



One Pedagogy – Many Practices

Variations on Formal and Enacted Curricula in Steiner/Waldorf Schools¹

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Introduction

After 100 years of development Steiner/Waldorf² pedagogy displays a variation in practice that is seldom visible in published curricula (Waldorfskolefederationen 2016; Mathisen 2014; Rawson & Avison 2013; Avison & Rawson 2014; Richter 2016). This variation manifests, in part, on the formal level where e.g., the Hibernia school in the German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen has developed a vocationally oriented form of the Steiner curriculum. It also manifests on the enacted level, i.e. in what teachers and schools practice, where there is a significantly larger plurality in the pedagogy than what the published curricula tend to express (see Gabriel & Schneider 1996, pp. 322-324 for a similar, critical, perspective).

This is not to imply that the published versions of the “orthodox,” henceforth called “standard,” curriculum make strong claims to represent the totality of the Steiner educational tradition. Statements such as the following make this abundantly clear (Rawson & Avison 2013, p. 13, italics in original):

The present new overview must not in any way be regarded as a prescription of how things *ought to be done*. Teachers’ own imagination is their greatest treasure and must not be curtailed in any way.

It should also be regarded as self-evident that the standard curriculum is far from unchanging, something the many editions testify to, owing both to a need for development as times change and in reaction to changing national laws and policies on education.

Finally, this is not, to my knowledge, an issue limited to Steiner education but one that is ubiquitous in how we describe curricula and other matters where there is a formalized, written element and a practical application of it in some way. The tendency is generally to describe an average or idealized practice and seldom, if ever, to include deviations. This could be taken as a good argument against doing so since no one else seems to be. As I hope to show this is more an effect of cultural habits

than any overt reflection of what might best promote development and understanding.

The general problem with this kind of homogeneous presentation was noted at least as early as 1935 by Ludwick Fleck in his book *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* where he distinguishes (in relation to medical texts) between journal science and textbooks. The former is heterogeneous and difficult to synthesize since it consists of sometimes conflicting arguments. The latter is ordered so as to provide a coherent view of a field but in the process tends to obscure the many uncertainties and variations that exist in journal science. A similar issue is at hand here regarding curricula but there is no reason why a textbook in principle shouldn’t be able to incorporate at least some of the variations and uncertainties of practice (practice being analogous to journal science in this case). The problems with not doing so can be outlined briefly.³

First, it reinforces the perception that Steiner education is comparatively homogenous, especially together with publications such as *The Seven Core Principles of Waldorf Education* (Leibner 2017) where the focus is on the common or essential aspects of Steiner education. This is not to deny that there are many aspects that are constant across Steiner schools and throughout the first century of the curriculum’s existence or to claim that there are no core principles. But an exclusive focus on average or standard curricula (both formal and enacted) together with core principles increases the difficulty of enacting innovative practice and research runs the risk of simplifying what is, in practice, a significant diversity.

Second, we understand ideas and practices not only through what they have in common but often just as much through tracking their boundaries, e.g., it is sometimes easier to comprehend how conflict resolution works by studying unusually successful “deviations” from the norm (cf. Tyson 2016a). Thus the standard curriculum can also be understood better through

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2 Known [outside of North America] by both terms and often called Steiner-Waldorf in contemporary texts, henceforth called Steiner pedagogy or Steiner education (two terms I will be using synonymously) in this article.

3 There is an interesting comparison to be made between Fleck’s arguments and those of the anthroposophical author Owen Barfield in his book *Saving the Appearances* (1988) where both refer to similar phenomena in the middle ages and make use of the same anthropological research by Levi Bruhl and Durkheim. Fleck’s conclusions seem to be reached from an implicit subjective idealism or constructivism whereas Barfield’s result from the standpoint of an explicit objective idealism.

the documentation of deviant curricula. This is especially important for novice teachers given that beginners have a tendency to interpret guidelines more like rules and thus the presentation of a singular form, no matter how couched it is in language emphasizing the need for flexibility and imagination, tends to be taken at face value. Novices benefit from having ideas presented together with cases that illustrate major differences in how the ideas are enacted. Thus, proceeding from the core principles or foundational ideas of Steiner pedagogy, a standard curriculum has developed. But, proceeding from those same ideas *several formal deviations from the standard curriculum* have also developed. To say nothing of the variations in enacted curricula.

Third, the cultural habit noted above of thinking in singular terms reinforces the prejudice that there is a one-to-one relationship between idea and practice as well as the accompanying sense that there is a singular orthodoxy where the only alternative is full relativism. The possibility of systematically explored pluralism is then overlooked. From a pluralist point of view there can still be clear differences between curricula and a comparative valuation of them. However, the point is that when we do not actively pursue an interest in difference, we implicitly enforce an unnecessary conservatism both in research and development something that the sociology of science, as developed by e.g., Bordo (1987), Fleck (1935/1979), Kuhn (1962), and Hacking (1999), provides ample evidence of, even if these authors are not always aligned with the full argument presented here.

The purpose of this article is to argue for the value of systematically exploring the concrete diversity of Steiner educational practice and to suggest ways in which this can also be incorporated in the publication of formal curricula on the national and international level as well as how it can enrich comparative curriculum research.

One issue, it should be noted, with exploring diversity is that ad-hoc documentations run the risk of providing one-sided views on diversity compared with more systematic reviews, since it is difficult to know if the entire field is really covered. It is not within the scope of this article to provide such a systematic review but rather to argue for its value and potential, to suggest ways of achieving it and to provide an example

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of where this might take us through two case studies, one focusing on the integration of vocational education in the standard curriculum at the Hibernia school and one focusing on the integration of a craft-based social development project at the Waldorf school in Ulm, Römerstraße. Thus, the examples provided need to be approached with some care since there are other ones not included in this study that are of significance to our understanding of the potential expansiveness of the Steiner curriculum in the fields of vocational education and social development work (for a more systematic exploration of the former see Tyson 2019).

Finally, the general context of this kind of study is what Flyvbjerg (2001) has called phronetic social science, based on the Aristotelian

concept of phronesis or practical wisdom. The aim of such research is not primarily to develop new theory but to increase our understanding for the purpose of acting wisely. Briefly put, Flyvbjerg's argument is that too much social science research has tried to generate theories on par with natural science theory, i.e. capable of prediction, something he argues is impossible in social contexts. What we need instead is more research where the aim is to increase our capacity to act for the greater good in the Aristotelian sense of human flourishing or *eudaimonia*. This perspective fits well with pedagogical research where it is especially clear that it is difficult to avoid implicitly normative matters. When we teach there is no neutral baseline or final, perfect, approach since we are concerned with the ethically charged issue of intervening in the life of other individuals. Similarly, with the creation of curricula, each curriculum is an ethical stance on what we consider wise (implicitly or explicitly) regarding how and what to teach. As such, it cannot be viewed as anything more than a temporary construct until a time comes where we recognize wiser constructs. The kind of comparative research argued for here is meant to be a more systematic approach to the continuous development of pedagogy and curricula.

In what follows, I will begin with a general discussion on the Steiner curriculum considering it in relation to the issues raised in the introduction. After this, a section on method and research design considers both the general framework for this kind of case study and the specific methods followed in documenting the two cases. These are then presented and a discussion follows after

which a final section outlines the main conclusions and suggestions.

Curriculum Studies and the Steiner Curriculum

A common distinction in curriculum studies is that between formal, enacted and experienced curricula (e.g., Billett 2011). Formal curricula consist of that which is written and published as a curriculum as well as the general structure of lessons, etc. Enacted curricula consist of the actions of teachers in the classroom and may diverge significantly from whatever formal one they proceed from. Finally, what students experience is a third aspect of a curriculum that needs to be studied in its own right. Such student-centered studies are especially important in the evaluation of formal and enacted curricula and sometimes enacted curricula are only possible to explore from the point of view of the students who experienced them (e.g., when the original teacher is no longer around to describe his or her actions).

Not all formal curricula need to be written, it is also possible that they are transmitted as part of the oral culture of an institution. This complicates things since it may require more or less extensive visits to a school in order to document those aspects of its formal curriculum that have not been committed to writing.

The original, formal, Steiner curriculum was first established in writing by the teachers Caroline von Heydebrand and E. A. Karl Stockmeyer (Heydebrand 2010, Stockmeyer 1991). These have been the basic templates for the main part of the later curricula, and today the most common text is Richter (2016), translated and edited into English by Richter & Rawson (2000), and, according to Rawson (n.d. possibly 2015), into a further 17 languages. It contains a vertical progression for each subject starting in grade 1 and culminating in grade 12, as well as a horizontal consideration of the interrelations between the subjects for each grade. At its foundation lies the understanding that the curriculum can be “read” from the child, i.e. the child provides us with the knowledge we need in order to create a curriculum (content wise and structurally) that corresponds to the child’s current and future needs (cf. e.g., Skiera 2010, p. 248). Or, as Gabriel and Schneider write (1996, p. 315, my translation): “the child is the curriculum”. It follows that any formal, written, curriculum is dependent on such a “reading” and

can be modified or discarded in situations where “further reading” has invalidated previous ones. Although Steiner provided a large corpus of indications regarding how to “read” from the perspective of spiritual science (e.g., Steiner 1984, 1986, 1992), this does not preclude that, especially as the curriculum became formalized in writing, several other elements came to influence it, not least the social and practical context of the first Steiner schools (cf. Skiera 2010). The variations across Steiner educational practice suggest that such “reading” is far from straightforward.

It is difficult to give a brief summary of this curriculum, especially since the deviations considered here both more or less conform to its basic tenets. They are largely deviations *within* the basic framework. One comparison might be with the critical-constructive *Bildung* ideas of Klafki (see Sommer 2014) since the Steiner curriculum can be described as a distinctively *Bildung*-oriented curriculum. However, this is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, since the aim is first and foremost to explore what deviant curricula can contribute, the main differences between them and the standard curriculum are presented together with the case studies so that it is possible to at least get an idea of what they are deviating from (since neither represents a deviation from the standard curriculum in its totality).

Furthermore, countries also have to square this standard curriculum with their own national curricula and these tend to then go through various stages of development and change (compare e.g., the iterations of the Swedish curriculum *En väg till frihet* from 2007 and 2016). A separate study would be needed to compare such iterations of formal curricula in selected countries and to make a cross-country comparison of how the Steiner curriculum has been adopted and changed as it migrated from one cultural context to another.

Already in the Nordic countries, this would present significant differences, especially on the upper secondary level where several changes over the last 20 years have taken place. For example,

the Swedish Steiner schools had to adapt their curriculum to the new national curriculum in 2011 creating a number of issues with how to square the standard curriculum with it. This also meant that the latest iteration of the Swedish Steiner curriculum is written in order to outline how it fits within this new national curriculum. However, on an institutional level, there are several schools where the Steiner curriculum has been further changed in various ways. One

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such place is the agricultural vocational track at *Järna Naturbruksgymnasium* (Järna agricultural gymnasium) resulting in an amalgam of the Steiner curriculum with various agricultural courses that are, in turn, treated from a biodynamic perspective.

Another, particularly interesting, example from Sweden can be found from the 1980s, when a group of students, mainly from the Solvik school (itself a significant variation on the standard Steiner curriculum) started an independent upper secondary school together with the teachers Erik Norlin and Ivar Heckscher. This is all the more interesting since one of its main characteristics was an almost complete lack of formal curriculum. Instead the interests and will of the students were placed at the center. This included that the students largely financed their education themselves and found their teachers among various practitioners as they went along (Norlin 1986). The project was done in two cycles somewhat apart from each other, the first one being documented in the above-mentioned publication and the second one documented in manuscript form only.

Beyond this there are a number of documented examples. To take a few from the German-speaking context there are variations on the traditional Steiner curriculum represented by the previously mentioned Hibernia school, by the Steiner school in Gröbenzell, by the Intercultural Waldorf school in Mannheim (all in Germany), and by the *Regionale Oberstufe Jura-Südfuss* (ROJ) in Switzerland. All have seen more or less extensive evaluations over the years and one, the Hibernia school, will be considered further below (Brater 2000; Brater & Munz 1996; Brater et al. 2009; Rist & Schneider 1979).

It seems that the greatest diversity exists at the upper secondary level, at least on the level of formal curricula although this would require a more systematic study to be concluded with certainty. A possible reason for this is in the nature of most central European and Nordic school systems which select into different tracks, generally somewhere between 6th and 10th grade. These selections are mainly done with the purpose of sending students to vocational tracks or to tracks preparing for higher education. Already within the first decade of its existence this was an issue facing the original Steiner school/s where a tradition established itself of mainly preparing for the “Abitur”, the German track for higher studies at the university level. This has largely been followed, at least in the Nordic countries and in Britain as well as the US. It belongs to the exceptions

that Steiner schools have developed ways in which to incorporate vocational elements or tracks at the upper secondary level. This selection issue has been at the center of an ongoing discussion in the Steiner educational movement resulting in different approaches. The wide-spread disregard in most societies for vocational education and accompanying appreciation of academic training has been a contributing factor as well.

Turning to the enacted curriculum – this has seen a variety of single or multiple case-studies over the years (e.g., Berg et al., 2003; Tyson 2018a, b). These studies can be viewed as part of a wider trend in curriculum research where one prominent focus has been on Martin Wagenschein’s genetic-socratic-exemplary didactics (e.g., Berg 2003; Berg, Klafki & Schultze 2003, 2001; Wagenschein 1991; Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts 2000). As they relate to Steiner education, the studies have mainly served the purpose of documenting individual innovations in subject didactics rather than exploring their relationships to the Steiner curriculum in a wider sense. Here the issue is also complicated by the difficulty of conducting such research in any systematic way given the comparatively large number of schools world-wide. Several smaller studies would perhaps need to be made on a national and regional level in order to explore systematically the variations across practice that can be found. One might also focus here on specific subject areas such as the teaching of history. In such cases it would be easier to systematically cover practice and potential variations across it. Such documentation could then be related to the formal curriculum, expanding its general concepts, functioning as supplemental material that clarifies interpretive variations and finally providing a more stringent presentation of Steiner educational didactics that doesn’t give the impression that there is a given single norm for how to teach a subject.

Finally, on the level of the experienced curriculum, there are any number of ways in which research has been conducted. On the biographical level there are large scale studies, such as that of Barz & Randoll (2007), using questionnaires to explore some of the experienced effects of the Steiner curriculum. There are also biographical studies, such as that of Gessler (1988), focusing on the experienced effects of individual schools, in that case the Hibernia school. Common to both are a wider biographical perspective. I am not aware of any studies in Steiner education focusing more on how students experience the daily enacted practice in schools,

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as is the case with e.g., *Bildungsgangdidaktik* (cf. e.g., Hericks et al. 2001; Meyer & Reinartz 1998).

Methodologies and Research Design

This discussion has two aims, first to outline how the two case studies were documented and, second, to provide some remarks more generally on how this kind of study can be conducted. As such it is based on the work done in Tyson (2018a, c, 2016a, b) where the purpose was, in part, to develop a framework for this kind of research.

Generally speaking, the methods available for documenting cases are relatively straightforward. Regarding formal curricula, they are already, for the most part, present as written sources. This is also the case with case study 1 on the Hibernia school. Beyond this, the documentation of mostly orally transmitted formal curricula can require both interviews and observations. Interviews to the degree that the participants are easily capable of articulating them and observations when this is not the case. However, any systematic approach here is bound to be difficult since it is hard to know as an outsider if such curricula exist at a particular institution. Thus, finding out about them and accessing them is perhaps the main difficulty. For example, the Kristoffer school in Sweden has long had variations in its formal crafts curriculum where a brief course in bookbinding is included in 9th grade as well as 11th grade and where the 12th grade consists of a full year of specialization in one chosen material rather than several smaller courses (cf. Tyson 2018b). This represents a significant deviation from the standard craft curriculum and the inspiration for it came, as I have been told but with no real possibility to verify, in the late 1970s or early 80s from the Hibernia school.

Enacted curricula are open to be studied, both through interviews and observation as well as by looking at the lesson plans, weekly curriculum and other documents of an individual school. The interviews can be done with teachers or students, in person or through written testimonies. In case study 2, on the social development project, a combination of interviews and reviews of informal documents has been used. The appropriate method depends on the kind of enacted curriculum in question, is it a major block of educational activity or a specific aspect? Is it easy to grasp its major elements through condensed writing/retelling or does it require a more detail-oriented approach? However, for the most part one can expect interviews or written reports to be sufficient since the focus is on enacted curricula close to the level of formal

curricula rather than to didactical practice. For example, a written report of the craft tasks given at the Kristoffer school (as detailed in Tyson 2018b) is sufficient from a curriculum perspective, whereas observations might be needed in order to clarify the way in which this is taught, i.e. the practical didactical aspects. These are clearly not two distinctly separate matters but rather represent two ends of a continuum.

Studies of experienced curricula are mostly conducted in a similar fashion to those of enacted ones.

When it comes to method of analysis, it is fundamentally comparative. It does not, however, necessarily involve any specific analytical tools (although this depends on the context) but tends to work with conceptual comparisons and these concepts are grounded in the cases chosen. Thus, in case study 1 the concepts are mainly related to crafts vocational education given that these are the concepts that have been most heavily influential in how the curriculum has come to deviate from the standard one. In case study 2 the concepts are social work combined with craftwork since these are at the center of the case. Other deviant curricula such as that at the Solvik school mentioned in passing earlier would proceed from the concepts that are central to their deviation (probably intuitive pedagogy and the movable classroom, see for example Schönherr-Dhom 2014).

The purpose of such comparative conceptual analysis is, following the phronetic approach, the development of practical wisdom rather than theory. Thus, the analysis or discussion is interesting and relevant to the degree that it can increase our understanding for the purpose of acting wisely in practice, i.e. increasing human flourishing (Tyson 2017 pp. 94-96). Thus, what might be considered lacking in empirical analysis from other

research perspectives represents a different research aim. This, of course, does not free the researcher from the responsibility to argue clearly and coherently. But the question of validity relates more to the case studies' capacity to enrich our practice, a pragmatic kind of validity as Flyvbjerg calls it (2001).

Common to all of these methods is a research design oriented towards extreme cases (Flyvbjerg 2001), where cases are actively sought that deviate from the average norm. The average norm is not simply a given, but, in the current context, can be considered to be the national standard curricula as well as established textbooks that remain close to their formulations when suggesting ways in which to enact their

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prescriptions in practice. In Sweden this would be e.g., the national Steiner curriculum *En väg till frihet* (Waldorfskolefederationen 2016) and perhaps literature such as the book *Waldorfpädagogik* (Liebendörfer & Liebendörfer 2013).

One also needs to bear in mind that there are highly interesting deviations from didactical practice that nevertheless do not significantly represent a deviation from the standard curriculum. An example of this, as far as I can tell, is the approach of the Swiss Waldorf teacher Christian Breme to embryology, where he has developed an extensive class that centers on modeling the stages of the embryo's development in clay (Breme 2012). Such case studies of didactical practice are at least as important as the curriculum studies suggested here and some indications of their potential can be found in Tyson (2018a).

Exemplifying the Approach

Vocational and Social Developments in the Steiner Curriculum

Case Study 1 – The Hibernia School

A good way of testing the main thesis of this article, that deviant versions of the Steiner curriculum are largely marginalized, is to look at the impact that the most widely discussed one has had internationally. The Hibernia school, founded by Klaus Fintelmann in the 1950s, represents a significant modification of the curriculum from grade 7 onwards, mainly through an integration of vocational elements including, a full apprenticeship-training at the upper secondary level. The standard Steiner curriculum otherwise normally qualifies students at the upper secondary level for further academic rather than vocational studies.

As a consequence of these changes at the Hibernia school, some of the more advanced natural science and social science contents of the standard curriculum were left out of the curriculum for grades 10-12 and reserved for an optional two-year *Kolleg*, where students could go in order to get their Abitur. Other than this, the standard curriculum is largely followed so that the additions of the apprenticeships (and more general considerations on practical Bildung that will not be further discussed here) represents the main difference. This take on the Steiner curriculum was extensively documented in the 1970s and 80s culminating in a UNESCO study by Rist & Schneider (1979). Furthermore, it also

represents a significant deviation from conventional apprenticeship-based vocational education and training in Germany.

Within the German-speaking sphere, this and other similar initiatives in Kassel and Nürnberg have seen a

good number of works devoted to their curriculum innovations and generally to the integration of vocational elements in upper secondary curricula (cf. e.g., Edding et al. 1985; Fintelmann 1991; Fücke 1996, 1981). There have also been further developments in more recent years (cf. the special edition of the journal *Erziehungskunst*, February 2018, for a review). However, it is not mentioned in the German standard curriculum (Richter 2016) and none of this seems to have had any impact

in the English literature on Steiner curricula or Steiner education more generally. All that exists in English from the Hibernia school is the UNESCO-published aforementioned study by Rist & Schneider (1979) and one chapter that reiterated elements of that study in a larger compilation (Loose 1988), and that is all. The only research articles or dissertations mentioning these matters are not directly concerned with Steiner education but rather with vocational education (Tyson 2015, 2017). A reasonable assumption is that the combination of language barriers and the weak position of vocational education in most countries has contributed to this. However, the point here is that had there been a concerted and systematic effort to explore deviations from the standard Steiner curriculum, these and other initiatives could not have been overlooked. As it stands, more than 50 years of development and experience remain to be discussed and learned from, at least outside of the German-speaking context.

The basic ideas behind the Hibernia curriculum are that students at this stage in their biography benefit immensely from a kind of general vocational education or *Berufliche Bildung* (vocational Bildung). The argument can be summarized in three points:

1. That training of manual skills is a general education of the will (where arts, humanities and sciences tend to involve a general cognitive and emotional education).
2. That (manual or crafts) vocational education for all students is a path of overcoming the social division of labor.
3. That vocational education is a way to introduce a biographical relationship towards work and of

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supporting both the transition to work after school and the capacity for self-directed lifelong learning.

Fully exploring these matters or even summarizing more than the bare minimum would be beyond the scope of this article. Here I will focus on the main deviations from the standard curriculum.

The school began as an apprenticeship training at the Hibernia chemistry factories in the Ruhr area where its founder, Klaus Fintelmann, was invited to take responsibility for their general education. He introduced elements from the standard Steiner curriculum, such as the so-called main lessons in the mornings, where the same subject is taught over the course of 2-4 weeks and in time the initiative grew to form a comprehensive school. Owing to this beginning in vocational education and Fintelmann's ideas about the general educational value of a vocational education at the upper secondary level, the school came to develop its main deviation from the standard curriculum. Basically, this consists in having all students at the upper secondary level in grades 10-12 train in a vocation to the point where they are able to complete a journeyman's test and earn their vocational certificate. The students are able to choose between several crafts such as carpentry, tailoring, the now discontinued chemical engineering at the Hibernia factories, tool making, electrics, as well as childcare for those not interested in a more traditional craft education. The curriculum also impacts grades 7-9 because the students, up until the second semester in grade 10, are exposed to the basic elements of all crafts, thereby making their choice of specialization midway through grade 10 with approximately the first apprenticeship year completed in all of them. For those that wish, there is the possibility to remain at the school after graduation to attend their *Kolleg* where one or two-years of further study allows for the acquisition of an Abitur or other certificates that give access to the various levels of German post-secondary education.

The main innovation, then, is in including vocational education, mostly in crafts or industrial crafts. These are then generally taught in a conventional way; Fintelmann notes that the technical world of work is functionally divided today so that most work-tasks are dispersed to such a degree that an immediate experience of the full context is no longer possible. This, he argues, creates a situation where workers need to be taught how to act out of insight and knowledge of the whole process they

are engaged in. He goes on to say that the implication is that we need to foster a motivation among workers to understand the aims and purposes of their work, even if the sense of it cannot be experienced immediately but only through synthesizing experiences across a wider field. This, in turn, presupposes a kind of education that prepares one for it, something that needs to be taught before one enters the workforce since at that point the division of work-tasks is already in practice. His concluding argument here (Fintelmann 1985, p. 124f., my translation) is that

No one can carry out a socially qualified planning if he isn't – in principle – able to carry out the tasks he is planning for. And no one should be forced to carry out what he – in principle – wouldn't be able to plan and imagine, i.e. the ability to cognitively understand the context of one's work. Thus, on the practical *Bildungspath* of the Hibernia school the work-tasks are from the start created in such a way as to allow a shared participation in the experience of their solutions. The learners are asked to develop their own drafts and to independently carry them out with the responsible co-thought of the workshop teacher. [italics in original]

This not only outlines something of the potential differences between the way the vocations are taught at the Hibernia school compared to conventional vocational education and training (although that is a massive simplification, it can be assumed that there is significant variance in the "conventional" way as well, cf. Tyson 2015). It also clarifies the fundamental aim of including vocational education in a general educational curriculum. We cannot expect that students will learn these things today after school when entering vocational education because at that stage the training is already fragmented.

Although this brief introduction to the Hibernia school doesn't qualify as a full review of its curriculum, it exemplifies the central aspects of the curriculum enough that it should be clear how it offers a distinct deviation from the standard Steiner curriculum. In effect, it constitutes a Steiner educational perspective on vocational education together with a practical enactment of it. Its absence from standard curricula, along with the absence of similar variations, enforce the impression that Steiner education has little to offer in relation to vocational education and that vocational education has little to offer Steiner education.

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Case Study 2 - The Social Development Project

The second example is of an enacted curriculum in social work, reported and discussed more extensively in Tyson (2016c).⁴ ‘Social work’ is a phrase intended to cover those elements of a curriculum where students are directed outwards into society for the purpose of engaging in some kind of social development work. In the standard Waldorf curriculum, a tradition has established itself where students go on a social practicum (generally at the upper secondary level) for 2-3 weeks. Often, this entails working in childcare or in homes for the elderly or disabled. The case presented here represents a deviation from this practice, regarding both continuity and focus. The description has been kept short, focusing on these deviations to the exclusion of detail and other aspects since the relevant issue here is the comparison with the standard curriculum.

The case stems from eurythmy teacher, Mr. Wilfried Kessler, who works at the *Freie Waldorfschule Römerstrasse*, in Ulm.⁵ From 1992 until today he has carried out a developmental project together with students in the village of Masloc, in Romania. During these decades, they have assisted in the construction of an anthroposophical clinic, herbal garden for medicinal herbs, a small medicine making facility, a youth center, staff accommodation, a large clinic park with a swimming pool and chapel, as well as the renovation of a kindergarten and a retirement home. There is also an ecological waste treatment plant that purifies the sewage from the buildings.

This development in Masloc has been the result of repeated visits by Kessler and student groups, initially the students he was class sponsor for, and later students from all of the upper secondary school (grades 10-12), mostly visiting for a week or two and working at the site. Almost all building materials were donated by large firms, making the project an important example of resource redistribution and recycling. For example, one large firm making radiators turned out to have a person working full time on donating equipment that had been returned by customers for reasons other than technical issues. Generally, the construction work was done with the full participation of the village and many of its inhabitants, beginning with the first trip down

after purchasing the land when it had to be cleaned, as it had been used as an informal landfill until then. The purchase was made possible through the staging of a play by the students where they collected the money needed for the initial piece of land.

Compared to standard practice, this case is one in which developmental work is done mainly through construction, i.e. in the field of crafts rather than working with children, the elderly, or the disabled (something that can well be done through crafts but that is another matter to consider). The long continuity of the project, more than 25 years, has also made it possible to increase the scale of the developmental work, allowing it to achieve lasting and extensive changes, even with relatively few weeks of actual work. The developmental project also provided a focus for many of the cultural activities undertaken by the students, allowing those activities to contribute resources to its further development.

Of central importance to the present discussion is that the majority of this developmental project was done outside of the formal curriculum and sometimes in conflict with it. Generally, it took place during holidays and similar spaces free from the demands of formal schooling, something that seems to be common when social development projects are integrated into schools. This example of an enacted curriculum is therefore easy to overlook as a curriculum, since it has resisted formalization. Which leads me to the discussion.

Discussing the Cases and Rereading Each through the Lens of the Other

Before returning to the issues initially raised, it is important to engage in a brief discussion of the two cases outlined in the previous section, since this illustrates the potential of the comparative method noted previously.

The cases are at opposite ends of a spectrum regarding length. The Hibernia curriculum is given here more briefly than a full presentation would entail, and the social development project is presented only in outline to demonstrate its relevance as an enacted curriculum. As parts of a standard curriculum text, the relative brevity is warranted and in the context of more systematic reviews they could well be categorized as variations on vocational education curricula and social development curricula.

‘Social work’ is a phrase intended to cover those elements of a curriculum where students are directed outwards into society for the purpose of engaging in some kind of social development work.

⁴ The report is mainly based on personal communication with Wilfried Kessler and complemented with some information from published news articles and pamphlets.

⁵ Eurythmy is a movement art established by Rudolf Steiner.

Presenting the cases together also allows for a rereading of both where they cast light on each other.

Schools as drivers of social development represent a massive and largely untapped resource at the upper secondary level. If ways could be found to turn part of education outwards into society, while today students spend the absolute majority of their time in classrooms, this potential could be unlocked. As the example of Wilfried Kessler's project demonstrates, even in circumstances where the formal curriculum contributes little, it is still possible to achieve extraordinary results, but this relies almost exclusively on individuals who possess an unusual engagement with the issue at hand.

What has remained largely unrecognized at the formal level is the potential that especially craft-vocational education contains in this respect. The results of craft-work are often such that they could be made part of social development projects, and since students need to practice in order to learn their chosen craft, it would be possible to integrate social development into the formal curriculum in many if not all vocational education programs. Thus, each case can be viewed through the lens of the other, and this suggests that vocational curricula could profit from integrating social development projects and upper secondary education could benefit from integrating vocational elements in order to drive social development.

In effect, the two deviations presented here have produced, I would argue, a potential major innovation in education predicated on someone actually combining them. What other possible innovations remain unknown to us because they are either documented in isolation and not in relation to other variations or not documented at all?

On a methodological note, these reflections do not follow in any direct way from the presentation of the two cases, rather they stem from the kind of comparative and imaginative conceptual analysis discussed in the methods section. Curriculum studies with a phronetic approach could be expected to yield such results given that the aim is to improve and enrich practice.

Conclusions

The first conclusion follows immediately from the preceding discussion: a lack of systematic documentation and comparison deprives us of possibly important

educational innovations. This conclusion is clearly not limited to Steiner education. In effect, Steiner education as a whole serves as a deviation from education in general making the issue easier to clarify by using it as an exemplifying case. State-issued curricula can be compared as reforms change them but tend otherwise to be fixed at the formal level. Given the vast number of state schools, they are more difficult to explore systematically on the informal, enacted level. Thus, Steiner education also provides an interesting look at what can happen when the formal curriculum is not as completely "owned" by one national actor and instead is relatively open to change at the institutional level. Perhaps this might even result in an argument that more diversity among formal curricula would be beneficial.

A second conclusion is that the two cases that have been taken as examples for the purpose of this argument about curriculum research and development illustrate the issues raised initially. The standard curriculum takes on the same character as a textbook that glosses over important matters of controversy or difference. In particular, the formal curriculum of the Hibernia school is an example of how the exclusion of deviations in standard publications simplifies Steiner education to its own detriment. One might be of the view that presenting diversity has not been the established purpose of curriculum publications and that

such discussions are better suited for other kinds of publications, however, it is precisely this matter that is up for debate here. If curriculum publications have not, hitherto, been written with the purpose of highlighting pluralism, the argument here is that they should be. This could be done in at least two ways, the first being to expand standard publications with some chapters on deviating Steiner curricula together with a more principled discussion on

what a comparative approach can bring. The second would be a separate publication focusing more extensively on this matter. Nothing precludes both, since the space available in publications focusing on the standard curriculum would of necessity be limited and a more extensive treatment is probably warranted.

A textbook focusing on deviating Steiner curricula would be especially valuable for teacher education where the inclusion of cases such as the ones presented provide teacher students with a more dynamic view of the Steiner curriculum. Although this argument refers

Vocational curricula could profit from integrating social development projects and upper secondary education could benefit from integrating vocational elements in order to drive social development.

specifically to Steiner teacher education, it holds validity across all teacher education. It becomes easier to perceive the biases and perspectives taken in standard curricula through such deviations.

A singular curriculum reinforces narrow and exclusionary views and impedes reflective practice (Schön 1983, 1987).

The two cases presented also highlight the importance for researchers unfamiliar with Steiner education to be cognizant of the diversity in practice, especially when doing empirical studies. Depending on the cases selected, e.g., the particular schools studied, one can develop quite different lines of inquiry. For instance, the Hibernia school represents an important case to compare with regular vocational education and training, whereas most Steiner schools have much less to offer.

It remains an open question for further empirical research to determine if, and then to what degree, the emphasis on a standard curriculum has reinforced conservatism in Steiner educational research and development. Perhaps a systematic look at the various deviations from the standard curriculum would rather support the conclusion that either or both research and development are characterized by innovation and plurality in practice. Be that as it may, the active and systematic inclusion of deviations in published curricula can hardly be expected to reduce such innovation and plurality.

Finally, an ongoing question for the Steiner school movement is its purpose. Is it a major alternative pedagogy that needs to preserve a distinct tradition or is it a framework for ongoing pedagogical research and development?

This is hardly an either-or-question. Steiner education has developed a curriculum that is largely Bildung-oriented (cf. Tyson 2018a) and as such potentially appeals to those teachers, parents, and students who desire this kind of educational focus. However, a one-sided focus on this runs the risk of marginalizing the importance of Steiner education to the larger educational community by positioning it as one of several alternative pedagogies catering to the minority that are unsatisfied with “regular” schools. Both researchers from within and from outside of the Steiner educational context could potentially contribute to the general development of pedagogy and didactics by focusing some of their efforts on cases that represent interesting developmental initiatives. This is perhaps even more important for the teacher training institutions who in

A lack of systematic documentation and comparison deprives us of possibly important educational innovations.

many ways function as gatekeepers for what we count as Steiner pedagogy. If teacher students are taught only, or almost only, what counts as the pedagogical and didactical norm or standard, this inhibits systematic development. Steiner education has the ongoing potential to be a significant source of curriculum innovation that can enrich society at large (to the extent that there is a shared interest in Bildung). However, unless there is more of a systematic cooperation between teacher training institutions, researchers, and individual schools interested in actively enacting such innovations, the potential for this will remain largely untapped.

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