RoSE
Research on Steiner Education

Volume 12 / Special issue
pp. 1-14

Hosted at www.rosejourn.com

Education for freedom for all? The relevance of contemporary theory to Steiner education

Neil Boland
Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Joaquin Muñoz
Augsburg University, USA

ABSTRACT. This article considers three current approaches to education for social justice: culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy and decolonisation. It is informed by the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Linda Tuhiwai Smith among others. It questions the degree to which Steiner education engages with and is informed by contemporary theoretical approaches. It asks in what ways Steiner education can benefit from these discourses and build on them in order to create anti-oppressive, decolonising approaches to Steiner education. It identifies areas of work which may more fruitfully be taken up by other authors, individual teachers and schools, nationally and internationally.

Keywords: social justice, critical education, culturally responsive pedagogy, decolonisation

Introduction

Education and the purposes of education have been stated and debated countless times over millennia. No one purpose has lasted more than a few decades and what characterises this debate is that every society works through the question of education anew, often it seems like once a generation (Beeby, 1988). On one level, it is curious that gains from one generation are rarely passed on intact to another, that the educational wheel appears to need constant reinvention. On another, it can be seen as not so much a reinvention as a constant task to adapt to changed circumstances and changed times. This paper asks if Steiner education is at such a moment, and if there are already existing approaches which may assist it in adapting to changed circumstances and changed times.

Specifically, we take three of these domains – cultural responsivity, critical pedagogy and decolonisation – and look at how they address themes and issues in contemporary society which have arisen in the past few decades. We characterise them with the intention to illustrate how such themes are addressed outside the realm of Steiner education and something of the depth and nuance of thought which has been developed; we then reflect on what these approaches can offer Steiner education as it addresses issues of the present day.

Background

In 1920, when Steiner education was beginning to be practised, Rudolf Steiner founded the Union for Anthroposophical College Work (Bamford, 2010). The members of this group were predominantly young,

interested in anthroposophy and involved in university study. They sought to deepen their university work with understandings gained through anthroposophy. To this end, a series of 'College courses' was organised, starting in the Goetheanum in 1920.

In order to deepen university work with anthroposophical understanding, Steiner said that,

> One would have to be armed with the ingenuity to wed absolutely clear crisp thinking with the intuitive sense that what flows through the steam of anthroposophy can truly bring to science what is needed. One must have the kind of holy fire that enables one to serve such an undertaking. (Sept 25, 1920, quoted in Steiner, 1922/2015, p. xiv)

Although Steiner was strongly behind this initiative, comments at the time and later indicate the presence of a view that such academic work was somehow not 'anthroposophical' and did not come from the same source. It is the beginning of an apparent rift discernible a hundred years later between anthroposophical traditionalists and 'activists' (see preface to Steiner, 1922/2015), between esotericists and academics. Steiner appeared to see no tension between these two, indeed he can be seen as a perfect example of this wedding of both, a role model of how to embody both academic rigour with anthroposophical insight.

In 1922, the College Course was held in Berlin, 6–11 March, attracting academics from a range of disciplines. The format of each day was similar. A lecture by Steiner on the anthroposophical approach or relation to a particular discipline was followed during the morning and sometimes afternoon by lectures on the same topic by experienced and academically trained anthroposophists. For instance, lectures on education were given by Dr Elizabeth von Baravalle, Dr W. J. Stein and Prof. Dr Schwebsch. Steiner's own lecture on education on 8 March, 1922 is relevant here in that, for an academic audience, he firmly links the anthroposophical approach to education to existing educational approaches, theories and theorists.

> In the area of pedagogy, anthroposophy does not wish to oppose in any way the pedagogical principles defined by the great educational theorists, especially during the nineteenth century. … It appreciates great educators as much as everyone else. (Steiner, 1922/2015, p. 48)

Over the last hundred years, we consider it fair to say that Steiner educators appear not to have linked their practice or approach to a significant degree to other "great educational theorists" and have tended to work in isolation from contemporary educational theory and educational science which has developed steadily since then (Ullrich, 1992).[1] This article is a modest attempt to address this lack.

Positionality statement

A convention more and more common in research writing is the positionality statement, important to support the reader in knowing the background of the author/s and, in doing so, indicate ways in which the author's positionality might affect their writing. Secules et al. (2021) go so far as to call it a "requirement for research quality…particularly when working on equity research" (p. 19).

Joaquin Muñoz is a tribal member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Tucson, Arizona, USA, and currently lives and works in Minneapolis, MN. He is an assistant professor of American Indian Studies and Education at Augsburg University. He came to Steiner Education through the research of his doctoral dissertation (Muñoz, 2016) which focused on Steiner education in the United States and Canada, and examined the similarities and differences of Steiner and Native American and Indigenous epistemologies.

Neil Boland lives in Auckland, New Zealand where he is senior lecturer in education at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and associate professor at the National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. He was born and brought up in Northeast England and is a white male. He has taught in Steiner settings at early childhood, primary, and secondary levels, as well as leading the undergraduate and graduate programmes in education at AUT. He works at an interface of Steiner education / anthroposophy and other pedagogies

1. Notable exceptions to this include publications such as Schieren (2016), but these are few and far between and frequently not in English.

and philosophies, and considers his understanding of education considerably enriched by both. Aside from Rudolf Steiner, his philosophic influences include Foucault, Deleuze and the critical pedagogy movement.

Our first contact began through email exchanges between ourselves and other teacher educators, and our initial discussions included examining aspects of the curriculum of Steiner education, with an eye towards questioning conventional approaches in pedagogy, as well as investigating critical approaches in education. Along with our collaborative efforts, our individual positionalities are critical to our approaches to research in the area of Steiner Waldorf education, critical pedagogy, and topics for equity and inclusion.

By articulating our positionalities, we acknowledge the ways our identities impact our reading and analysis, as well as placing limitations on our perspectives. In doing this, we also seek to clearly illustrate the importance of identifying oneself in research, in order to empower diverse viewpoints in research, to highlight our privilege and power, and to acknowledge subject identity as critical to understanding.

Themes in modern society

Questions in contemporary society today examine fundamental questions about the human being, the place of the human being in society, and the role of society in relation to the individual. Education researchers have acted as points of resistance to calls for the privatisation of schooling processes and for those which dehumanise students, and are engaging strongly to counter the social inequalities of racism, sexism and oppressive ideologies. The number of educators undertaking this work is consistently increasing, and new teachers are beginning to be versed in theoretical approaches such as critical race theory, feminist theory, and cultural studies. These approaches have become more salient in the realm of education as movements such as Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, #WaterIsLife and Extinction Rebellion have gained prominence in global discourses as well as forming the foci of protests and resistance worldwide. The presence and ubiquity of these topics in private, media and political discussions means that they are undoubtedly becoming topics for students and young people. Young people's thoughts about these topics thus lead us to ask: What responsibility, if any, do educators have to know and be informed by aspects of topics such as systemic racism, sexism, and economic and political oppression? To what degree do educators need to have worked with and through these discourses in order for this knowledge to inform their teaching for social justice?

To explore these questions, we take three approaches to social justice which have arisen during the course of the twentieth century and are still in the process of development. They are culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy and education for decolonisation.

Recent critical approaches in the education pantheon

For reasons of space, we cannot go into these approaches in detail but hope that what we write below serves to characterise each overall field. For those readers familiar with Steiner education, we ask that you read what follows with Steiner education in mind, to see if and how any of the points and questions raised here find response in Steiner practice or thought, and if and how the points raised have merit if applied to Steiner education. This will be discussed in the next section.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

A critical issue for educators today is the relationship of teaching, learning and schools and equity. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) offers one approach for schools to teach and support equity practices in schools. Because marginalised students often experience education where "invisibility is the norm" (Cammarota, 2006, p. 3), a culturally responsive approach is necessary

> For so-called minority children, especially in the contemporary social context, educational resources and opportunities must include integrating their language and cultural experiences into the social and intellectual fabric of schools, much as these have always been seamlessly integrated into the education of privileged White children. (Moll, 2010, p. 454)

Historically, education can be problematised for its construction and reification of particular identities. Educational institutions create social constructions of "the body as object and target of power" (Foucault, 1975/2019, p. 136). The individual as an object has produced the perspective of the student as an empty vessel, by which the "banking conception" of education to fill "the students with the contents of his narration" (Freire, 1994/2016, p. 71) emerges. Frequently, this narration is embedded within the dominant narrative which is constructed from a mythology of Western–White–European ideals and sensibilities that have occupied the curricular centre of education (Baines et al., 2018). Education is a conduit and constructor by which culture, politics and power shape everyday life (Giroux, 2000), creating a conception of the normal, of common sense, as a function of white/European ideals.

Initially conceptualised as a response to the needs of African-American children, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy supports the development of curriculum and pedagogy for many populations of students, including Latinx youth (Acosta, 2007; Acosta & Mir, 2012; Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), Native American students (Brayboy, 2005; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) as well as Māori and Pasifik peoples (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2018).

Fundamentally, culturally responsive teachers highlight the task of education as enacting "social change" through pedagogy which addresses the "problems of public life" (Giroux, 2006, p. 4). This is similar to the aim of Steiner education expounded at the beginning of the *First Teachers' Course* (Steiner, 1919/2020). In theorising the need for educational stances which highlight equity and social change, Ladson-Billings identified several components of an effective pedagogy, including the incorporation of students' home cultures as a means to support their learning and the recognition of historic injustices in need of remedy.

In our conceptualising of CRP, we draw on the work of Ladson-Billings (1995 a; 1995b), Geneva Gay (2002) as well as critical pedagogues (Giroux, 2000, 2006) and liberation pedagogy (Freire, 1968/2011) as foundational to our understanding. We take four key components that comprise a CRP experience, in addition to the significance of student's lived experience, history and culture in the classroom experience (Krzyzosiak & Stewart, 2019; Larson, 2018):

1. Academic success: Key to this academic development are knowledge and skills in all content areas "in order to be active participants in a democracy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). The emphasis on academic achievement is also central to resist discourses which follow cultural responsiveness initiatives, which are sometimes said to sacrifice rigour in favour of self-esteem (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

2. Cultural competency: Enacting a culturally responsive pedagogy challenges teachers to build spaces in classrooms that are affirming to diverse student experiences, especially when those students are culturally, linguistically and ethnically different from their teachers.

3. Cultural history knowledge: An essential component of CRP for teachers to possess as they engage with students is knowledge of student populations, and in particular, the "cultural characteristics and contributions… the cultural particularities" (Gay, 2002, p. 106) of different ethnic groups. Knowledge of alternative histories and factual information about students and their home cultures "is needed to make schooling more interesting and stimulating for, representative of, and responsive to ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

4. Sociopolitical consciousness: Giroux identifies schools as sites for "social and economic reproduction," (Giroux, 2000, p. 112), which maintain social inequities. Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies sociopolitical consciousness to engage students to "critique cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). A culturally responsive pedagogy conceptualises education as an institution for resistance, to support a commitment to democracy and to reject commodifying impulses.[2]

2. See Steiner's comments on the Waldorf School as "a means of reforming, of revolutionizing, education" (1919/2020, p. 16).

It is worthwhile to reflect to what degree ideas like this are found or form the basis of pedagogical approaches in Steiner settings.

These tenets of CRP seek to create education as the true "great equalizer" (Katz, quoted in Rist, 1973, p. 2) and to actively work against inequalities that "challenge the education of students along various indicators: poor students faring worse than their more affluent counterparts; white students performing better than students of color and others" (Muñoz, 2016, p. 59).

CRP offers a number of responses to questions raised in critical education work, including responses to inequity and injustice wrought by racism, sexism and oppression. CRP also develops learning and educational environments which centralise humanising processes and approaches for students, resisting neoliberal education reforms that reduce students to matriculated digits through the "neurotic comparison of statistical evidence" (Facer, 2011, p. 21). CRP teachers practice humanising work that uplifts the experiences of minoritised groups, offering up schooling spaces as potential sites for healing.

> Culturally responsive pedagogy can construct generative sites for youth of color, Indigenous students, and other minoritized youth, because power is examined and critiqued, especially in considering students "whose language and cultural experiences [do not] count... and… must remain in the periphery." (Moll, 2010, p. 454)

CRP is often cited or enacted in spaces with marginalised youth, assuming it to be a direct method to support only those students; however, CRP is a critically important approach for all students, and is a necessary one to help White/European-descent students recognise the genius of black and brown peoples (Muhammad, 2020). CRP can become a site for critical and equity-minded learning for all students.

The New Zealand Māori academic, Georgina Tuari Stewart, has published strong critique of culturally responsive pedagogy (Krzyzosiak & Stewart, 2019; 2018; 2020) in a New Zealand context. Her view is that CRP by itself cannot undo systemic inequities which have been established over years in New Zealand. Since 1984, teachers in New Zealand have been tasked by policy makers with remedying the educational under-attainment of minority groups (specifically Māori and people of Pasifik descent), while the greater societal and macroeconomic issues remain unaddressed, so hamstringing teachers. Stewart and others call for disruptive approaches to be adopted which are allied more to critical theory (see following section) before culturally responsive pedagogies can begin to take effect. In short, CRP can become an ineffective, surface-level panacea which ends up laying blame at the feet of teachers for not 'solving' the under-attainment of minority groups, while policy makers avoid culpability.

Be this as it may, it is important to recognise that, like the other approaches discussed here, culturally relevant pedagogy represents both a method *and* a set of habits of mind that a teacher must embody in order to practise the method. One of the most critical misuses of CRP has been in failing to enact all of the constituent components of its action. While many teachers will profess the belief in high standards for students of colour and minorities, and some may venture to learn and develop *cultural competence* of the identities represented in the classroom, many teachers are either unable, or reluctant to engage the *sociopolitical consciousness* that is necessary, to "take learning beyond the confines of the classroom…to identify, analyze and solve *real world problems*" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75, italics added). CRP is an approach, and a habit of mind, which requires a recognition and acknowledgement of the real world problems young people encounter, including the ones we may want to ignore and avoid, like racism, sexism, cultural invisibility, income inequality and climate injustice. CRP implores teachers to engage in "not-on-my-watch pedagogy" (Baines et al., 2018, p. 126) to identify and rectify oppression. It requires a willingness to recognise the challenges and concerns of all students, and a willingness to confront ourselves when these challenges are to the normalcy we may help engender and which may well be advantageous for social groups we represent. In this way, we disrupt oppressive processes that negatively impact our students' lives.

Critical Pedagogy

Another contemporary response to issues of inequity in schools and education is the work of critical educators, emerging from the intersections of critical theory and pedagogy; this includes elements of critical

race theory (Delgado & Delgado, 2017), tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005), and similar approaches. Fundamental to these approaches is the question and critique of power, with a central focus on power dynamics to the functioning of institutions and a deep consideration of how power shapes assumptions of the nature of reality. In critical theory, "the immediate world of fact, the experiences of the senses, and even the given-ness of nature itself are not to be treated as if they were ahistorical and autonomous entities" (Harvey, 1990, p. 3). Critical theory seeks to question, and to cause institutions to question, the nature of their standpoints through an examination and critique of power as related to social position, axiology, ontology and epistemology (Walter & Andersen, 2013). In examining these standpoints, participants in institutions (and institutional organs themselves) can "critique existing affairs" in order to reconsider "social and material processes" (Harvey, 1990, p. 3).

In examining the operation of institutions, attention needs to be given to the ways in which institutions can produce control. Institutions like schools enact beliefs that align with power structures and status quo perspectives, which almost always disadvantage people of colour, women and other minoritised groups. Critical pedagogy attempts to critique and question the actions and mind-sets students are exposed to and then carry with them upon leaving school. Critical pedagogues attempt to denaturalise aspects of schooling, teaching and learning which, at first look, appear to be part of the normal function of schools, but turn out to be dehumanising processes for youth.

It is fascinating to view the history and development of the Steiner movement through this lens and to gauge the distribution of power in Steiner contexts. Steiner education arose out of the movement for social renewal (Steiner, 1919/1999) which seeks to renew society on egalitarian bases. Steiner education can here be critiqued by critical theorists to see the degree in practice to which it instead upholds, or fails to challenge, existing power inequities.

Critical scholars have examined schools and critical pedagogical practices related to schooling and literacy (Freire, 1968/2011, 1994/2016). Other scholars have critically explored implementation processes of educational policy, and examined the implications for the school, the teacher and the student (Giroux, 2000, 2006). Central to this work, and directly pertinent to Steiner education theory and practice, is the continued development of critical pedagogy practices which seek to uncover and undo biases, stereotypes and preconceived notions that essentialise and harm minoritised children and youth, those perceived as 'other'. Critical pedagogies seek to develop school spaces that support all students, focusing on the holistic development of individual capacities of students, while also challenging and critiquing unjust systems and institutions. Previous work examining the outcomes of Steiner education for students demonstrates a potential congruence with the aims of critical pedagogy and Steiner education (Boland, 2015; Muñoz, 2016).

Critical theory and critical pedagogy profess a number of key principles frequently applied in schooling domains. One primary concern is the presence and practice of democracy in society. The democracy articulated by critical pedagogues is one that is actively oriented towards justice, and is aimed at the well-being of society as a whole and of all its members. Critical pedagogy assumes that education is fundamental to a well-functioning democracy, and that a democracy cannot survive without a populace educated in critical ways of thought and action.

A second important aspect of critical pedagogy is an attempt to identify and oppose the so-called 'common sense' assumptions embedded within schooling and teaching practices (Kumashiro, 2015). These assumptions apply to epistemology, practice and content in the classroom. 'Common-sense' epistemology (i.e. the banking model of education), teacher practice (rules, disciplinary action, pedagogy) and content (i.e. that disciplines such as history, science, English are thought of as siloed) frequently disguise a particular cultural construction of these elements and articulate an unquestioned 'common sense' that is, in fact, embedded in a white/European cultural framework and presents itself as *acultural* knowledge. It serves to transmit a particular cultural view that "reproduces and legitimizes the dominant culture" (Giroux, 2011, p. 19). It would be worthwhile for all Steiner settings to audit what cultural knowledge they promote (and do not promote/silence) and what social constructions are endorsed.

A third principle is a recognition of the notion that neutrality in these issues is not possible. Teachers cannot remove themselves to an objective state, or be impartial or neutral in any situation, most especially situations which centre on issues of equity. Teaching is "always broadly political and interventionist in terms of the knowledge-effects it produces, the classroom experiences it organizes, and the future it presupposes" (Giroux, 2007, p. 2). Scholars of critical theory reject the notion that schools are designed as unbiased structures, but actually act as institutions of social and cultural reproduction, often without a critique of power in place (Giroux, 1997, p. 71). Thus, teachers must critically examine themselves and reject the notion of lacking bias or being impartial. This can be confrontational. The teacher must embrace both known and potential biases and impartialities, to prevent enacting pedagogy detrimental to marginalised students, but also to prevent the transmission of these ideas to students from dominant groups as well.

As with the other approaches outlined here, the promise of critical pedagogy, with its intentional focus to "develop a consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, connect knowledge to power and agency…as part of a broader struggle for justice and democracy" (Giroux, 2011, p. 152) can be lost as a function of translation. The work of teaching, including in Steiner settings, is so multifaceted and complex, that simple, pragmatic solutions are often sought to solve classroom situations. While this is understandable, it is problematic for a number of reasons. Not only does this reify tenets of neoliberal discourse in schools (Muñoz, 2016) but also because it can do a disservice to powerful ideas of critical pedagogy. The tenets and practices of critical pedagogy cannot be packaged and sold like a curriculum or syllabus – critical pedagogy can never become a tick-box exercise. On the contrary, critical pedagogy practitioners would vehemently resist ideologies and practices which instrumentalise teaching and learning. The purpose of learning is to comprehend the world in its complexity and contradiction, with attention to "strengthening the imagination and expanding democratic public life" (Giroux, 2011, p. 152).

Decolonisation of and in schools and classrooms

A further development in contemporary progressive education is decolonisation, or decolonising. Decolonisation is rooted in a long history of resistance by Indigenous/original Peoples to imperial or dominating powers that changed the worlds of the original inhabitants across the world and impacted every domain of life. Imperialism, and its expression in colonisation, brought about fundamental changes in economic structures, but also created crucial changes to views of Indigenous Peoples, ushering in attempts at subjugation, including land theft, genocide, religious, cultural and linguistic oppression, enslavement and internment. The process of colonisation altered mind-sets and domains of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples, and created discourses that reached "into our heads" (Smith, 2001, p. 23). This reach impacts the perceptions and identity of Indigenous Peoples, as well as those subject to further impacts of colonialism from enslavement (Emdin, 2016). Colonisation contributes to racist views, sexist views, ableist views, notions of hierarchy and myriad other oppressive conceptualisations of human beings through a fundamental reliance on the view of 'the other' (Smith, 2001). Ultimately, the process of colonisation has shaped powerful discourses about knowledge, ethics, values, and conceptions of reality, fundamentally disrupting power relationships in favour of Eurocentric models. It has shaped whose knowledge, ethics, values, and conceptions of reality are deemed 'correct', acknowledged to be of value and worthy of learning. Colonisation affects us all. Decolonisation seeks to address these historic traumas that continue to impact people today.

In its most basic definition, decolonisation is the process of removing elements of colonial oppression from public spaces. At the same time, it is an effort to repair the traumatic history of colonialism and its residual effects in institutions. In particular, it is the recognition, reconciliation and transformation of systems within structures that both historically and contemporaneously enact colonial processes which engender practices that dehumanise those who are colonised. While this process most frequently emerges in conversations around Indigenous Peoples (Bardwell-Jones & McLaren, 2020), it is critical to recognise that it is much broader than this. Crucial to an understanding of colonisation and decolonisation is a resistance to the notion of 'settler' or 'settlement' as a historic event rather than as an ongoing process (Arvin et al., 2013); the recognition of colonialism as a dehumanising act of erasure (Bardwell-Jones & McLaren, 2020) by

"dominator cultures" (Smith, 2001) and the need to constantly re-centre the understanding of institutions playing a continuously active part in the process of colonisation (Absolon, 2019). These understandings demonstrate the ways that education institutions, structures and practices can contribute to processes of colonisation, such as policies which have banned Indigenous People's language, contributing to loss of language and cultural histories. To those immediately hurt by colonising beliefs, colonisation in schools serves to perpetuate deficit views of groups of people, pathologising their behaviours and cultural practices, and centring their being in wrongness. To those who are members of the colonising group, the colonisation processes can give them a false sense of superiority, robs them of true connections to other people, and engenders false narratives of history and reality.

These are powerful statements which call much into question and can act as a destabilising influence on established traditions. As in critical pedagogy, the notion of 'acultural' expressions of schooling and pedagogy is challenged as decolonising approaches demand that educators identify ways in which they may be unconsciously and unintentionally perpetuating systems and habits of oppression. This work is as potentially uncomfortable in a Steiner setting as anywhere else.

In educational institution contexts, the challenges to these colonising processes are key for the health and well-being of marginalised and under-represented groups and those that have been rendered invisible, all of whom have experienced the unyielding effects of settler-colonialism. It affects all those who are 'othered'. Critical to the work of decolonisation is a basic acknowledgement that power structures of settler-colonialism persist, and continue to impact on those who have suffered through colonisation and colonial thought. Decolonisation reminds us that colonialism is not an "historical point in time away from which our society has progressed" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 9). Within all schools, this should create an imperative to explore curriculum, pedagogy, management practices, community connection and engagement, and financial transactions for enactment of colonising processes, or as residual legacies of colonisation activity and thought that have remained unchecked.

Decolonising processes seek to uncover the hidden "colonial logics" (Byrd, quoted in Reese, 2008, p. 60) which inform not only the function of institutions, but the underlying assumptions about whom those institutions serve and what purposes they seek to fulfil. Decolonising practices work to unearth the metaphors that we use to justify actions and behaviours in the world, in an attempt to consider how other epistemological stances place relationships and responsibilities in the centre. Working in this framework, decolonising processes work "as part of a larger intent…to address social issues [and] social justice" (Smith, 2001, pp. 3-4).

The work of decolonisation is readily evident in the field of Native American and Indigenous Education (NA/IE), in the context of the United States, where issues of Indigenous People's sovereignty and epistemology are central. Work in NA/IE begins with the right of sovereignty as its central starting point, the assertion of which stands as a declaration against colonisation. A number of studies expand on the work of developing sovereignty within education, looking at it through a lens of decolonisation, and offer a possible "reconceptualization of the parameters for engaging Indigenous students within institutions" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 434).Decolonising sees the incorporation of principles of multicultural education (pluralism, an incorporation of diverse sources, intercultural understanding) as a starting point for the project. Central to decolonising is the attention to processes of *colonisation* and *colonialism*, activity perpetrated (both historically and contemporaneously) to attempt domination "over ways of thinking, knowing, valuing, feeling, doing, being, and becoming" (Reyes, 2019, p. 1). Schools must honestly and critically view how damaging aspects of racism and capitalism impact school practices and processes, while questioning the ways these ideas shape norms (Reyes, 2019).

Colonialism must be understood beyond romanticised versions of history in which intrepid (usually white) explorers fought bravely to bring civilisation to the world (see, for example, Thatcher, 1988). By understanding the continuation of colonialism as a structure impacting the everyday operation of life, not only is a reckoning of history possible, but a clear understanding of the present-day action of colonialism, and negative effects that disproportionately impact those perceived as other can be gained. Decolonisation

cannot be reduced to approaches, or to a programme or a system; rather, it is an approach to content and delivery that rejects the "persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonisers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 12). It is in this sense that Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us that decolonisation is an act of creating a preferred future, a civil rights based on justice for all.

With these concepts in mind, we turn our gaze towards Steiner education, specifically to examine its similarities and congruencies with CRP, critical theory and decolonisation, as well as its differences. Here, we will both examine Steiner's own work and conceptualisations of Steiner education as being culturally responsive, and in line with social justice work. This article is an initial exploration of this territory. In it we hope to highlight potential opportunities for this work to occur rather than put forward answers, in order to promote the further expansion of social justice in educational settings.

Steiner education in relation to this work

In the previous section we have characterised three significant discourses which are prominent in thinking about and in education. What they all have in common is a wish to redress entrenched systemic inequities which exist between individuals and between groups in society, so that each individual can reach their fullest potential.

Rudolf Steiner called Steiner education itself an "education for freedom."

> …a teacher's primary task is to nurture the body to be as healthy as possible. This means that we use every spiritual measure to ensure that in later life a person's body will be the least possible hindrance to the will of one's spirit. If we make this our purpose in school, we can develop the forces that lead to an education for freedom. (1922/2004, pp. 48-49)

'Education for freedom' is a phrase frequently used to describe Steiner education. Yet, to what extent is its use justified? So long as systemic inequities remain unidentified and undisrupted, any educational approach is unlikely to achieve an 'education for freedom' for all its students. This is something of an irony and needs, we believe, to be considered carefully and seriously. The noble ideals of Steiner education can be subverted by unconscious bias and unquestioned societal norms which perpetuate what can be termed systemic racism, sexism and other -isms. We believe that most Steiner teachers and parents would state that racism, sexism and others are the opposite of the values they hold, yet until each person experiences "what it means to unlearn certain regressive behaviors, ideas, habits, and values that the dominant culture imposes on [them] as second nature" (Giroux, 2019), significant change will be unlikely.

This is uncomfortable. In saying this we have no intent to denigrate Steiner education – we have a keen interest in its wellbeing and development. Culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy and decolonisation are topics which all educators in all schools need to engage with: This includes Steiner educators in Steiner schools. Steiner education is sometimes portrayed as at the progressive forefront of educational practice, "the school of the future" (Pauli & Hennig, 2020), a way towards enlightened, holistic teaching. While this may hold good in some ways, in others the wider educational conversation has moved on and achieved advances in areas which appear to us not to be reflected strongly in Steiner practice or theory. It is important to emphasise that what is essential about Steiner education – Steiner's understanding of the incarnating child, his anthropology, the three essential pedagogies, and the nature of childhood – is untouched by these comments. They remain as valid as they were a century ago. It is matters of curriculum choice, resources used, as well as pedagogical traditions and attitudes which are more affected and which we believe need urgent attention. The work of Martyn Rawson into curriculum development indicates a possible direction here (Rawson, 2017; Boland and Rawson, 2021 in press).

Literature for Steiner teachers tends to be inward facing (written by Steiner teachers for other Steiner teachers) and to exist in something of a hermetic void (Ullrich, 2008). Quite a number of books in English on Steiner practice and curriculum available today are reprints of ones written and first published decades

ago, themselves quite often translations from German (Rawson, 2020). Plenty has been written about the tendency of Steiner education towards self-isolation and we applaud and encourage all those who are working to change this tendency. The number of publications which engage in depth with 'outside' literature and seek to explore Steiner education critically– that is, move beyond showcasing its attractions and advantages – is modest. There has developed a 'Steiner' way of doing things, a Steiner vocabulary (which can prove a hindrance to newcomers) and a Steiner way of thinking; literature can perpetuate accepted norms over time rather than extend, deepen and challenge levels of understanding and practice (Denjean, 2014). It is normal for any profession to gather its own vocabulary over time and for newcomers to be socialised into the profession, yet this comes with dangers as well as conveniences (Loughran & Menter, 2019).

Steiner said that "anthroposophy… appreciates great educators as much as everyone else" (1922/2015, p. 48). We question to degree to which this remains the case a century later. To what degree do Steiner educators, teacher educators and mentors engage with (let alone appreciate) great educators and significant educational developments from the later 20th or early 21st centuries? Steiner frequently referenced recent philosophers and related his own work to theirs (among others, see Steiner, 1894/1995). To what extent do Steiner practitioners and educators currently view Steiner education through a lens of contemporary philosophy, or see value in doing this?

Speaking to the needs of the present

In writing this article, in characterising these three contemporary approaches, we have tried not to talk about or even think about any one geography, society, culture or ethnicity. The article will be read in different ways, on different continents by people from different backgrounds, with different experiences.

Culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy and the decolonisation of education are three ways in which education has responded over recent decades to changing needs and trends within society. Teachers, philosophers, academics and activists have contributed to each field developing discourses of significant complexity and nuance. These discourses are constantly being challenged, refined and developed as educators work towards the distant and possibly unattainable goal of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory education – a true education towards freedom.

We believe that this work can and should inform Steiner education in appropriate ways. These three pedagogical approaches have moved conversations and knowledge forward. What they lack, in our view, is the essential depth of understanding of the human being and human development which Steiner education offers; what Steiner discourse currently lacks is the critical depth of these pedagogies, which challenge the fundamentally unjust nature of society and which call for social justice to be enacted through education.

Looking forward

This fits well with the mission of Steiner education as it was articulated in 1919. To pick up the idea of Beeby's from the opening, a new impulse enters education once a generation. It is important to identify it and help it become established. A century after the establishment of Steiner education, can we identify new impulses seeking to find place in our societies? The one we have addressed here – social justice – is old yet emerging in new ways all round the world. The roots of social justice issues in Steiner education are long and deep. What are twenty-first century ways in which to work with them?

By engaging with the three discourses we have highlighted, Steiner education has the opportunity to benefit from work done by others in order to explore how these discourses can inform anti-oppressive, decolonising approaches to Steiner education. This could happen in a number of ways.

At the local level, there are already Steiner teachers who have brought anti-oppressive practices into their classrooms which have affected the choice of literature studied, how and whose history is taught, how the world is framed to students. Some of these teachers have gathered together to form groups and so benefit

from each other's work. This is admirable and we acknowledge and applaud all the work which has been done in these areas. This needs doing on a schools-wide basis so all teachers can engage in its complexity and contradictions to find their own ways to address it.

At the same time, teachers are busy people, engaged at the chalk face, with competing demands on their limited time. They cannot be expected to all do the hard work which decolonising approaches require. Asking teachers to reinvent the wheel individually is a poor use of resources and time. Lack of time brings with it the danger that the work will not be done in depth and will remain superficial. So that it does not remain ad hoc, this needs to be taken up strongly by national bodies. For instance, following work by the then Federation of Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand, a Māori curriculum document was drafted in 2015 to reorientate the taught Steiner curriculum to include and valorise Indigenous content (Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, 2015). In North America, the Steiner movement is promoting and organising a number of learning experiences for teachers, developing curricula to address racism and the invisibility of minority viewpoints, and seeking ways to engage with racial trauma in Steiner communities. Steiner Education Australia has drawn up a multi-year Reconciliation Action Plan to address similar needs (Steiner Education Australia, 2019). Other countries and bodies are doubtless engaged in similar work. Each country has its own demographic and societal needs which need to be addressed nationally. Engaging with these discourses in a deep and measured way rather than reacting to situations and seeking quick-fix remedies will allow more lasting and transformative progress to be made. Additivist approaches to the existing curriculum to demonstrate inclusion, swapping a story from a colonising culture for an Indigenous one, replacing three white authors with three of colour are steps forward but gives quick bolt-on solutions which fail to address the underlying issues which are systemic and are not susceptible to quick fixes (Boland, 2014). National projects can help carry this.

Likewise, there is undoubtedly work to do at an international level. There needs to be high-level discussion about potential Steiner responses to the undoubted systemic discrimination inherent in all education systems (not a specific Steiner problem, but something all institutions must do). This cannot be effectively devolved to schools which do not have the resources, time or necessarily the qualified personnel. Leadership initiatives need to be discussed to research this overall topic and find ways to most effectively address it.

What is possibly the most important way forward is for students in Steiner teacher education programmes to engage with these discourses. For this to happen, teacher educators and the leaders of these programmes need to engage with them first. This is ultimately where lasting change will begin. If those with responsibility for the initial development of teachers and the further development of those already in the work (including mentors) are able to incorporate decolonised and decolonising approaches to their work, emerging generations of teachers will be able to learn ways through which they can transform Steiner practice. This way, they will be able to better reflect contemporary social, ethical and educational changes.

In the *First Teachers' Course*, Steiner commented that "teachers must understand the time they live in because they must understand the children entrusted to them in relation to that time" (Steiner, 1919/2020, p. 163). Part of understanding the time we live in, involves engagement with wider educational and philosophical debates to help ensure that Steiner education remains adaptive to new situations and new circumstances, that it does not become a boutique education for the privileged few but a vehicle to bring about social change, leading to an education for freedom for all. It is only in doing this that it will meet the hopes expressed at its foundation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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