Honolulu Teachers Explore Place

Teaching Through Aloha[1]

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Introduction

This article documents a communal process of investigating aspects of place and belonging in Waldorf education. It records the unfinished journey of a community of teachers in Jocelyn's school in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, and explores questions, tensions, and contradictions that surfaced during a two-year process. The values we bring to the research revolve around inclusion, social justice, and lived spirituality. These values are well-expressed by the Hawaiian concept of "aloha," which denotes warmth, acceptance, and inclusion extended to everyone. This concept is defined by Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, Pono Shim and Ramsay Taum, as "an action… a natural response of respect, love and reciprocity … Aloha is to be in the presence of life, to share the essence of one's being with openness, honesty, and humility, it is a way of behaving, a way of life. It is a commitment to being real. It is a commitment to accepting others and giving dignity to who they are and what they have to offer … It is a spiritual principle that conveys the deepest expression of one's relationship with oneself, the creative and life-giving forces, one's family and community, and with one's friends and strangers."[2]

Furthermore, we find that the Hawaiian cultural belief that the land is alive with spirit meshes well with the anthroposophical view of human-cosmos relations. A part of our view of lived spirituality, then, is the idea that "human beings are spiritual beings impacted by larger beings present in the land and in the cosmos, and that recognizing these beings may cause us to flourish, achieve our personal missions, and evolve" (Demirbag, 2015, p. 74). In the current project, this metaphysical approach takes the form of strengthening the relationship to the land, to one's surroundings, and to the elements of nature; we have termed it: *(re) inhabiting the curriculum.*

Our project of auditing the curriculum at Honolulu Waldorf School is motivated by the question: to what degree is the Waldorf curriculum identifiably Eurocentric when used in places where Polynesian cultures live strongly. In particular, Neil wanted to trouble and destabilize unreflected practice, challenge passively-accepted norms, and investigate how aspects of place were dealt with in a Waldorf school in the Pacific. The concept of auditing Waldorf education was suggested by Aonghus Gordon (in Hougham 2012, p. 70), but to our knowledge, this is the first time it has been attempted (and documented) by a community of teachers. In this article, we approach the curriculum through an audit of place. Further, we use our values of aloha and lived spirituality as standards of judgement by which we document and observe steps taken along the path by a community of teachers (K-12) exploring notions of place and belonging within the structure of the Waldorf curriculum taught in Honolulu. Taking an approach similar to that of McNiff and Whitehead (2010), we use these values to explain how we are working to generate a living educational theory of practice.

Literature Review

Laidlaw identifies the values she introduces into her work and research as *standards of judgment*. "These standards of judgement help me to frame my educational practice and theorising" (Laidlaw, 2008, p. 74). With our values of diversity and lived anthroposophy as standards of judgment, we reviewed critical literature which deals with the critique of eurocentrism, colonization, and dogma principally within Waldorf education, but also more generally. We conclude that the notions of a "sense of place" and "homecoming" found within the literature we have reviewed are in harmony with our own standards of judgment. When speaking about his hopes for the budding Waldorf school, Steiner spoke repeatedly about the need to 'read the child', to adapt the education to the needs of the child (Wiechert 2014a). He envisioned teaching to be a path of exploration, of constant questioning, of critique. In essence, all Waldorf teachers were expected to be action researchers; namely, following observations with practical solutions to perceived problems. In his first lecture to the new faculty, Steiner stated: "We want to transform what we can gain through anthroposophy into truly practical instruction. … We will practice teaching and critique it through discourse" (Steiner, 1919a, p. 30-31).

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[1] A different version of this article was published in the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* under the title (Re)inhabiting Waldorf education: Honolulu teachers explore the notion of place. It can be found at http://ejolts.net/node/309.

[2] This description of aloha appears on posters titled "What is Aloha?" placed at various public locations in Hawai'i such as the Kahului Airport.

Speaking out of her experience of Waldorf schools in the United States and Brazil, de Souza comments that the Waldorf curriculum "privileges a certain body of knowledge (it is visibly Eurocentric) and neglects important cultural, economical, and political issues" (de Souza, 2012, p. 60). The aspect of Waldorf education identified here goes against the standards of judgment we hold regarding the central importance of diversity and inclusion.

For a number of years, teachers and academics have been drawing attention to the fact that, despite its evident achievement of being adopted in an increasing number of countries, there are specific issues regarding the contextualization and localization of Waldorf education and, specifically, how it manifests in non-European contexts. In the United States, Vernon Dewey has reported on the lack of racial diversity among teaching staff in Waldorf schools (Dewey, 2012). Wiechert and Sagarin have sought to expose 'Waldorf myths'—practices applied uncritically by Waldorf teachers and that turned, over time, into traditions despite sometimes being completely at odds with Steiner's intentions (Sagarin, 2003, 2008; Wiechert, 2014b). Though it has been claimed within the movement that "for some time Waldorf education has ceased being a Eurocentric education movement" (Kullak-Ublick, 2012), de Souza's comments above indicate the opposite, namely that established European or Eurocentric traditions still play an over-large part in pedagogical practice in Waldorf settings, notwithstanding the schools' widening geographic and cultural diversity. This is supported by research undertaken among Māori teachers in New Zealand (Boland, 2015).

Our project of auditing the curriculum at Honolulu Waldorf School is motivated by the question to what degree is the Waldorf curriculum identifiably Eurocentric when used in places where Polynesian cultures live strongly.

Ida Oberman wrote in 2008 that "normative constructs" within the Waldorf curriculum limit processes of adaptation to local cultural contexts. "The curriculum remains remarkably unchanged, even under the last decade's pressures to disavow Eurocentrism… even in inner-city Milwaukee, the Waldorf teachers continue to tell the Norse myth of Odin and Thor" (Oberman, 2008, p. 13). Two years later, Rawson highlighted an overall lack of criticality, which can be observed when Waldorf schools are established in different cultures and contexts:

> Waldorf education is being offered in more than 60 countries and is growing rapidly with major new areas of development in Asia. In the process of becoming global, it has spread from its origins in Europe, yet it has barely begun to reflect critically on what this expansion means in terms of the transmission of ideas into different cultures and different settings. (Rawson, 2010, p. 2)

Aonghus Gordon put this expansion in stronger terms, questioning whether it is a form of colonization, establishing settler outposts overseas to bring civilizing influences to those in need of them.

> There are many different levels of colonialism, and not only the economic model but also the spiritual mode, and it would be imperative in any school right now, in my view, to actually do its own audit of the time and place.
> (Quoted in Hougham, 2012, p. 70)

The notion of Waldorf curriculum as colonizing force may seem harsh, but using the language of colonization is legitimized by Neil's research findings (Boland, 2015). At least in a New Zealand context, a degree of disenfranchisement of Indigenous Māori within Waldorf schools was perceptible, though this has changed markedly since the publication of Neil's research. Growing awareness of these issues led Neil to put an increasing amount of time into challenging unconscious cultural biases in Waldorf education.

Raghavan (2018) calls for increased diversity in curricula, in classrooms and beyond. At the same time, she points out the need to do more than "reform space" or engage in an additive or contributionist attitude to diversity, which recognizes and acknowledges minority groups but still essentially regards them as "Other" (Boland, 2015). Raghavan further states the need to assess and then to "redistribute" the hidden power relationships within the curriculum, in order to advance towards a "truly democratic, decolonial" education.

Gordon's reference above to a colonialism in the "spiritual mode" can be linked to the assertion made by Wes Jackson, in his book, *Becoming native to this place* (1996), where he states: "Conquerors are seldom interested in a thoroughgoing discovery of where they really are" (Jackson, 1996, p. 15). This point is further expanded by Tina Evans, who argues that "the abuse of place by modern conquerors derives, in part, from perceptions of conquered spaces as other" (Evans, 2012, p. 155). This 'othering', which prevents significant interaction with the indigenous culture by confining it to an exotic status, incomparable to the one brought over by the conquerors, can be countered by non-Indigenous inhabitants working to establish living connections with their surroundings and becoming what Jackson calls "homecomers," prepared to "dig in" and begin "the long search and experiment to become native" (Jackson, 1996, p.97).

Approaching the question from a different angle, Gregory Cajete (2010), in critiquing the approach to the issues of environmental sustainability taken by the education system in the United States, argues for a notion of a "(re)inhabitation" of the environment and an ever-closer experience of one's locality.

Our own work engages with the notion of "(re) inhabitation" while resisting the perception of "conquered spaces as *other*," an effort advanced through the Hawaiian concept of *aloha*.

The Context of Honolulu

Honolulu is a diverse city with a predominantly Asian population (42.2%), followed by groups categorized as two or more races (21.6%), "white alone" (19.5%), and then by Native Hawaiians, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African Americans, and American Indians and Alaska Natives (United States Census Bureau 2015). With 41% of its students attending private schools, the city offers a broad array of educational choices (Demirbag, 2014). These include some of the largest and oldest schools west of the Rockies; America's wealthiest independent school (which is the only school limited to students of Native Hawaiian ancestry); schools that subscribe to educational philosophies such as those of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner; America's first Buddhist high school; International Baccalaureate schools; public schools that implement Hawaiian language immersion streams; and numerous charter schools, including culturally-based schools. It is a city that in many ways epitomizes diversity, inclusion, and aloha.

Honolulu is also a city that has been colonized; first culturally, by American missionaries in 1820, then nationally, with the American overthrow of the Hawaiian government in 1893, and later, in 1896, linguistically, as the Hawaiian language was forbidden in schools across the state (ʻAha Pūnana Leo 2015). The Hawaiian cultural renaissance of the 1970s ultimately led to widespread interest in the Hawaiian culture, to the start of Hawaiian language private immersion preschools in the 1980s, and then to the opening of Hawaiian language public immersion schools that run K-12 classes. In this area, rapid progress has been made. In 1984, there were fewer than 30 native Hawaiian speakers under 18; currently there are 23 Hawaiian immersion public and charter schools throughout the state (Department of Education 2017), and it is estimated that approximately 10,000 youth now speak Hawaiian in Hawaiʻi (ʻImiloa 2017). In addition, the study of Hawaiian history is now required in the public school system. The Hawaiian culture is alive and well in Hawaiʻi and there is a marked and increasing sensitivity towards issues of colonization.

Hawaiʻi's sense of place reflects the often deep relationship that residents have with their environment, describing this relationship as one would describe a relationship with a loved one (Olivera, 2014; Lindsey, 2006). The Department of Education in Hawaiʻi recently developed for all public school a series of outcomes that recognize the importance of place in a child's life.

> What makes Hawaiʻi, Hawaiʻi – a place unlike anywhere else – are the unique values and qualities of the indigenous language and culture. ʻO Hawaiʻi ke kahua o ka hoʻonaʻauao.' Hawaiʻi is the foundation of our learning. Thus the following learning outcomes, Nā Hopena Aʻo, are rooted in Hawaiʻi, and we become a reflection of this special place.
> (Nā Hopena Aʻo 2015, p. 2)

This personal relationship with place corresponds directly with our understanding of a lived spirituality—viewing the individual as a part of the cosmos and acknowledging that there are spiritual beings connected to the land which can be experienced.

Recognizing the nature of a "special place" has numerous precedents in literature. D. H. Lawrence writes in the first chapter of his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, "Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars; call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality" (Lawrence, 1923, p. 17). We believe that Steiner's Waldorf education can—and must—also acknowledge the effect and power of place in a child's education. (Re)inhabiting place—its spirit, land, culture, people, values—is a central aspect of Waldorf education. It requires us to live anthroposophy—to acknowledge our relationship with the cosmos, and to work on inner development. Thus, living anthroposophy helps us to integrate place and to live aloha—and vice versa.

Methodology

We chose action research as the basic methodology of this study. It is a model highlighted by Steiner in the initial address to teachers when at the very first Waldorf school: "We will practice teaching and critique it through discourse" (Steiner, 1919a, p. 31). It is a method that acknowledges that the standards we bring to research are socially constructed (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). In addition, the premises of action research resonate strongly with Steiner's objective of social renewal through restructuring society's cultural, political, and economic spheres, and with the goals of education in general (Steiner, 1919b). McNiff and Whitehead emphasize that the goals of action research include social renewal through improving practice, explaining practice, and holding ourselves accountable in our practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

We engaged in the process of a standard action research cycle: plan – act – observe – reflect, before moving to the next iteration of the cycle and starting to reflect again. Not only did this method allow for emergent themes and planning, but it also recognized our reality of two practitioners sharing ideas, deciding to move one way, touching base on the progress, and then setting up another cycle for exploration. In its simplest expression, we acknowledged three feedback loops for our reflective listening and adjusting practice (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). In this way, the methodology can be seen as developmentally transformational, allowing us to address new questions as they arise in the research process, and to generate a living educational theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Action research also allows this on-going process of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing, and then reflecting again to start a new cycle in order to explicitly acknowledge and utilize the values and intentions held by practitioners—in this case, the teachers of Honolulu Waldorf School.

> You decided to take action to improve the situation, first by improving your understanding of how you were positioned in that situation. You began to make your tacit knowledge explicit. You and others worked collaboratively to raise your colleagues' tacit knowledge about your shared values to a conscious level. You offered reasons for your actions. You are able to share how you tried to exercise your educational influence in your own and other people's learning, so that you all became more reflective and aware of your positioning in social situations, in order also to take action to improve those situations by influencing others. You are now able to demonstrate how your actions are underpinned by moral commitment, and how you are aiming to help other people also to understand the need for moral accountability. You are aiming to transform practice into praxis at an individual and collective level.
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> (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010, p. 191)

Our hope was that repeated cycles of reflection at Honolulu Waldorf School would uncover aspects of the school's hidden curriculum. The latter term refers to "an implicit curriculum that expresses and represents attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, which are conveyed or communicated without aware intent; it is conveyed indirectly by words and actions that are parts of the life of everyone in a society" (Alsubaie, 2015). As a next step, the faculty could start creating an explicit curriculum, consciously addressing the concept of place in the education.

The initial process the school went through looked as follows:

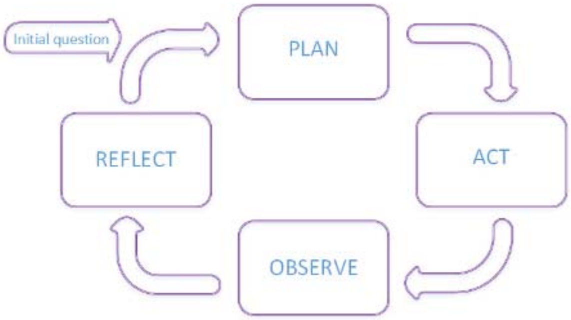

FIGURE 1: The basic action research loop

The school community has been discussing the role of Hawaiian culture and values in the school for many years since its founding, and regularly included chant, hula, and Hawaiian protocol as part of important communal gatherings and meetings. Native Hawaiians were hired to teach hula and conduct blessings of the school and its work.

For the purpose of this study, we refer to the work that began after Jocelyn arrived at the school and before Neil got involved as ‘Cycle 1’. Jocelyn had begun an exploration of the impact of place on a school, continuing work she had done in her dissertation and at the Haleakala Waldorf School:

> Upon completing my Dissertation in Practice (DiP), I carried the thread I was following with me and soon realized that it was actively shaping my leadership. I was applying the ideas presented in my research and conference workshops to my new school’s direction, the kuleana[3] of its mission, and the presentation of its curriculum. As a school we explored the history of the land beneath the buildings and asked questions: who had owned it and lived here, and what did the family that gave the land to the school stand for? What values did they support that allowed them to make this gift, and what kuleana did we accept when we accepted this land fifty-five years ago? Today my living educational theory of practice (McNiff & Whitehead 2010) is that understanding what is imprinted or ensouled in the land beneath the school, along with the intentions of the school’s founding families, will reveal the school’s kuleana and serve as the foundation of a living mission (Kornberger 2016). It will form the backbone of Honolulu Waldorf School’s unique form of social justice that is the purpose of Waldorf education (Neil Boland, personal communication, February 13, 2016). And the school will flourish once we can articulate this unique kuleana and mission, attracting those families who resonate with it.
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> (Alencastre, Demirbag, et al., 2017, p. 230)

The Cycle unfolded as follows:

Initial question:

What is the nature of the location of Honolulu Waldorf School (HWS) and how does it impact the mission of the school today? The historical timeline of HWS was superimposed on the historical timeline of the land where the school is located in order to uncover repeated patterns or themes in the school’s history in relation to its interaction with place (April-May 2015). These questions expressed Jocelyn’s belief that the founding and historical values of an organization directly impact the ‘being’ of that organization even fifty years later and stem directly from her value of lived spirituality.

Planning:

Jocelyn developed a faculty in-service program that aimed to connect teachers to sense of place (June 2015). She believed that a teacher cannot assist children in developing a relationship with place unless that teacher is first developing her own relationship to/with place.

Acting:

Jocelyn executed the in-service to include experiences of cultural practices and to conduct community service work at a cultural site near the school (Kanewai Spring) along with departments discussing methods of integrating sense of place into the curriculum (August 2015). She hoped that these discussions would increase faculty consciousness of the many ways that the curriculum could be localized. She also hoped that the experience of community service to benefit the land would help to foster a sense of responsibility to care for where we live—aloha ‘aina—or love for the land, an expressed value of the school.

Observing:

Jocelyn observed faculty in terms of what they chose to implement from their list of possible curriculum changes (Fall 2015). The big question was, would an increased consciousness of place lead to change in teacher practice?

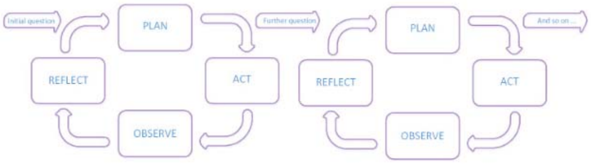

FIGURE 2: Continuation of the cycle

Cycle 2 of the school’s investigation into place picked up momentum when a faculty member introduced Jocelyn to Neil. The decisive step was that Neil then agreed to be the keynote speaker at the regional February conference in 2016. His talks provided clear motivation for faculty to look at what they were doing, as a school and as individual practitioners, and provided the impetus for the group to investigate changing its practice.

Reflecting:

Faculty member introduced Jocelyn to Neil; we held a series of skyped discussions on sense of place (June 2015). These extended, exploratory conversations allowed the two of us to get to know each other, and to identify and then explore common interests, values, and concerns. What became clear over a short period of time was our mutual interest in the importance of 'place' in pedagogy[4] and the significance of establishing this link to place in childhood. The conversation widened to take in pedagogical approaches which help establish a connection to place and others which hinder it (Gruenewald, 2013; Kornberger, 2016; Malone, 2012).

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[3] Kuleana can be described briefly as “responsibility.”

Planning:
Jocelyn discussed the idea of using sense of place as a theme with the school's leadership group (August 2015) and of having Neil as the keynote speaker for the annual Pacific Rim Waldorf conference to be held in Hawai'i in order to gauge their support for this idea. The conference organizers decided that all workshop presenters would develop a field trip that connected to their workshop in order for participants to have a direct experience with the land.

Acting:
The conference was held in Hawai'i (Feb 2016), where participants listened to Neil's keynote talks, took part in artistic activities, attended workshops, and went on field studies all connected to the theme of the day's keynote and to place. As an integral part of the conference, all participants responded artistically to the day's work by working with pastels. Participants consistently remarked on the "flow" and "breath" of the conference that the art and field trips provided.

Observing:
Jocelyn observed faculty in terms of what curricular changes were made after the conference, and faculty observed each other (Spring 2016). Again, we posed the question: Did consciously expressing our values regarding place impact faculty practice?

In Cycle 3 we initiated a formal research discussion between us, including a written reflection two months after the conference and another audit prep session four months after the conference. The purpose of gathering teachers' reflections at these stages was to look consciously into the process that teachers go through when reconsidering the values they bring to their own practices.

Reflecting:
Jocelyn asked teachers to write their reflections two months after the conference as to what still seemed significant to them in April 2016, and then again in June 2016; teachers also shared their experiences in conversation with their colleagues and observed how others were beginning to make attitudinal or curricular changes. This was an opportunity for teachers to actively learn from each other as they explored how place could come into the curriculum.

Planning:
(Mar 2016) Jocelyn and Neil developed the format for conducting an audit of the school's curriculum in August 2016. We hoped that providing a formal opportunity for faculty to reflect on their actions together would serve as the basis for stimulating action toward change as they saw how some of their peers were actively engaging with an effort to rework the curriculum.

Acting:
Neil returned to HWS to lead an audit of the curriculum focusing on place (Aug 2016). This happened over the course of three days. Neil led a mixture of plenum sessions and work in small groups, often subject- or sector-based. Questions he asked included:

- What in the school and in the teaching connects students to the place where they live, what disconnects? How does this differ by sector (early childhood/primary/secondary)?

- How are cultures represented in the school? What is the hidden curriculum within the teaching plan? Do teachers want to work with this?

- With which communities does the school engage? Which does it not engage with? How is it seen in the local and wider community?

- Can we identify 'low-hanging fruit' which can profitably be addressed first?

Following service work at Kanewai Spring, Jocelyn led the grades teachers (1-8) in a meditative meeting there and also made arrangements for a traditional weaving workshop using coconut fronds (see figure 8 below). This was based on the idea that teachers who have taken part in and are comfortable with Hawaiian culturally-based experiences would be much more likely to offer such experiences to their children.

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[4] "Place-based education might be characterized as the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place. […] Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become a part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it" (Lane-Zucker, 2004, Foreword).

Observing:
Jocelyn observed faculty implement changes in their curriculum based on the audit, and faculty learned from each other how they might continue to work with this topic of place (Fall 2016). The social construction and evaluation of values in action were key elements to teachers learning from each other and provided us with evidence that our values were having an effect on the faculty as teachers actively began adapting curriculum.

Findings

The findings below focus on the faculty voices expressing changes they had noticed in themselves or in their practice over a period of one year, especially around notions of place and belonging, following the February 2016 conference with Neil as keynote speaker. They exemplify a community learning together, learning from each other, and actively working with the values that we introduced.

In recalling the conference two months after it had happened, the primary theme expressed was that Hawai‘i is unique both as a place and in its identity. Three principal motifs emerged within this theme:

- connecting to our place and to the Hawaiian culture

- providing a mirror to our children that includes our environment—the animals, plants, trees, etc. around them

- acknowledging the many cultures within Hawai‘i

Important ideas that teachers retained included (in their own words):

- “The idea that children should be reflected in the images in the environment around them”

- “To seek the knowledge and wisdom of the place where we are and infuse ourselves and the curriculum with that”

- “Hawai‘i’s position in the Pacific, and the relationship between Hawai‘i, anthroposophy, and the culture of the Hawaiian peoples”

- “The place and communities are of great interest to me, coming from Indigenous roots myself and being a Waldorf teacher—I love Waldorf education but have a hard time when the communities they are in are not reflected back to the people. I have been very aware—painfully aware of this for a very, very long time”

The secondary theme that emerged was formulated in the question, How do we take action as teachers? Here we tried to observe whether any of the values that we stressed had an effect. The teachers wished to put ideas into action. Some of the suggestions were what we had expected—using local geography, stories, plants, and animals. But other suggestions were indicative of the inner work which is a key part of the work of Waldorf teachers, and the basis for a lived spirituality. Teachers stated that they needed to question why they do what they do, and they needed to work on themselves—on their own perceptions and reflections. This is the work critical to unlocking the hidden curriculum.

- “I really try to decipher the hidden curriculum, to question why we do things—how it serves the children. I’d like it to help me help my colleagues to work together for a better understanding of the timelessness and relevance of the core aspects of the education—once I have better clues as to what those really are.”

- “Each one of us has the power to make a difference in the world—through lifestyle choices, through attitude adjustments (getting rid of a colonial mindset), and through social and political engagement with the world. As a teacher I can use the Waldorf school curriculum to change the world—one child at a time. However, first I must change myself to live what I want to teach.”

- “To not simply repeat or regurgitate Waldorf dogma but to make these teaching experiences our own and come to an individualized understanding of teaching the content. We promote (as educators) critical thinking skills of our students. So we then, too, must be critical thinkers. This is where the freedom is found.”

- “I feel the major issue that stops us from growth, transformation, and renewal is a clinging to the old, traditional dogma that doesn’t serve anything except some warped ego.”

- “I could not separate the place from the communities around—to Native peoples these two are especially intertwined—there is not one without the other.”

Within two months of the conference, a number of teachers had already taken action primarily focused on incorporating a sense of place into their teaching. They told stories that included Hawaiian culture, Hawaiian animals, and Hawaiian plants. They also actively looked at the plants, animals, and insects on campus, and planted kalo (taro).

- "To transform many archetypal stories and use the Hawaiian resources and actual places, using more material from nature."

- "I am really working with the images, people and stories of this place creatively. For example I made a story about Mango Menehune. Menehune are little people of legends here, and mangos grow here. I made up puppets for the story and a song. I have really enjoyed this work."

It is important to note that when asked which of the three conference focus areas were relevant and which needed more focus, the concept of time stood out almost equally to the concept of place. Indeed, for some of the teachers it was quite difficult to separate place, time, and community; it became clear that, like the nature of the curriculum we teach, these three areas are integrated. The anthroposophical perspective is that children choose this place to incarnate as human beings, as well as this time and the communities in this place (Steiner, 1919a).

Hawaiʻi's sense of place reflects the often deep relationship that residents have with their environment, describing this relationship as one would describe a relationship with a loved one.

- "All of them are absolutely important! They all assist the students with a better understanding of their identity and purpose in life. It is imperative that what we teach is consistent with where we are."

- "All are relevant: what are we doing to turn off the community around us? How can we show what we are doing is relevant for today? How can we incorporate the spirit and essence of this place into our work, our mission, our kuleana [responsibility]?"

- "We are gardening with the children and exploring natural resources. Will these resources be here next year? How can we live so that everyone, everywhere can live as well as we do, even into the future?"

Other teachers did not feel called upon to immerse themselves into the Hawaiian culture, and had not yet taken any steps to integrate the conference themes; however, when asked about their thoughts regarding why we do what we do, they responded positively.

- "I love the idea of questioning (then studying) why we do what we do. This has made a willingness to be open to new Waldorf ideas more pronounced. I will hope that it helps us all to come to our own connections with our work."

In June 2016, four months after the conference, Jocelyn led the faculty in a prep session for the audit that was to come in August. A series of questions was developed by Neil and reviewed by Jocelyn, with teachers answering some of them individually and others through group discussions. Individually, two thirds of the faculty stated that they related to the following statement posed by Neil:

> The teacher needs to feel free to explore the spiritual foundations of the curriculum day by day, to put it into practice according to his or her insight. If this path does not happen, the curriculum first becomes a worn-out path, then tradition, and finally a mere list of norms which have to be adhered to. (Denjean, 2014, p. 20)

They recognized that if they did not make the curriculum their own, or if they implemented curriculum as a tradition or a "supposed to" rather than as well-thought-out instruction, meaning was lost, both for themselves and for the students.

The majority of teachers felt the freedom to implement the curriculum as they wished, but some believed there was not enough specificity regarding what exactly must be taught. Others thought that there was not enough deep consideration of the spiritual foundations. A few teachers thought that things were just fine. At the counter-pole, at least one teacher expressed the opinion that we projected a worn-out path to the community and were hanging onto other traditions that were no longer relevant (i.e., St. Nicholas celebration). Another felt we have no basis for even knowing what path we are on.

- "As a school, we don't share enough of what we do to know if the curriculum is actively taken up or if it is just seen as norms we adhere to."

- “The curriculum content for teachers is clear, but the inner work and reflection are not. Perhaps this is why so few people can pursue this path daily. Active spiritual work and sharing with the support of older, wiser colleagues would help everyone. I worked from tradition.”

- “I would like to believe that I open up to see what the children are showing me they need from each lesson I bring. I sometimes feel bound or that I am rogue against the school’s ‘traditions.’ Because of the work, I sometimes rely on ‘worn-out paths’ of what I did the first time [I took a class] through [a cycle of eight years] or a colleague’s suggestion but it usually morphs into what is needed. The school has a clear list of norms and traditions that sometimes feels stifling.”

- "Freedom without form is not healthy or balanced. For this statement to be complete and balanced I think there must be some mention of form. Otherwise we become lazy and use the statement ‘I am spiritual’ to defend our actions. … I often feel that it is this over-dependence on saying that one is working out of a spiritual foundation that leads to this worn-out path. I see it as often those who consider themselves hard-core anthroposophists that tend to say things like “that’s not Waldorf” and so keep us from transforming.”

- “I think that many of us are on the worn-out path saying, “This is how we do it and how it’s done here.” Some people push, but most seem to want to remain comfortable. Do what’s been done before. I think we are sometimes rigid in what year we do what. The rigidity gives us security without having to think.”

- “I believe that in this school there is deep awareness of the spiritual foundation of our work and that we are sincerely striving to manifest it.”

- “I’m not sure how to explore the spiritual foundations of the curriculum day by day but I do try to explore this and give it mindfulness and attention when I am planning for the week, but day by day I’m not quite sure about how to penetrate that fully.”

- “I feel I am allowed the freedom with my curriculum to implement as I choose. I feel our school does lack accountability for teaching specific topics that are agreed upon to cover. Sometimes, with too much freedom and no accountability, we can become less than we should be.”

The quotations cited above indicate the marked range of opinions present in the faculty regarding their satisfaction with the curriculum. A frequently-cited reason for those who are discontent was time—there was not enough time to plan, to reconsider curriculum, or to discuss curriculum with colleagues. Others felt that they were being judged by their colleagues when they tried something new. And a couple of teachers were very content in their own personal freedom.

- “I am finding my way in this regard. I cannot speak as to where my colleagues are, nor where our school is. I could deepen my work with more time for personal expression and experience and development of my program and fewer hats to wear.”

- “I would like to spend time planning using the school’s curriculum guide yet not feel judged by others as I take risks in new areas. It is difficult to try new things with criticism or self-doubt that I’m on the right path. I like bringing ideas to the group to be worked on together but colleagues often feel threatened by looking at ideas outside of the box. Give each person a chance to heal and grow without pre-conceived notions or cultural restrictions. Strong, clear, direct meeting facilitator with no ego but lots of support.”

- “I really appreciate the freedom though I usually talk it over with those in the art department to talk it through and get input (which is usually positive and adds depth). I don’t really want to change it. I think my colleagues feel the same way.”

When Jocelyn asked whether the school was “monocultural, Eurocentric, middle class/privileged, disinterested in others, unconsciously arrogant, and guardians of the truth” (Boland, 2015, p. 195), responses were mixed. Groups of faculty stated that school traditions are Eurocentric and others cited a list of multicultural events at the school to demonstrate that the school was not Eurocentric, though having non-European events does not in itself negate the possibility of Eurocentrism. Teachers provided examples of being unconsciously arrogant or ‘guardians of truth,’ and others felt that we were open to learning from others. Some felt that being disinterested in others is an institutional characteristic for all schools rather than a Waldorf tendency, and a lack of diversity was also recognized. Part of the value of this process was to highlight myths and judgements that are prevalent in the school, often unspoken but nonetheless present:

- “He’s not Waldorf trained, you know...” (unconscious arrogance)

- “Steiner’s anthroposophy and the ‘Christ impulse’ is perceived by many as Eurocentric or exclusive but this was not his intent or understanding at all... this misunderstanding is at the CORE of the ‘Eurocentric’ misunderstanding.”

- “Explore colonialism and what it does to the mind” (teacher: non-local; student: local)

- “Guardians of truth—‘college of teachers’ attitude”

- “Unconsciously arrogant/rely[ing] on tradition” – especially in regards to the length of time a teacher remains with a single class.

One group focused more on the positive expressions of these myths: There are “values and deficits to tradition”; “We struggle with collaborative work”; “We agreed with about 50% of the list”; “We are open to learning from others”; and “We are not Eurocentric—May Day, hula, Salsa Night, Japanese, Spanish.” Interestingly, the Hawaiian version of May Day, and Spanish language and culture are not seen as European. Whether or not these many cultural activities are “additive”, “recognitive,” or “redistributive” has not yet been questioned or discussed by the school (Raghavan, 2018). Has the school in fact “ceded” curricular “power” by giving precious curricular space to a host of cultural perspectives taught by native participants of those cultures? Where is the line between “recognitive” and “redistributive”? Does the line come through explicit discussion or is implicit presentation “sufficient”? This may be the next avenue of exploration.

> [F]or some of the teachers it was quite difficult to separate place, time, and community; it became clear that, like the nature of the curriculum we teach, these three areas are integrated.

The biggest hindrance cited that prevents the school from being the school it could be was the lack of collegial understanding:

- “Lack of harmony. We do not understand each other. Difficulty making decisions”

- “Need sharing/dialogue/collaboration to deepen community and relationships”

- “Cannot transcend disharmony without time to share and develop interest in each other”

- “Biography work needed”

- The need to “work as a We, not as a group of individuals” was also cited.

These hindrances point to one of the most common Waldorf school conundrums—that having teachers involved so deeply in school administration requires a significant amount of time that takes away from time preparing for one’s classes. (Waldorf schools are traditionally governed by the teachers themselves as a republican body. This means that on top of a typical teacher’s work of preparing for classes, they must also spend time meeting in committees to plan faculty evaluations, hire teachers, consider the state of the buildings and grounds, discuss marketing ideas, etc.) The same is true for spending time getting to know each other’s gifts and biographies so that harmonious working is more possible. We must work to understand who we are, learn how to work together and to resolve conflicts. A “lack of harmony” points to the possibility that the teachers were not actively working with the value of aloha as something they needed to engage in as colleagues.

Ultimately, in preparing for the August audit, teachers were grateful for the opportunity to reflect on these questions. Statements included that the process allowed them to stand in the shoes of their peers and “look at our community through the eyes of our colleagues,” and to “change the impulse behind our curriculum choices.” They asked for more time to continue discussing the issues that surfaced and for help in knowing how to move forward with the thoughts and questions that had been set in motion. The longer teachers worked with the questions, the deeper was the thought and the greater the engagement with answers. Jocelyn and Neil felt encouraged that the values they had introduced were producing significant discussion and change.

- “Such a huge process! Much more time needed! So many new ideas generated from each discussion—which would have been wonderful to follow up on. Certainly underscores the importance of conversation and dialogue with colleagues. This should be an integral part of all faculty meetings—true sharing rather than problem solving."

- "Great thought-provoking questions that need to be asked from time to time in the course of any Waldorf teacher's career."
- "Love the process, it feels raw and thoughtful. I especially like that it's not all 'surfacey' and 'flowery.' (We've gone in that direction before and got nowhere.)"
- "I'd like to emphasize the merging that is happening among many fields of thought, research, knowledge in the world into a stream or flow that sees the human being as a verb (as they like to say) and not a noun. A consciousness in evolution. A whole identity."

The question that arose in many ways was, *What does it mean to be a Waldorf school*? This might be one of the guides for unlocking the hidden curriculum.

- "What makes Waldorf Waldorf without all of the little 'doo dads' and 'rituals' of Waldorf?"
- "We need a conversation on what it means to be a Waldorf school. What does it mean to be a Waldorf teacher? What does it mean to be Waldorf?"

Discussion

Three main themes surfaced for us in the findings. They reflect where the faculty finds itself, a full year after the conference that challenged the faculty's thinking, and they center on the following statements and questions:

Theme 1:
Hawai'i is a unique place with a unique identity. How do we connect children to their rich environment?

Theme 2:
Inner work is needed by each teacher not only to develop one's own sense of place, but to (re)inhabit one's own surroundings—a process which requires faculty to question why they do what they do.

Theme 3:
What does it mean for the Honolulu Waldorf School to teach a curriculum that arises out of the landscape and peoples of Hawai'i? HWS must identify for itself what a Waldorf school in Hawai'i should look like as opposed to offering a European-based curriculum outlined in 1919.

These three themes were developed and deepened within each research cycle as teachers continued to reflect on the topic of place, as discussions continued on the topic, and as they watched each other adjust their curricula. It is notable that, throughout this process, the faculty recognized and accepted the responsibility to teach as *action researchers*—they clearly dislike the notion of dogma, and they respect and accept the idea of questioning why they do what they do. They believe that when they don't take on the role of action researcher as strongly as they could, and when they don't question the use of someone else's material, it is primarily due to time limitations.

> The big realization of the faculty was that "living aloha" is not something we can simply tell the students to do. The entire faculty, indeed the community, must strive to live aloha and model this value for students if we hope to be a place of inclusion and diversity.

The school's work with Kanewai Spring is a prime example of the development of Theme 1 in terms of engaging more closely with aspects of Hawaiian identity and love of the land. In Cycle 1, the faculty went to Kanewai Spring near the school to learn about the water system in the area and to do a service project together. Cycle 2 provided faculty with pedagogical reasoning to consider place and the opportunity to brainstorm on how place could be included in the curriculum. By the end of Cycle 3, five classes from the grade school were visiting the spring and doing service/community work there, while the early childhood department wrote an elaborate puppet show incorporating music for their students about the story of the spring. Members of the public were invited to the three performances of this show at the school's *Waldorfaire*. The puppet show was showcased on a morning news show and people from the area recognized the story of Kanewai Spring.

Theme 2, acknowledging the inner work and questioning what a Waldorf teacher must undertake, emerged during Cycle 2 and deepened through Cycle 3 with exploration of the curriculum as a “worn-out path” and through reflection on question whether our teaching was purist, accommodationist, or evolutionary (see Oberman, 2008).[5] The faculty acknowledged that it is through questioning that we—and our curriculum—evolve; this is a major tenet of lived spirituality. Neil explicitly presented the idea of teaching as a dogmatic purist, accommodationist, or as evolutionary in Cycle 3. It is a question that all Waldorf teachers must grapple with. When the delegates of the Southern California/Hawaii region of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) gathered in February 2017, the group struggled with the issue of preparing new Waldorf teachers in order that they understand and value the central importance of self-development (personal communications, February 21-17, Southern California-Hawaii AWSNA Delegates’ Meeting).

Theme 3 brings together talk and preparation with implementation. Exactly what makes a school “Waldorf” and, specifically, what does that look like in Honolulu? A question that explicitly arose during Cycle 3 and that continues to live today is the debate whether the offering of eurythmy, a form of movement created by Steiner, makes HWS a Waldorf school, or whether the Hawaiian practice of hula could also satisfy part of the movement necessary for children’s health in a Waldorf school. Nationally, AWSNA has taken the position that eurythmy is a defining aspect of a Waldorf school. AWSNA proposed that eurythmy be specifically identified as a subject that accredited Waldorf schools strive to offer (Draft Path to Membership, Principle 3). During discussions on this topic, Hawai‘i’s Waldorf schools questioned this position, acknowledging that in hula there is an ancient art of movement arising from the Hawaiian culture and that this is a subject that all Hawaiian Waldorf schools already offer.

We recognize that the data, findings, and discussion offered in this paper reflect an unfinished study of change happening at the Honolulu Waldorf School. However, we believe that they provide evidence for our living educational theory that (re)inhabiting place in the school’s curriculum starts with the faculty, and that it is an expression of lived spirituality. Further, an area that has not sufficiently been addressed by the faculty are the myths of Waldorf education. This would be a rich area for further exploration, and would help particularly with Theme 3 regarding the identity of the school. What also needs further work in the area of Theme 2 with its focus on questioning one’s teaching practices is the process of becoming a mature teacher; this means moving from operating as a dogmatic purist when one is new to the practice of Waldorf education, through an accommodating phase, to blossoming as an evolutionary thinker. Similarly, the role of collegiality and aloha within the path of self-development is a huge area that needs further exploration.

Conclusion

The journey of Honolulu Waldorf School’s faculty has been one of discovery and engagement for the teachers and, equally, for us. Conversations held as a faculty, and actions taken by departments show that over the past few years, and particularly since the conference and post-conference work with Neil, the faculty has succeeded in deepening its thinking about the Eurocentrism of the curriculum that it offers, as well as taking action to develop and explore what education in a Hawaiian Waldorf school might look like. In February of 2017, twelve months after Neil challenged the faculty to examine its curriculum, the high school faculty decided not to attend the regional February conference that was titled, “Nourishing Self, Nourishing Soul.” Instead, the high school faculty created its own mini-conference that continued to focus on place-based and project-based education. They wanted to focus on their own experience as a resource for answering questions about how to incorporate place and to (re)inhabit where they live, and continue to process concepts and ideas which had begun to develop and form during the previous twelve months. The participants’ time together included a day’s field trip to the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, an organization that states as its vision “a future where all people understand and celebrate Hawai‘i’s cultural heritage and natural history, and use that knowledge to inspire the future" (Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, 2017). They also reviewed every course offered at the high school and discussed how a sense of place might be included—or is already included—within each. For the 2017-18 school year, participants discussed the addition of a place-based class to the curriculum. As of this writing, that has not yet occurred, though it could be argued that currently there is more consciousness of bringing place into existing classes.

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[5] Oberman (2008) identifies three characteristics of Waldorf schools as they develop:

> **Purist –** keeping to the given path, being ‘faithful’ to traditions and practices that have been built up over the decades – over-reliance on tradition that can lead to a perceived lack of flexibility and eventually to the danger of dogmatism.
>
> **Accommodationist –** developing hybrids between ‘Steiner’ methodologies and new pedagogical styles and language. Can lead to the creation of something not necessarily recognisable as education based on the work of Rudolf Steiner.
>
> **Evolutionist –** adapting to local situations, changed contexts, and a different century. Involves going back to the indications Steiner gave a century ago and seeing how they can be used in the twenty-first century in utterly different settings than originally given. Guidelines for this need developing.

Almost simultaneously, the lower school was working on articulating its social vision with the purpose of creating a culture that would discourage and ultimately eliminate the concept of bullying. There was a startling moment of recognition when the faculty recognized that what they were envisioning was the embodiment of aloha. They read the Hawai'i Revised Statute 5-7.5 on the "Aloha Spirit." It references such values as kindness, unity, pleasantness, humility, and patience and states:

> These are traits of character that express the charm, warmth and sincerity of Hawaii's people. It was the working philosophy of native Hawaiians and was presented as a gift to the people of Hawaiʻi. "Aloha" is more than a word of greeting or farewell or a salutation. "Aloha" means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. "Aloha" is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. "Aloha" means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable. (University of Hawaiʻi, n.d.)

The big realization of the faculty was that "living aloha" is not something we can simply tell the students to do. The entire faculty, indeed the community, must strive to live aloha and model this value for students if we hope to be a place of inclusion and diversity. This realization that as a faculty we were working towards a deeper embodiment of aloha reinforced the awareness of the significant steps we have taken as a diverse group of teachers towards becoming more of a Waldorf school that celebrates and values the Hawaiian culture, rather than solely a Waldorf school located in Hawaiʻi.

In April of 2017, a group of faculty discussed further expansion to this social vision of aloha for the school to include the words of Kumu Hina Wong, a transgender teacher of hula who describes herself and some of her students as "in the middle" (Hamer & Wilson 2015). This pledge provides an Indigenous perspective to the question that founded Waldorf education: What kind of education is necessary for children so that they do not think that war is the answer to conflict? (Steiner, 1919a). It also provides a compelling reminder that frequently the answers we seek are literally in our own backyard. Aloha is life-affirming, as is (re)inhabitation for all colonized territories as well as urban ones:

> I believe that every person has a role in society, and deserves to be included, and treated with respect in their family, school, and community.
>
> I believe that every person should be free to express what is truly in their heart and mind, whether male, female, or in the middle.
>
> I believe that every person should be able to practice their cultural traditions, and to
>
> know and perpetuate the wisdom of their ancestors for future generations.
>
> I believe these values are embodied in aloha: love, honor, and respect for all.
>
> Therefore I pledge to live aloha in everything I do, and to inspire people of all ages to do the same.
> (Hina, 2015)

In June of 2017 Jocelyn presented to the entire faculty a draft of this article and an opportunity to review their journey thus far. When asked if the article was a "hit" or a "miss" in representing the school's journey, 88% percent felt the article accurately represented the school's journey. One person felt it was a "miss" and that we were still presenting dogma, while another single person felt the article was both hit and miss. The idea that seemed to stand out for many of the faculty was of the issue of cultural colonization through the representation and promotion of non-Hawaiian forms and ideals; the possibility

[A]t least one teacher expressed the opinion that we projected a worn-out path to the community and were hanging on to other traditions that were no longer relevant.

that the school might serve to a degree as a colonizing influence discomfited them.

Asked what they wanted to hear more about, the faculty expressed further interest in the concept of aloha as well as in practical applications and procedures for strengthening a sense of place within the curriculum. Teachers spoke to the group of something they had done to include a sense of place into their classrooms and/or teaching. Teachers also talked in groups about the ideas they heard that seemed most do-able as well as innovative. To conclude the reflection, a Hawaiian scholar took the faculty through an experience that showed that each person was already capable of establishing a personal relationship with the land around him or her. Responding to a strong faculty request, this scholar joined the faculty monthly through the 2017-18 school year and helped to foster conversation around the Hawaiian culture and the meaning of aloha. Through the year, the faculty also learned a chant that expressed five Hawaiian values included within the concept of aloha: kindness, unity through harmony, pleasantness, humility, and patience expressed through perseverance. The faculty committed the chant to memory and discussed how these values could help move the school forward. Further discussion proceeded in subgroups that represented each of the five values based on which value group members felt was most important to the school. The result was a fairly even representation within each value, suggesting the basis for generating action steps in each area.

Jocelyn also brought the concept of aloha to the 2018 AWSNA conference focused on social justice. Kumu Hina’s Pledge of Aloha was read aloud to all the delegates of the Southern-California region. Jocelyn then led the entire AWSNA delegation in the aloha chant as an indigenous value-based statement supporting social justice through Waldorf education in America. The Pledge of Aloha and the chant were also shared in the conference workshop led by Jocelyn, as was the story of Honolulu Waldorf School’s journey toward the incorporation of place in its curriculum.

In July of 2018, the HWS administration has begun discussions on operationalizing a culture of aloha within our school community. Initial considerations include signage that explains aloha and the expectations associated with “living aloha,” as well as a three-year plan of strengthening aloha within the school community. The first task will be to assign an aloha related theme to the annual fund campaign such as “Growing Through Aloha.”

As we have begun to publish various pieces about our efforts to counter aspects of Eurocentrism in Waldorf education and to decolonize Waldorf education, we join leaders around the world who are calling for a similar reflection. Honolulu Waldorf School looks forward to remaining an active player in this international dialogue, and in so doing, providing its students with an education that is more meaningful, more reflective of, and more thoughtful towards their own surroundings—an education that allows them to truly be at home as “homecomers” in their world.

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