formulating practical proposals and explained their individual *reasons* for participating in the collective recommendations. At this point, at last, differences of background that lay dormant during the case-by-case discussions sprang back to life. The Catholic members of the commission gave different reasons for agreeing from the Protestants, the Jewish members from the atheists, and so on.

I have quoted this at some length because what Jonsen & Toulmin point to here is central and reflects the 5th stance (which I would consider myself an adherent of). First, it accentuates that theory, or world-view, doesn't determine a practice in any straightforward way. Second, it demonstrates that a practice can be interpreted coherently from sometimes opposing conceptual viewpoints. Steiner education is no exception, meaning that what is enacted in practice can be understood from drastically differing viewpoints. Insisting that one particular interpretation of anthroposophy is then the clear source of Steiner educational practice is strange. Third, it is the most concise formulation I have come across for why cases are far more pertinent to our knowledge of ethical matters (and by extension of Steiner education's intercultural potential) than any general principles can be. But, as Flyvbjerg has noted (2006), cases are not a straightforward matter. There are paradigmatic cases, extreme cases, black swan cases, etc. Unfortunately, none of the case studies position themselves in terms of what *kind* of case they understand themselves to be, severely weakening their argument. Wilson, for example, has chosen to do her research in a Steiner kindergarten run by a teacher and her colleague out of the teacher's home. This context as it relates to other Steiner kindergartens in North America and globally is not discussed meaning that it is incomprehensible what it is a case of. Is it an extreme case? (Extreme perhaps in the sense that it represents an unusual kind of Steiner kindergartens.) Presumably this reflects Wilson's predisposition to posit a strong causal link between anthroposophy and practice. If this is true then it doesn't matter which kindergarten one explores, they will all be representative of the same basic socialization.[6] Of course, the same holds for positive cases of practice. These cannot in any simple way be taken as proof that the Steiner educational conceptual framework is mono-causally connected to practice.

Another interesting comparative issue that emerged from this review is the degree to which the various authors seem to be either unaware of each other's research or only mention it in passing even at times when a more extensive reference would have been warranted. For example, neither Wilson nor Frödén refer to each other even though both have done research on gender in Steiner kindergartens and have written about this for more than a decade and partly rely on the same theorists (eg. Judith Butler). Knight (2022a) is aware of Muñoz dissertation, mentioning it as one of several works of research by insider "Waldorf-practitioners" something that Muñoz claims he was not at the time he began writing the thesis. In any case this does not disqualify the research Muñoz has done and it is notable, especially since Knight positions herself as a white woman making claims about Steiner education's Eurocentrism while having access to a study made by someone who positions himself as a Native American and thus the direct target of these limitations. Knight makes no mention of their diverging conclusions regarding what is, essentially, the same subject, not even in order to explain why no discussion is needed. It seems that this is not just a matter of critics being unwilling to take divergent research into account. In the later publications of eg. Adam and Schmelzer (2019) or

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6. It might even be argued that this constitutes a special case of universalism.

Rawson (2022a, b), the dissertations by Muñoz and Mor are not mentioned. My, provisional, conclusion is that much of this writing remains unknown to other scholars in the field, underlining the need for a review such as this.

On a general note, this review has confirmed that scholars rarely make a systematic effort to explore black swan cases, ie. cases which would falsify their theses or at least force them to engage in difficult arguments. This remains a field for productive future work in Steiner education where the claims of anthroposophy could be tested by actively searching for cases that question them. This holds especially for those areas where universal statements are made, eg. about education towards freedom, the evolution of consciousness towards individuation, the universality of psychobiological development in childhood, etc.

Further questions

One issue that the current studies do not tackle systematically is the continuing prevalence of Eurocentric and otherwise problematic narratives in current non-academic Steiner educational literature. For example, Charles Kovacs is a popular author of several books outlining the contents of various subjects as he taught them. This includes a book called *Ancient mythologies* (3rd edition 2008) that has also been translated into German (5th ed. 2018). In the English original he begins his story with the myth of Manu but places it in Atlantis including descriptions of Atlantean life that seem to be derived directly from Rudolf Steiner or some other source, but which are, to the extent that I have been able to determine, in no way part of the Indian saga about Manu. Among other things, Kovacs describes the Atlanteans as having power over life forces and that their kings had many slaves who's growth they could either curtail making them very small or increase in order to make some of them huge warrior-giants (2008, p. 12). This is problematic already on the grounds that Steiner education claims not to teach anthroposophy and the way Kovacs writes about Atlantis is difficult to construe as unrelated to anthroposophy (it is certainly not an expression of ancient mythology in any direct sense). The German translation of the book (at least in its latest edition) tacitly omits the first pages in which this story is told and begins with the next chapter. There is no explanation or commentary. The example has been chosen because these books are not obscure but, as the several editions testify to, quite the opposite. There is clearly an ongoing need to consider the non-academic literature on Steiner education from a critical perspective and at least to provide new editions with some contextualizing foreword.

Another, critical, reflection concerns Steiner education and its social "mission". An argument could be made (and has been, cf. eg. Boland 2015, p. 196, Adam & Schmelzer 2019, p. 7) that the first Steiner school gradually became a school for the children of anthroposophists and that its aims became to prepare the students for the "Abitur" ie. German state exams in preparation for university studies. Vocational tracks have, with some notable exceptions, not played a role in Steiner schools at the upper secondary level (for a review, see Tyson 2019), more on this shortly. The critical perspectives of Knight and Wilson consider Steiner education as part of elite education for those with enough resources to afford sending their children to essentially private schools. Even in countries such as Sweden where these schools receive full state funding it is clear that the resources in question also include significant cultural capital. Rawson (2022b, p. 8) notes that his impression is that the Steiner school movement struggles with remaining a radical alternative pedagogy. It is continuously threatened with becoming a comfortable and safe alternative for the anxious middle classes.

It is also worth noting that thus far, in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, there seems to have been little to nothing done in terms of systematic inquiry or practical curriculum development in order to work with indigenous matters even though Sweden, Norway and Finland have a Sami population and Denmark, through Greenland an Inuit (and this leaves out other minorities such as the Romani). Perhaps there are initiatives that have remained undocumented, and, as stated in the introduction, there are dialogues being initiated. It is hard not to suspect that this is a reflection of the strong normative influence that the original German curriculum has exercised in the Nordic countries.

Furthermore, in internal arguments about decolonizing the Steiner curriculum it is not uncommon for reference to be made to decolonization and anti-racism as an ideological position and, in contrast, to anthroposophy as fundamentally freedom-oriented and thus anti-ideological (eg. Kafi 2023). This can be viewed as an example of how a thought-collective (Fleck 1979; cf. also Röschert's pioneering study from 1997 on anthroposophy as enlightenment) protects its tenets, in this case that anthroposophy is, a-priori, free from such issues given its foundational ideas. The question arises to what extent, and how, Steiner schools from a sociological perspective are schools where parents and teachers with an anthroposophical world-view (and similar spiritual values) have striven to create havens or islands in a hostile world rather than centers of culture where everyone can feel invited. If the former is largely the case, feelings of being threatened and the need to protect an orthodox teaching would emerge strongly. If the latter is largely the case, interest in transformation and openness to other views and perspectives would emerge in practice as well as in research. The review gives a rather inconclusive answer to this.

Two areas of future study

Having reviewed the studies to date, some themes appear less developed and will be very briefly addressed.

The first one is a more in-depth discussion of the intersection between feminist scholarship and postcolonialism (cf. eg. Harding 2006). Perhaps I have been looking in the wrong places, but I haven't been able to find a similar critique of Steiner education from a feminist perspective as from the postcolonial. The thesis of Jeske (2004) is partly concerned with this but, apart from the critical voices of Knight and Wilson there is little regarding the matter in the internal debate it seems. I think this is especially relevant given that within feminist scholarship there are some highly interesting critiques of narrative (eg. Le Guin 2019) or our relationship to nature (Merchant 1980) to mention just a couple of relevant essays and studies.

The issue becomes clearer if one disregards outright gender-issues such as the socialization of boys and girls in Steiner kindergartens (Frödén, Wilson) and focus is placed on wider questions of patriarchal structures in society and thought. Eurocentrism in Steiner education has received attention, what about patriarchy? Perhaps this is not considered a relevant question. However, given the way stories are valued in Steiner education the structures of narrative are interesting to examine from such a viewpoint. For example, the confluence of heroes and epic narratives is a subtle way in which traditionally patriarchal values are part of the very structures of many narratives (cf. Tyson 2023).

The second theme concerns vocational education. Postcolonialism can be critiqued for lacking a class-related analysis and for being highly academic. As a result, postcolonial perspectives seldom include vocational perspectives. Especially in Steiner educational contexts it needs to be recognized that this limits some of the potentials for rethinking the Steiner curriculum in a more inclusive manner. When academic success is the measure of inclusion and integration, vocational education is marginalized as the invisible "Other". As Tyson (2023) theorizes, there is a largely untapped potential in creating vocational programs where the students engage in their vocational education at least partly through enacting social and cultural developmental projects. Thereby reversing the flow of resources into school back out again. This holds the potential for making Steiner education less of an elite education in ways hitherto not explored (as far as I know).

Having said this, I think it is important at the end to acknowledge the work that has been done, especially in the last decade or so. Scholars such as Boland, Rawson, Schmelzer and Zech have engaged in repeated efforts to raise these questions and they have now been joined by others such as Barkved, Büchele, Hoffman, Mor, Muñoz and Steinwachs in the reform and development of Steiner education from within.

It seems fitting then to finish on a couple of quotes, the first from Rawson (2019, p. 16): "Just as Waldorf schools and curriculum studies struggle to incorporate feminist perspectives, so too we are still waiting for a Waldorf version of post-colonial studies", and to note that the forthcoming volume edited by Steinwachs and Rawson (2023): *Waldorfschule, Globalisierung* und *Postkolonialismus – Versuch einer Annäherung* [Waldorfschool, globalization and postcolonialism – a first approach] is a step in this direction.

The second is from Boland (2017, p. 65): "Australian Aboriginal artist and educator, Lilla Watson, […] said, 'If you have come to help me, I don't need your help. But if you have come because your liberation is tied to mine, come, let us work together' (cited in Leonen, 2004)." The more or less formal motto of Steiner education: "education towards freedom", is powerfully critiqued and contextualized through this. I think that Steiner's views on freedom are in agreement with Watson's, but that this review suggests that in practice we too often understand ourselves as helpers; of children; of "the other". Watson's eloquent words could perhaps serve as a support for self-reflection here.

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