

FUNDAMENTALS / GRUNDLAGEN

Rob Blom: The Crooked Structure of the Post Truth Sequitur: A Path Toward Epistemological Depth

Rob Blom: Toward a Truth Paradigm

Ulrike Barth, Cathrine Bryden & Liliana Olea: Staunen im pädagogischen Kontext
Wonder in the pedagogical context

El asombro en el contexto pedagógico

Martyn Rawson: Types of discourses about Anthroposophy in relation to Waldorf education (Part 2)

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH / BEITRÄGE ZUR EMPIRISCHEN FORSCHUNG

Dirk Rohde & Wilfried Sommer: Clases optativas en el campus online de secundaria

Proyecto piloto: Enfoques contextuales del átomo

Li Xiang: Mapping themes and Gaps in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Research: A Scoping Review Using Text Mining

Anne-Mette Stabel: From Resistance to Compromise. The encounter of Steiner pedagogy with an educational reform

Renate K. Ostergaard: When school starts at age six – a study on how first-grade teachers work with preschool-like time organization within the school's time structure

Vilde Stabel: Values education in Steiner Schools. Teachers perspective on the physical environment as a pedagogical resource

BOOK REVIEW / RAHMENKONZEPTE

MARCELO DA VEIGA: Albert Schmelzer: Rudolf Steiner im Spannungsfeld von Freiheitsphilosophie und Menschenrechten, Nation und „Rasse“.

(Review in German and English)

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Editorial

Axel Föllner-Mancini

Die HerausgeberInnen, Redakteure und AutorInnen von *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education* freuen sich, hiermit die Edition Vol. 16 / Nr. 2 vorlegen zu können. Die Ausgabe umfasst wie gewohnt methodologische wie auch erfahrungswissenschaftliche Studien im Kontext der akademisch orientierten Waldorfpädagogik und ihrer Referenzwissenschaften.

Die Rubrik *Beiträge zur Grundlagenforschung* eröffnet Rob Blom mit zwei zusammengehörigen Studien. Der Autor untersucht postmoderne Positionen zum Wirklichkeits- und Wahrheitsparadigma und eröffnet Perspektiven auf einen erneuerbaren Erkenntnisbegriff.

Die Studie von U. Barth, C. Bryden und L. Olea untersucht das Phänomen des Staunens in seiner Bedeutung für pädagogisches Wahrnehmen und Handeln. Es wird im Erkenntnisprozess als eigenständige, der Reflexion vorgelagerte Phase beschrieben: ein Moment des Innehaltens zwischen sinnlicher Wahrnehmung und begrifflichem Verstehen.

Im zweiten Teil seiner Überblicksstudie identifiziert Martyn Rawson Diskurstypen der Anthroposophie, sofern sie sich auf Grundlagen und Praktiken der Waldorfpädagogik beziehen lassen. Die Analyse bietet Orientierung in strittigen Zusammenhängen.

Für die Rubrik *Empirische Forschung* stellen Dirk Rohde und Wilfried Sommer das evaluierte Projekt zu einem Online-Oberstufencampus vor und erläutern die Praxis am Beispiel einer naturwissenschaftlichen Epoche zum Thema „Atom“.

Li Xiang präsentiert eine Literaturanalyse zu Themen und Desiderata im Bereich der anthroposophisch orientierten Kindheitspädagogik.

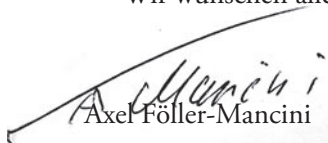
Der Artikel von Anne-Mette Stabel und Dag Oystein untersucht Herausforderungen, die im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Bildungsreformen und waldorfpädagogischer Praxis in Norwegen diskutiert werden. Ein Beispiel hierfür ist die Herabsetzung des Schuleintrittsalters von sieben auf sechs Jahre.

Renate Ostergaard untersucht die Auswirkung unterschiedlicher Zeitstrukturen im Übergang vom Kindergarten in die rhythmische Gestaltung der Schule.

Die empirische Studie von Vilde Stabel untersucht die Rolle der physischen Umgebung bei der Werteerziehung in der frühen Kindheit an Steiner-Schulen in Norwegen aus der Perspektive der Lehrkräfte. Die Gestaltung der Lernumgebung in der ersten Klasse ist darauf ausgerichtet, Spiel und praktisches Lernen zu ermöglichen.

Marcelo da Veiga rezensiert das 2025 im Info3-Verlag erschienene Buch von Albert Schmelzer: Rudolf Steiner im Spannungsfeld von Freiheitsphilosophie und Menschenrechten, Nation und „Rasse“.

Wir wünschen allen LeserInnen eine anregende Lektüre.


Axel Föllner-Mancini

Editorial

Axel Föllner-Mancini

The publishers, editors, and authors of *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education* are pleased to present Volume 16, Issue 2. As usual, this issue includes methodological and empirical studies in the context of academically oriented Waldorf education and its related disciplines.

Rob Blom opens the section *Contributions to Basic Research* with two related studies. The author examines postmodern positions on the paradigms of reality and truth and opens up perspectives on a renewed concept of knowledge.

The study by U. Barth, C. Bryden, and L. Olea examines the phenomenon of wonder in its significance for pedagogical perception and action. It is described in the cognitive process as an independent phase preceding reflection: a moment of pause between sensory perception and conceptual understanding.

In the second part of his overview study, Martyn Rawson identifies types of discourse in anthroposophy, insofar as they can be related to the foundations and practices of Waldorf education. The analysis offers guidance in contentious contexts.

For the *Empirical Research* section, Dirk Rohde and Wilfried Sommer present the evaluated project on an online upper-grade campus and explain the practice using the example of a science unit on the topic of “the atom.”

Li Xiang presents a literature review on topics and desiderata in the field of anthroposophically oriented early childhood education.

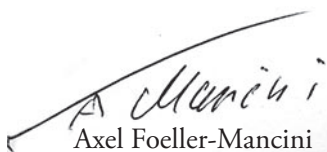
The article by Anne-Mette Stabel and Dag Oystein examines challenges discussed in the tension between educational reforms and Waldorf educational practice in Norway. One example of this is the lowering of the school entry age from seven to six years.

Renate Ostergaard examines the impact of different time structures during the transition from kindergarten to the structured daily routine of school.

Vilde Stabel’s empirical study examines the role of the physical environment in values education during early childhood at Steiner schools in Norway from the teachers’ perspective. The design of the learning environment in first grade is geared toward facilitating play and hands-on learning.

Marcelo da Veiga reviews Albert Schmelzer’s book, published in 2025 by Info3-Verlag: *Rudolf Steiner in the Tension Between the Philosophy of Freedom and Human Rights, Nation, and “Race.”*

We wish all readers an engaging read.



Axel Föllner-Mancini

Editorial

Axel Föller-Mancini

Los editores, redactores y autores de *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education* se complacen en presentar el volumen 16, n.º 2. Como es habitual, este número incluye estudios metodológicos y empíricos en el contexto de la pedagogía Waldorf de orientación académica y sus ciencias de referencia.

Rob Blom inaugura la sección *Contribuciones a la investigación básica* con dos estudios relacionados entre sí. El autor analiza las posiciones posmodernas sobre el paradigma de la realidad y la verdad y abre perspectivas hacia un concepto renovable del conocimiento.

El estudio de U. Barth, C. Bryden y L. Olea analiza el fenómeno del asombro en su importancia para la percepción y la acción pedagógicas. Se describe en el proceso de conocimiento como una fase independiente, previa a la reflexión: un momento de pausa entre la percepción sensorial y la comprensión conceptual.

En la segunda parte de su estudio general, Martyn Rawson identifica tipos de discurso de la antroposofía, en la medida en que pueden relacionarse con los fundamentos y las prácticas de la pedagogía Waldorf. El análisis ofrece orientación en contextos controvertidos.

En la sección de *Investigación empírica*, Dirk Rohde y Wilfried Sommer presentan el proyecto evaluado sobre un campus en línea para la enseñanza secundaria y explican la práctica tomando como ejemplo una unidad didáctica de ciencias naturales sobre el tema «Átomo».

Li Xiang presenta un análisis bibliográfico sobre temas y aspectos pendientes en el ámbito de la pedagogía infantil de orientación antroposófica.

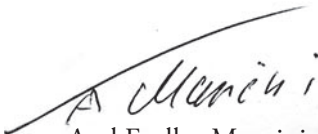
El artículo de Anne-Mette Stabel y Dag Oystein examina los retos que se debaten en la tensión entre las reformas educativas y la práctica de la pedagogía Waldorf en Noruega. Un ejemplo de ello es la reducción de la edad de inicio de la escolarización de siete a seis años.

Renate Ostergaard analiza el impacto de las diferentes estructuras temporales en la transición de la guardería a la organización rítmica de la escuela.

El estudio empírico de Vilde Stabel analiza el papel del entorno físico en la educación en valores durante la primera infancia en las escuelas Steiner de Noruega desde la perspectiva del profesorado. El diseño del entorno de aprendizaje en primer curso está orientado a facilitar el juego y el aprendizaje práctico.

Marcelo da Veiga reseña el libro de Albert Schmelzer publicado en 2025 por la editorial Info3: Rudolf Steiner en la encrucijada entre la filosofía de la libertad y los derechos humanos, la nación y la «raza».

Deseamos a todos los lectores una lectura estimulante.



Axel Foeller-Mancini

The Crooked Structure of the Post-Truth *non Sequitur*: A Path Toward Epistemological Depth

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In our shared academic climate, accentuated by moving beyond Modern (and post-Modern) perspectives, we (as Authors) have come across the idea that we (as people) are living now in a “post-truth world.” While the term gained cultural currency as a descriptor of specific political phenomena, its uncritical adoption in scholarly discourse merits philosophical examination. Our core discussion revolves around unravelling, i.e. “making sense of” truth paradigms and “teasing apart” the relationship epistemological shallowness has to post-truth. We argue that post-truth represents a quintessential *non sequitur*—a conclusion that cannot be derived from its premises—that incorrectly leaps from legitimate critiques of truth’s limitations to the abandonment of both Taylorian articulation and the Malpasian call to retrieve truth lost in Modernity. By unravelling the fallacious nature of post-truth through three argumentative threads: (i) etymological considerations, (ii) a historical contextualisation across Modern and post-Modern thought that enables the crookedness of truth into its distortion of post-truth, and (iii) an envelopmental approach to truth that overcomes bivalence and epistemological flattening, we demonstrate how spiritual knowing and epistemological depth offer a path between rigid rationalism and nonrigid sentimentality. We conclude that by extending the epistemological topography to include hierarchical and heterarchical dimensions, a more robust conception of truth—one that preserves spiritual knowing—can be recovered amidst the post-truth condition.

In unserem geteilten akademischen Klima, das sich zunehmend über moderne (und postmoderne) Perspektiven hinausbewegt, begegnen wir (als Autor:innen) vermehrt der Vorstellung, dass wir (als Menschen) in einer „postfaktischen Welt“ leben. Während der Begriff kulturelle Bedeutung als Beschreibung spezifischer politischer Phänomene gewonnen hat, verdient seine unkritische Übernahme in den wissenschaftlichen Diskurs eine philosophische Überprüfung. Im Zentrum unserer Argumentation steht das „Entwirren“, d. h. das „Sinnstiften“ von Wahrheitsparadigmen sowie das „Auseinanderfalten“ des Zusammenhangs zwischen epistemologischer Oberflächlichkeit und dem Postfaktischen. Wir vertreten die These, dass das Postfaktische ein paradigmatischer Fehlschluss (*non sequitur*) ist – ein Schluss, der sich nicht aus seinen Prämissen ableiten lässt – und dass es fälschlich von legitimen Kritiken an den Grenzen von Wahrheit auf deren völlige Aufgabe schließt, wobei sowohl die Taylor’sche Artikulation als auch der Malpasianische Ruf nach einer Wiedergewinnung der in der Moderne verlorenen Wahrheit missachtet werden. Durch das Entwirren der fehlschlussartigen Natur des Postfaktischen entlang dreier Argumentationslinien – (i) etymologischer Überlegungen, (ii) einer historischen Kontextualisierung der Wahrheit im Spannungsfeld zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne, welche die „Krümmung“ von Wahrheit zu ihrer Verzerrung im Postfaktischen nachvollzieht, und (iii) eines umhüllender (envelopmental) Ansatzes zur Wahrheit, der Bivalenz und epistemologisches Abflachen überwindet – zeigen wir auf, wie geistiges Erkennen und epistemologische Tiefe einen Weg zwischen rigidem Rationalismus und nicht-rigidem Sentimentalismus eröffnen. Wir schließen daraus, dass durch eine Erweiterung der epistemologischen Topografie – um hierarchische wie heterarchische Dimensionen – ein tragfähigeres Wahrheitsverständnis im Sinne geistigen Erkennens wiedergewonnen und bewahrt werden kann, angesichts des Postfaktischen.

Introduction

What is truth if not a beginning and end? And what is the human condition that permits the apprehension of truth's nature between birth and death—and rebirth (Steiner, 1994, 1997)? We may further ponder the finite nature of truth paradigms as a mind-soul-body trifecta as regards the human construction through languaging, the Platonic apprehension by beholding (*das anschauende Erkennen*),¹ and the complexification of truth embodied and enacted ecologically through time—(i.e., truth and truth-seeker in the post-humanist tradition); yet these deliberations all differ in degree *and* kind as regards the notion of post-truth conceived and contrived within scholarship. Whilst most philosophical discourse may simply *over-look* the term as a form of popularisation (*i.e.*, a fad), we cannot say the same for scholarship within *educational* philosophy. The present paper responds to a tendency pervasive within educational philosophy specifically—the uncritical acceptance of post-truth as either a legitimate worldview or a coherent era—a tendency evident across otherwise rigorous scholarship (Fuller, 2017; de Saint-Laurent et al., 2017; Peters, 2017; Nally, 2021; Ambrosio, 2022). Insofar as our ambition is to speak to the complexity of truth paradigms—as a structured envelopmental framework through which truth is apprehended, articulated, and enacted—we cannot proceed to do so without first detailing how post-truth—and its various conceptualisations—is subsumed within the truth tradition.² Thus, our primary aim in our paper is to gesture toward the crookedness of a post-truth (or post-factual³) culture ... not as a *world-view* (*Weltanschauung*), but as a particularised *point-of-view* (*Weltansicht*).

Our philosophical *out-look*⁴ resonates with two significant critiques of post-truth discourse. Clark's (2019) advocacy for non-post-truths represents a decisive injunction against postmodern relativism in educational theory and Baggini's (2017) assertion⁵ that 'with honest intent and clarity of mind, we can guard against such misuse [of distorting truth] and see that the claim we live in a post-truth world is the most pernicious untruth of them all' (p. 10). As Clark (2019) noted, 'postmodernism might have come down hard on "truth" and "objectivity" but its playfulness and relativism was intellectually principled even if wrong' (p. 1350). The observation by Clark permits our own scholarly playfulness⁶ regarding the concept of outlook. The archaic outlook⁷—or modern look-out—emerges from a "*vigilant* watch, act, or practice of looking out" that directly relates to Baggini's (2017) essential epistemic values of modesty, skepticism, and mindfulness. The Latin root *vigilia* encompasses both (1) a *watchfulness* (attentiveness) and *wakefulness* (mindfulness), *connected to vigere* (to thrive), and (2) *vigor* (invigoration toward truth-seeking). The etymological foundation illuminates the stances of both Clark and Baggini, who each plead vigilance against post-truths. Clark (2019) called for vigilance toward undisclosed non-post-truths to re-assert—and perhaps re-imagine—the role of expertise. Baggini (2017) advocated vigilance through an *attitude* of sincerity and accuracy—the two 'key virtues of truth' (p. 106) as per the late Bernard Williams. Our position synthesises these approaches into a stance toward non-post-truths: one conceptualised within the complexity of our times, directed against the arbitrariness resulting from a flattening of truth, and oriented through vigilance toward truth-as-envelopment.

We commence by addressing linguistic confusion surrounding the prefixed word 'post-truth' through etymological and evaluative considerations. We invoke the word "crook" to convey, metaphorically and

1. cf. Heidegger (1967) on page 246.

2. The present paper focuses primarily on the cultural dimensions of post-truth—its etymological crookedness, its misrepresentation of the truth tradition, and its epistemological shallowness. The philosophical dimensions, in particular as regards structure, transcendence and transformation within truth paradigms, are developed in the published companion paper.

3. The Cambridge Dictionary interestingly admits a rare and dubious redundancy, defining these two compound words the exact same; the only other instance of redundancy, to the Author's recollection, is "flammable" and "inflammable."

4. The word *outlook* contains both present and future connotations; the "view from a particular place" and an "expectation for the future" are equally an outlook respectively.

5. For Baggini (2017), relativism was a *bête-noir* in popular culture but did offer philosophical inquiry into social constructs (*e.g.*, narratives and power). However, he did contemplate a 'post-truth world' (p. 106) as both a pernicious untruth and a worldview where epistemic values falter and its correlates (*e.g.*, cynicism, overconfidence, close-mindedness, *et cetera*) flourish. It would seem to us that post-truth is better understood as a lackadaisical attitude toward epistemic values to avoid the semantic contradiction.

6. For Heidegger (1982), etymology poses 'a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science' (p. 29).

7. Retrieved from the Online Etymology Dictionary at https://www.etymonline.com/word/outlook#etymonline_v_9994.

etymologically, the distortion of truth with respect to the academic insistence that we are somehow in a post-truth era. The term “crook” warrants examination for three reasons: (1) unlike the modern criminal—the *crook* originally meant a “dishonest trick” through the wiles of the Devil in Middle English; (2) truth or post-truth, in the post-Modern era, having been *bent* to preserve its paradigmatic structures, obscures a restorative notion of truth lost in Modernity; and (3) the shared root with *crutch* (Proto-Germanic **kruk-*) serves as a semiotic support for conceptual instability. Later, through personal narratives, we illustrate how a truth paradigm of *epistemological depth* can overcome the fallacious and shallow nature of a post-truth cultural concept. Finally, we conclude with a call to Philosophers of Education to unravel the complex structure of epistemological depth away from the shallowness of the post-truth *non sequitur*. By extending the epistemological and ontological topography, we echo Neufeld’s (2012) *saving truths* to reinstitute, structurally, a spiritual knowing that recovers and preserves truth in contemporary philosophical discourse.

Etymology, Evaluation, and the Meaning-Making of Words

Etymological analysis serves as a foundational philosophical method rather than linguistic curiosity alone. Heidegger’s (2023) phenomenological uncovering of concealed meanings through etymological inquiry, Gadamer’s (2004) hermeneutic insights into how language houses understanding, and Taylor’s (1989) work on articulation each demonstrated how frameworks of truth become encoded *in*—and subsequently constrained *by*—the very terms employed in their expression. From a methodological perspective, conceptual structures simultaneously reveal and conceal truth—enabling understanding while also permitting manipulation and distortion in contemporary discourse—a dynamic further developed in Guénon’s (2004c) and Korzybski’s (1958) respective critique of modern semantic limitations and Chong and Chong’s (2019) healing paradigm in medical hypnosis. That post-truth escapes such etymological rigour is itself revelatory of a philosophical *lacūna*—a conceptual void where critical examination ought to reside, leaving the term to function as an implicit acceptance of precisely the arbitrariness and disqualification of truth it superficially claims to denote. Thus, we find prudence in dissecting the word post-truth from the outset. The prefix “post-” has both a spatial and temporal connotation: “behind” and “subsequent” or “after(ward)” respectively. Thus, two philosophical questions follow: (1) what is the conceptual or theoretical space *behind* truth? and (2) what is the noun that describes what comes *after* or *beyond* truth? For the latter question: we know of no such noun. From a metaphysical⁸ point of view, we can say that truth—on the basis of *theōria* (θεωρία)—is the result of a corresponding realisation (Guénon, 2004a). We can thus conceive of truth as being a “post-realisation” rather than something existing after or beyond truth. For the spatial connotation,⁹ the question is far more complex as we are not limited to the empirical domain of mathematical and quantitative space. If we were, intangibles like the aforementioned epistemic virtues would be vacuous; moreover, any singular uniform education would be well-suited throughout the world. These ideas are philosophically ironic (*eirōneia*), yet not so ironic to dissuade inquiry into what informs a post-truth world as each idea—uniformity, flatness, and post-truth—leads to an *arbitrariness*. To avoid arbitrariness, care is taken to work within *qualified* rather than quantified space—as a forest breathes differently than a lecture hall, and a monastic priory orients the soul differently than a marketplace—attending to the qualitative character of definitions and context rather than their uniform accumulation.

In a rare lexical event within the history of Oxford semantics, the word post-truth is *identically defined* to post-fact.¹⁰ Notably, the concept of *facts* has been problematized in philosophy for so long that Bas Van Fraassen, as early as 1969, articulated the central role of facts in explicating logical relationships as *already* historically problematic.¹¹ By the end of the 20th-century the philosophers who espoused the analytic

8. We invoke the word metaphysics in its *archaic* sense (e.g., mystical) as opposed to its *modern* usage (e.g., metaphysical realism), recognising that prior to Descartes, philosophy (“love of wisdom”) was a branch of metaphysics (“wisdom”).

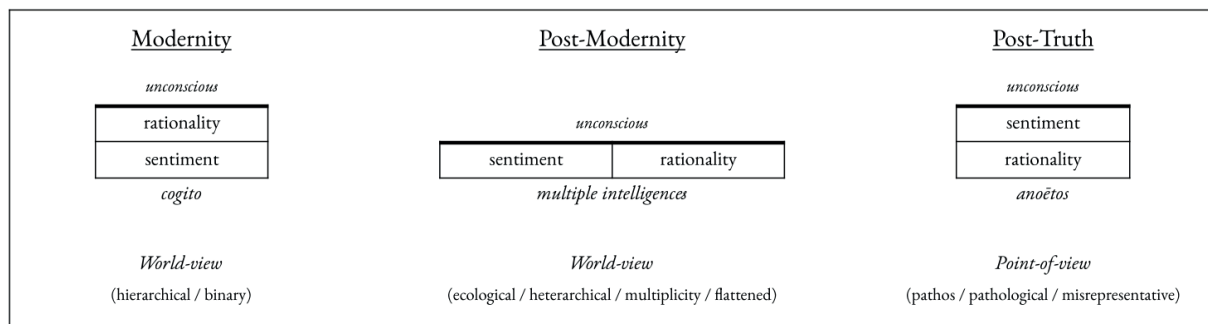
9. To be ‘behind’ is a matter of perspective as each relative position (e.g., beside, under, above) is mathematically equivalent through rotation—quantitatively speaking.

10. Both post-truth and post-fact are identically defined as ‘relating to circumstances in which people respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts’ (as retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>, 25 June 2023).

11. Van Fraassen wrote, ‘today [1969] the prevalent opinion seems to be that facts belong solely to the prehistory of semantics and either have no important use or are irredeemably metaphysical or both’ (p. 477). And while Van Fraassen took facts seriously as representable ‘within the framework of standard metalogic [and as] a semantic explication of tautological entailment’ (p. 477) such analytic philosophical ruminations on what may be anachronistically called post-fact are beyond the scope of our paper.

tradition placed numerous moratoriums on ontology, epistemology, truth, and even God (Rockwell, 2003; Wilber, 2000). Nonetheless, the analytic tradition—where facts and sentential logic aim toward a theory of *truth statements*—is not the lineage that espouses the definitions of post-truth. Definitionally, Nally (2021) explained that from the three sources of post-truth that underpin scholarship—Jeff Malpas (1992), Steve Tesich (1992), and the Oxford definition, each delineated below—only two themes emerge: ‘(1) post-truth is a way of describing how reality is not being accurately represented, and (2) the reason for this misrepresentation is a tendency (whether intentional or not¹²) for perceptions to be *skewed* based on emotional reactions [emphasis ours]’ (p. 611). For the post-truth condition to permeate, personal truths—what can be called beliefs or opinions—are supposedly rendered superior to facts (whether in cultural value, sense, or importance); thus, ‘the anti-thesis [unsubstantiated opinion] is becoming the thesis [knowledge / fact]’ (Kester, 2019, p. 1330). Conceptual cases can be made against decontextualised truths, truths steeped in paradigmatic blindness, unqualified statements masquerading as truths, downright lies, and so on; however, to commit a straw man fallacy here would be to miss the wolf lurking beneath the sheep’s clothing—*i.e.*, a concept concealing a philosophical incoherence beneath the appearance of cultural critique. Indeed, the accepted word post-truth is used as an *adjective*, not a noun, to qualify events through sentimentality (“believed to be right”). Within the presupposed post-truth ideology or worldview—or collectively, within academic and non-academic culture—how people *feel* has come to be regarded as more important than how people think, what people know, or how people *converse*. The veritable confusion and *inversion*¹³ of these two orders—feeling and thinking—can be divided into two incommensurate orders within the human psyche (*psukhē*) as sentimentality and rationality respectively.

Figure 1
Conceptualising Perspectives of World-views and Point-of-view



Note. Each column is wedded to a notion of soul ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$) of the Cartesian cogito—though not necessarily wedded to Cartesian dualism (*e.g.*, ecological). The bold line represents a conceptual limit—beyond the conscious *threshold* lies the unconscious, within which pre-Modern conceptualisation situated a sense of soul and Spirit¹⁴ (or the Platonic Intellect as “higher mind”).¹⁵ The loss of *true intellectuality*—synonymous with pure spirituality—‘has made possible two errors [in modern times] which, although seemingly opposed, are in reality correlative and complementary: rationalism and sentimentalism’ (Guénon, 1995, p. 1). When hierarchy collapsed to a network of intelligences, and Spirit became confused (*re:* flattened) with soul, and later soul with mind, and when spirituality came to be denied or wholly ignored, ‘as has been the case since Descartes, the logical end was positivism and agnosticism’ (p. 1)—a trajectory whose climax was reached in Modernity. The progression illustrated across Figure 1 demonstrates how the *non sequitur* of post-truth arose from flattened epistemologies that lack hierarchical depth—producing an anti-rational point-of-view that falsely presents post-truth as a coherent worldview.

12. Similarly, back in 1916, Steiner (2005) wrote almost the equivalent phenomenon, that ‘consciously and unconsciously people today form judgements in accordance with this type of viewpoint. The quicker the judgement, that is, the fewer the true insights that go to make up this judgement, the more comfortable it is for the souls of today’ (p. 2).

13. See “Post-Truth” in Figure 1.

14. *cf.* Figure 2 in the companion paper.

15. We allude to doctrinal teachings on the unconscious as beyond our conscious experience, such as deep sleep, and not the collective unconscious of Jung which would be conceptually situated below.

An objection may be raised that an ill comparison is being drawn between an unrelated noun and an adjective. Regardless of the inherent *logos* of post-truth as a concept—contextualised here as a misrepresentation, condition, or *point-of-view* rather than a *world-view* (Figure 1)—the term post-truth is quite *meaningful*—indicative of a particularised cultural possibility we wish to unpack, evaluate, and contextualise. First and foremost, the relation between noun and adjective is apparent through denotation. The adjective, moreover, details a type of event grounded in a neglect of truth. However, a “neglect of truth” is a surface evaluation—more nuanced would be to assert a *neglect* of truth at the rational order and a *realised* truth at the sentimental order. As Alfred Korzybski (1958) detailed from an ontological, semantic, and structural framework, the belief of the representation, whereby we identify higher order abstractions (*e.g.*, rational) with lower order abstractions (*e.g.*, sentimental), ends with unjustified evaluations; these *mis*-evaluations give rise to disturbed semantic states within our bodymind complex (*i.e.*, delusion, irrationalism, agitation, distrust, and so on). Thus, post-truth-as-misrepresentation—interpreted against Modern and post-Modern worldviews of Figure 1—is a confusion of orders (*i.e.*, a difference of *degree*).

A different *kind* of post-truth was posited by Fuller (2017), who positioned Platonists and Sophists as political actors motivated by *modal* games of skill and games of chance respectively within what Fuller termed a “post-truth orientation;” both Platonists and Sophists were proposed as “post-truth” thinkers, concerned more with the mix of chance and skill in the construction of truth than with the truth as such’ (p. 473). Fuller claimed both were ‘less concerned with the truth itself than with the conditions that make truth possible’ (p. 476) and framed the key distinction as about access to philosophical tools rather than qualitative differences in approaches to truth. For Fuller, politics becomes a game where Sophists deploy skills to maximise chance occurrences, while Plato used similar skills to minimise chance’s influence. While Fuller correctly identified certain power dynamics in philosophical discourse, the Fullerian framework arguably mischaracterises Platonic thought by overlooking essential metaphysical (*re*: vertical or envelopmental) dimensions. Fuller’s attempt to reverse the historical direction¹⁶ is novel, acknowledging that knowledge production is socio-political and situated within historical context; however, the assertion that truth reduces to a modal power struggle over access to the conditions that make truth possible reduces truth to precisely what Plato would call the shadows—the most contingent and ephemeral domain of knowing. As Wilber (2000) noted, late 20th- and early 21st-century sensibilities assume that by simply studying the shadows in greater detail we may overcome the Platonic condition; put poetically, the ‘sum total of the shadows’ (p. 414) has been mistaken for the Light. The misconception of mistaking shadows for Light arises because the Platonic “One” (*i.e.*, Spirit) no longer *envelops* the “Each” and the “All”; and when “Each and All” is all that is left—a deficient subset of the Platonic or integral worldview—truth becomes flattened into holism and systems theory¹⁷ (Wilber, 2000). A modal power framework reflects the tendency toward epistemological flattening that characterises much of post-truth discourse, converting qualitative distinctions (such as in truth paradigms) into purely quantitative differences in games of chance and skill. A focus exclusively on horizontal power dynamics fails to preserve the vertical dimension(s) of Platonic thought wherein the journey toward truth ascends (*anábasis*; ἀνάβασις) and descends (*káthodos*; κατάβασις). As explained by Steel (2012), the vertical movement manifests in educational contexts through the complementary processes of *diánoia*, which ‘extends principles downward into the realm of human activity’ (p. 47), and *nóēsis*, which “takes up” (*anáresis*) these principles toward their true beginning or ground (Arche). The bidirectional movement between *diánoia* and *nóēsis* is essential to pedagogical approaches that recognise the *depth* dimension of knowledge rather than horizontal distribution (*i.e.*, networks of *span*); put succinctly, epistemological flattening forsakes depth for span—enabling post-truth to masquerade as a worldview whilst simultaneously producing the very real cultural condition where no higher perspectives remain to adjudicate between competing *logoi* (Figure 2).¹⁸

Fuller’s *modal power* as regards truth conditions may reveal hidden power structures and assumptions that “un-Earth” why certain forms of knowledge are privileged or *possible*—a contribution to philosophical relativism; however, an examination of truth conditions falls well within established epistemological

16. The historic enterprise, as regards truth, has been an emphasis on philosophical principles {epistemology → conditions} rather than social constructs {conditions → epistemology}. The complexity of bi-directionality (epistemological ⇌ conditions) would mean an abandonment of pure constructionism toward what Maturana and Varela (1992) would term enactivism.

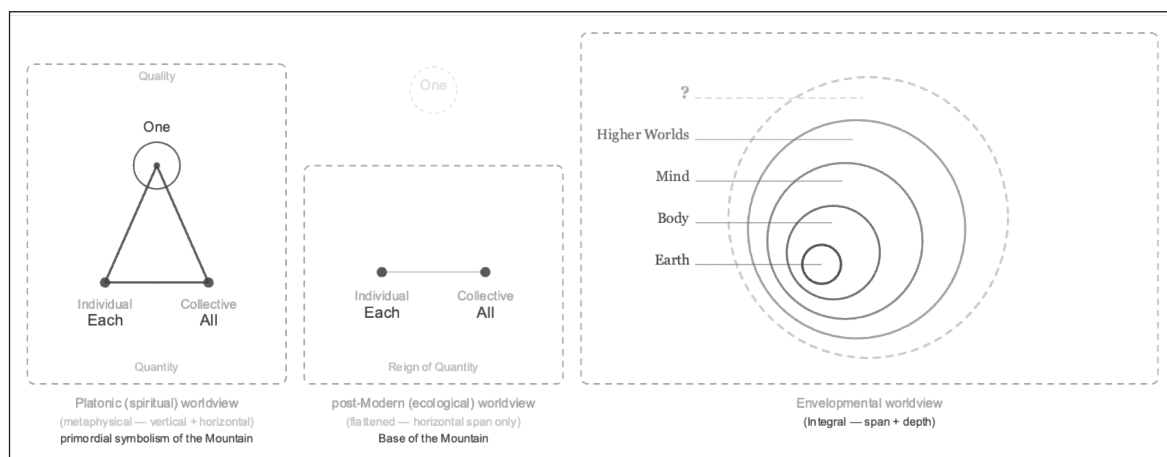
17. Hence “sum total” to mean, ecologically, the sum is greater than the whole of its parts, which is the basis of systems theory.

18. *cf.* Crosswhite’s (2018) post-truth condition and Clark’s (2019) death of the expert unpacked in the companion paper.

frameworks, including semantic realism/anti-realism, (logical/semantic) positivism, modal epistemology, verificationism, et *alia*. Such a complexification of truth, truth conditions, processes, and semantic-syntactic distinctions, is not a post-truth despite Fuller's insistence (unless we are swayed by arbitrariness). These categorisations of “games of chance” and “games of skill” are problematic given that both Plato and the Sophists pursued rigorous systematic approaches to truth. By recasting each position as a modal “game”—rather than maintaining the distinction between chance (*tuchē*) and skill (*technē*)—Fuller implicitly flattens their relationship. From a mathematical perspective, the Fullerian framework logically reduces to four possible modes: *inverse* (less of one, more of the other), *reciprocal* (chance by skill; skill in terms of chance), *contraries* (either chance or skill), or *complementarities* (degrees of chance and skill). However, although we can say “more skill, less chance” as intuitive and logical—as the cultivation of skill reduces the role of chance in outcomes—“more chance, less skill” does not follow, since increasing randomness does not actually diminish existing skill, just masks its expression. By flattening each to games, Fuller failed to capture an essential truth on the *asymmetry* between skill and chance, reducing skill to a more complex manifestation of probabilistic processes. Metaphysically, *skill*—as a combined proficiency (*technē*; τέχνη) and wisdom (σοφία, “expertise”)—is qualitatively higher than mere chance operating at the quantitative order of probability (Coomaraswamy, 1987). And when post-truth flattens truth to mere shadows of quantitative relationships (e.g., subjectivism and statistics), and spiritual knowing fades into obscurity, one cannot help but ask why?

Figure 2

The Disqualification toward a Flatland of Competing Logoi and the Envelopmental Resolution



Note. The left diagram represents the Platonic (spiritual) worldview—Each and All enveloped within the One, forming the primordial Mountain whose vertical dimension integrates quantity within quality. The middle diagram represents the post-Modern (ecological) worldview—Each and All without the One, reducing the Mountain to its base; following Guénon (2004c), the loss of the vertical dimension corresponds to the “reign of quantity,” wherein qualitative distinctions collapse into horizontal span and the epistemological flatness within which the post-truth condition acquires apparent legitimacy (*i.e.*, no “higher perspectives”). The right diagram represents the envelopmental worldview—Body, Mind, and Higher Worlds enveloped successively within one another, gesturing toward what lies beyond the known (?) in the Steinerian sense of higher worlds. The envelopmental model equally applies to competing logoi—wherein a higher perspective envelops and resolves what appears irreconcilable at a lower order.

Having examined the conceptual structure of post-truth, our analysis now turns to how the term originated in scholarly discourse. Understanding how the progenitors who coined “post-truth” conceptualised the term provides crucial insights into its original intent. The works of Steve Tesich and Jeff Malpas each employed the term without rejecting truth itself—a critical distinction overlooked in contemporary literature. Moreover, while Tesich referred to a “post-truth world” and Malpas to a “post-truth era,” both used these formulations to critique rather than legitimise the abandonment of truth. By examining these initial formulations,

current post-truth discourse is revealed as a conceptual non sequitur rather than a legitimate philosophical position. These origins further illuminate how truth paradigms have been flattened and how a path toward epistemological depth begins precisely with the refusal to accept post-truth as either worldview or era.

Other Origins of Post-Truth

Although both Tesich (1992) and Malpas (1992) coined the term “post-truth” in their writing, neither elaborated much further on post-truth nor rejected truth. The claim that ‘the complex relation between Modernity and truth, and how he [Malpas] believed post-modernism would bring a post-truth era’ (de Saint-Laurent et al., 2017, p. 148) seems to miss the crux of the Malpasian perspective. For Nally (2021), who posited post-truth as a condition rather than a worldview, interpreted post-truth through past longings:

although Tesich’s [1992] aim is to contest America’s characterisation as a superpower and Malpas’ [1992] is how to defend the facts of history in the face of Holocaust denial, they do hint that the conditions for post-truth rely on a collective belief that past realities have been “better” than present ones. (p. 611)

For us, an emphasis on an after-thought for Tesich and a playful alliteration for Malpas occludes the gem of Tesich’s and Malpas’ theoretical work on truth (in short, we did not get the hint). For instance, in Tesich’s introductory comments he wrote ‘truth prevailed’ (p. 12) and ‘despite the crimes committed in the highest office in our land, our system of government worked. Democracy triumphed’ (p. 12). Tesich lamented on the trajectory of the American citizenry’s *relationship* to truth, whom ‘began to shy away from the truth’ (p. 12) and ‘came to equate truth with bad news [and] looked to our government to protect us from the truth’ (p. 12). Most revealing is Tesich’s conclusion, that ‘[Americans] have acquired a *spiritual mechanism* that can *denude* truth of any *significance*. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have *freely* decided that we want to live in some post-truth world [emphasis added]’ (p. 13). Speaking ironically, ‘the last thing we want now is for an intellectually and spiritually vigorous generation to confront us with the question of what we have done to this country [*i.e.*, “truth”]’ (p. 13). To Tesich, truth was very much alive alongside a democratic process to support one’s relationship with truth. Spiritual will and significance were in question to vigorously save truth. The misappropriation of Tesich’s concerns into contemporary post-truth discourse represents a profound *non sequitur*—from an original call to recover significance to a framework that abandons the very object of concern. Hierarchically speaking, what is *most* significant is *least* foundational (*asymmetrical*); in other words, to “denude truth of any significance” is equivalent to a *dis*-qualification and subsequent flattening of truth (Figures 1 and 2).

For Malpas (1992), nowhere in *Retrieving Truth* did he indicate we live in an era without truth; the alliteration ‘the post-modern era is also a post-truth’ (p. 288), an era with the potential to ‘[doubt] the very possibility of truth’ (p. 228), an era ‘in which the possibilities of truth has been relinquished, rejected or, perhaps, simply forgotten’ (p. 288), were his first and final thoughts on the term. Such claims obscure the theoretical gem Malpas brought to the academic debate three decades prior: that the “postmodern truth” has not solved the crisis of Modernity. Furthermore, a postmodern truth has not justified, *a fortiori*, the abandonment of truth; the post-Modern *reaction* against truth—towards games of meaning, discourse, power, and worlds¹⁹—can only ‘lead back into the crisis of modernity from which it attempted to extricate us’ (p. 297). Historically, for the Modern, the concept of ‘truth is unproblematic insofar as the *possibility* of truth is unproblematic’ (p. 287); thus, there was never an apparent *crisis* in truth within Modernity *vis-à-vis* a paradigmatic blindness only a post-Modern perspective would *reveal*. For Malpas, ‘the post-modern abandonment of the notion of truth is misplaced and ... does not allow us to come to terms with the crisis of modernity’ (p. 289). Not only is there a refusal to acknowledge the crisis, ‘but ... a refusal to attempt to retrieve a more original and important notion of truth from the debris of modernity’ (p. 289). Part of the debris to be left behind was the elusive and exclusive function of *transcendence*—‘a notion that had to be relinquished’ (p. 297). To save truth and invoke a sense of meaning in languaging toward the unity of

19. One can group Fuller here, but essentially any social constructionism or constructivism theorist—and now we quote Davis (1996)—whose ‘reluctance to step outside the “neutral” bounds of epistemology into the messier and more demanding realms of morality, ethics, identity, and being-ontology’ (p. 234) continues the Modernist agenda and sidesteps the Malpasian retrieval.

truth, the Malpasian concern of “truth-as-transcendence” is justified insofar as truth is reachable and not demarcated with an idyllic Platonic realm. However, the very man Malpas positioned to save truth (Martin Heidegger) was quite at ease with “truth-as-transzendenz” (Moran, 2014). The paradox dissolves once the hidden semantics are extracted. To Malpas (1992), discarding truth-*{exclusivity}*-as-*{infinite}*-transcendence shortens to discarding “truth-as-transcendence;” to Heidegger (1967), the notion of *finite* transcendence (*endliche* Transzendenz²⁰) begets a truth-*{implicitly}*-as-*{finite}*-transcendence—which *also* shortens to “truth-as-transcendence.” The irony is that the Malpasian truth-as-retrieval *is* (to us) the Heideggerian truth-as-transzendenz. Each would advocate for the retrieval of truth as a “struggle” to *articulate*²¹ and discover one’s unique potential. Moreover, for Heidegger, ‘to speak the truth can manifest itself in two, fundamentally opposite ways: for one, it can be an *un-covering* or *dis-covering* (*ent-decken*) and, for another, a covering-up, a “*zu-decken*” and “*ver-decken*” of Being’ (Benesch, 2020, para. 8). Thus, not a post-truth, but an *un-truth*, and the “arduous,” “strenuous” and “willful” effort is to “forge” or “wrest” truth from the *un-truth* of our Being (Benesch, 2020). While post-truth thinking reduces reality to a simple binary (*e.g.*, “my truth” versus “your truth” or “rationalism” versus “sentimentalism” or “yes” versus “no”), our enacted world demands recognition of interwoven perspectives that not only honour empirical evidence and diverse lived experiences (another set of binaries), *but* equally embrace the complex, dynamic interplay between mind, life, body, and environment that shapes how we know, what we know, and finally, how we *en-act* in our shared Being-in-the-world. The contemporary transformation of these concerns into post-truth discourse exemplifies a classic *non sequitur*: from Malpas’ (1992) call to retrieve truth from the debris of Modernity and Tesich’s (1992) lament over truth’s devaluation, advocates of post-truth incorrectly infer justification for abandoning truth’s centrality altogether.

Further articulations against post-truth and the ‘crisis of democratic institutions’ (Oleksiyenko & Jackson, 2021, p. 1057) include the Foucaultian notion of *parrhesia* (*truthfulness*) or ‘aesthetics of the self’ (Ambrosio, 2022, p. 2141) and the Nietzschean ‘care of the self’ termed *therapeia* (Peters et al., 2022, p. 703). The Greek-inspired *parrhesia* (παρρησία)—etymologically “all” (πᾶν) “utterance/speech” (ῥῆσις)—was employed in Ancient rhetoric usage to utter boldly, frankly, and freely. For *therapeia* (θεραπεία), the etymology suggests the verb *therapeuo* (θεραπεύω), which among many connotations means “to heal,” “to serve,” or “to attend to.” In the educative domain, the archaic aesthetic of truthfulness, to Foucault, is inapplicable in our modern epistemological framing—only a courageous act that risks the Self and potentially unsettles²² the Other would establish sincerity of purpose (Ambrosio, 2022). Construed as a moral obligation demanding ‘better knowledge’ (Baggini, 2017, p. 108), Ambrosio (2022) stated that the duty of the *parrhesiastes* was *not* to establish truth *per se*, but to criticise the interlocutor of Self or Other. A call toward academic freedom notwithstanding (Davids, 2021), the subject *parrhesiastes*—with quasi-free *agency* among other quasi-free *agents*—must grapple with the erosion of truth and accountability within the structures of democratic institutions (Peters & Besley, 2019). Otherwise, such an Ancient privilege of truth-tellers will surely fall on deaf ears. Our corollary is such that without a structure of epistemological depth, one may well be listening—and conversing—*truthfully* ... yet interpreting truth within conceptually deficient frames (Table 1).

20. The idea of transcendence remained even after Heidegger’s turn (*Kehre*) who, according to Moran (2014), valued transcendence as *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) and *projection* (*Entwurf*)—two terms whose shared etymological root is cognate with English “warp.”

21. The path toward saving truths (Neufeld, 2009)—against insignificance and alienation; the path of authenticity for Taylor (2003).

22. The *parrhesiastes* risks ‘angering or hurting a friend by telling them they are wrong’ (Ambrosio, 2022, p. 4), such that the risk of truth-telling runs in both directions—toward the Self who speaks and toward the Other who receives. Crucially, however, the resolution of the emotional tension arising in the Other does not require the *parrhesiastes* to descend to the sentimental order—to soften, retract, or capitulate—but rather to maintain the envelopmental structure that already integrates the orders of rational clarity and sentimental warmth. The *parrhesiastes* who collapses into the Other’s emotional reaction has forsaken the very height from which truth could be offered. An envelopmental resolution is care without the loss of reason—a higher register that warms the coldness of rationality without surrendering to sentiment—the philosophical dimensions of which are developed in the companion paper.

The Complexity of Enveloped Truth in the Philosophy of Education

The etymological investigation of post-truth reveals not only a linguistic problem but a fundamental category error in educational philosophy—the confusion of span with depth²³ (Wilber, 2000), wherein the horizontally extensive cultural condition of sentiment-over-reason is mistaken for a vertically comprehensive worldview (i.e., the “Kosmos” or “Great Chain of Being”), and the categories of the sentimental-rational field are used to legislate over orders of knowing that structurally exceed and envelop them. As established in our etymological analysis above, the very construction of post-truth as a term reveals a conceptual incoherence—there can be no spatial or temporal domain beyond truth without negating the very concept of truth itself. The flattening of truth is traceable to the progressive loss—across the arc from Modernity to post-Modernity—of the higher envelopmental dimensions of Spirit, reducing the epistemological topography first to the rational and empirical, and subsequently, within post-Modernity, to a horizontal pluralism wherein no order of perspectives retains priority over another (i.e., no “higher perspective”). Post-truth arises as a consequence within the already-flattened post-Modern landscape—not as a further horizontalisation but as a perverse²⁴ inversion (Figure 1), wherein sentiment is elevated above rationality within the same impoverished two-valued field of ratio and sentiment, producing the crooked simulacrum of depth identified throughout the present paper as the structural *non sequitur* of post-truth. Whilst post-truth discourse thus distorts truth through inversion, truth paradigms, properly understood, function through envelopment—holding the rational and sentimental orders in asymmetric, hierarchical relation within a higher integration of post-formal stages of cognition. The critical question becomes not whether post-truth constitutes a valid perspective, but how philosophical reflection might recover the depth and dimensionality of truth paradigms that post-truth discourse systematically forecloses—a question to which the Taylorian diagnosis of the malaise of Modernity offers an indispensable, albeit incomplete, cultural phenomenology.

Philosophically, Charles Taylor (1989; 2003) pointed out that new forms of narrativity and new understandings of the Good—alongside our societal intersubjectivity of quasi-free *agency* among other quasi-free *agents*—collectively shape within our sense of Self a new coherence. This coherence represents truth as enveloping rather than flattening human experience. Currently, the (rational/modern) concept of education is an oppression to falsity: the repudiation that being naïve is the key to success and failure the key to understanding. That concept has, to Neufeld (2012), reached the end of its possibility as a meaningful engagement with the Good. Taylor (2003), furthermore, argued a careful path of articulation was needed, to come to terms with our sense of Self, our existence, our conflicts, our evolving or mutating inwardness, *et alia*, all within a historical enterprise²⁵ and predicated upon our present Self as a concatenation of our historical Self, both individually (e.g., moral standard) and socially (e.g., modern philosophy). The sheer breadth of such a historical enterprise (*re*: development) and the complexification of truth within a historical lens (*re*: envelopment)—whose measure is in centuries—provides us with what Taylor called successes (“models”) and failures (“foils”). These “models” offer dimensional depth lacking in flattened conceptions of truth, allowing critical engagement with our evolving sense of the nature of the Good. For instance, the malaise²⁶ of Modernity—that echoes in post-Modernity—centres around two principal themes: (1) the narrowing of

23. A concrete example is the ecological notion of the “more-than-human” world (Davis, 2004), which situates Earth as the largest and therefore most comprehensive whole—reasoning from span alone. From an envelopmental perspective, however, Human as a Spiritual Being is qualitatively *more* than Earth precisely because depth exceeds span: the human being envelops Earth as a higher holon, not by occupying more physical space, but by encompassing greater depth of interiority (Wilber, 2000). The category error here lies in mistaking the largest circle for the deepest one—the distinction I make between the ecological and metaphysical models of education (*cf.* Blom & Lu, 2016, Appendix A).

24. Etymologically from Latin to “turn thoroughly wrong.” The transmutation of perversion is, of course, the harmonious cognates stemming from *verse* (e.g., conversation, diversity, university, or simply “verse”) which directly relates to metaphors of teacher education.

25. We note that present foils may suppress awareness to past models (e.g., divinity and our inherent connection the transcendent Good) and cater to a modern malaise (e.g., disenchantment, narcissism, nihilism, and instrumental reason). We believe post-truth is a foil disguised as a model.

26. According to Neufeld (2012), higher education institutions (HEIs) are not only unable to correct such a malaise, but lend to its character through an increasing „essence of technology;“ a Heideggerian *technologia*, moreover, is at odds with what it means to be human, to seek deeper meaning in one’s Being-in-the(ir)-world, and to articulate spiritual ways of knowing, albeit in increasingly nonreligious ways within HEIs.

the self which begets narcissism, a *flatness* of living and shallowness of purpose, and the loss of the heroic²⁷ dimension; and (2) the disenchantment of the world (*i.e.*, Pan) through a reliance on the instrument (*i.e.*, Reason) and the role technology which equally ‘contributed to the narrowing and flattening of our lives’ (p. 6). These two principal themes converge onto the notion of *flattening*—a term emblematic of a loss, more generally, of the transcendent dimension. Such a flattening, away from the Spirit of contemplation and narrowingly toward the mathematical, material, calculable, and quantitative, marked the crisis of Modernity to Guénon (2004c)—whose diagnosis of the “reign of quantity” symbolically supported Taylor’s investigation into the malaise of Modernity. Again, is there a rightness or truth to the postulates of a post-truth ideology or worldview respectively? To Taylor (2003), and ourselves, not without an alignment with our evolving sense of the nature of the Good.

Taylor’s examination of flattening as a key symptom of Modernity’s crisis of malaise directly challenges the epistemological tendencies evident in post-truth discourse. His analysis of narrowing and flattening finds resonance in ecological perspectives that similarly identify how binary reductions impoverish our understanding of complex phenomena. Ecologically, the interconnected, interdependent, enacted, and conjoined mindbody (Davis, 1996; Varela et al., 1993) provides a rich foundation for understanding mindfulness as an embodied practice. Ecological approaches (*e.g.*, the interobjective *minding* in educational theory) reveal mindfulness as an enveloping truth practice rather than a critical technique²⁸ (Davis, 1996). Fritjof Capra (1996) and contemporaries (Stone & Barlow, 2005), in efforts to connect various themes such as complexity theory, the Santiago Theory of Cognition, deep ecology, and the “new sciences” of biology, proposed ecological literacy or *eco-literacy* to the educative domain—toward an understanding of form, pattern, structure, complexity, and relationships essential to mindful engagement with truth. Post-truth discourse, operating exclusively within the horizontal field of competing sentiment-based claims, cannot register ecological complexity as a meaningful epistemological category (*re*: “evolving sense of the Good”)—for depth, not span, is precisely what the two-valued field of ratio and sentiment excludes. The consequence is not just philosophical imprecision, but bears significant pedagogical implications: when depth is reduced to span, expertise²⁹ becomes indistinguishable from opinion, teachers become interchangeable units, and the entire vertical dimension of human cultivation—contemplation, mastery, spiritual knowing, the very *periagōgē* (*re*: “*turning-as-transformation*”) that education at its deepest level names—becomes structurally unthinkable within the flattened conceptual space post-truth both reflects and perpetuates. To quote Gadamer in his exposition on prejudice, ‘what authority says is not [necessarily] *irrational* and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered *to be true*. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the *expert* [emphasis ours]’ (as quoted by Davis, 1996, p. 139). Echoing Davis, a multi-valued system does away with teachers versus learners and posits teachers-*as*-learners; however, in the non-Aristotelian spirit of Korzybski (1958), where order matters and structures of asymmetry prevail, the notion of learners-*as*-teachers is philosophically unsound—a topic beyond the scope of our paper.

Unravelling the post-truth condition proves more complex than simply opposing rationality with ecological sensitivity or heterarchical plurality—for even the most sophisticated alternatives available within contemporary educational philosophy risk reproducing the very flatness sought to remedy; the onto-epistemic topography that espouses a binary system of sentimentality and rationality within the human experience (*i.e.*, soul) remains wedded to the paradigmatic limits of the Cartesian dictum, *the cogito* (Figure 1). Moving beyond the very bivalence and flatness that enables post-truth discourse to appear coherent allows for genuine mindful engagement with complex truth structures (*i.e.*, truth paradigms). In such a simple, two-valued, either/or system of evaluation, the *cure* to rationality—and the post-Modern quest for truth—is equally simple: *less* (priority on) reason and *more* (priority on) sentiment. While ecological frameworks offer valuable alternatives to Cartesian dualism, many ecological approaches perpetuate another

27. We note that the *heroic* dimension is a subset of the *transcendent* dimension.

28. The democratic notion of freedom, for instance, is as much an interobjective and ecological issue where authority is based upon „reasonableness“ as authority conceptualised within intersubjective and critical framing and ‘identified with oppressive power or intrusive violence; [placing authority] on a foundation of fear’ (Davis, 1996, 139). Hence Davis, like Malpas, speaks to understanding truth beyond mere (modal) games of power.

29. Clark’s (2019) “death of the expert” names the cultural instantiation of expertise collapsing into opinion, the philosophical remedy for which is developed in the companion paper as 3-valued or n-valued discernment within envelopment structure.

manifestation of the *non sequitur* pattern—applying eco-systemic paradigms to eco-epistemological problems whilst unwittingly reproducing the very epistemological flatness the paradigms were invoked to resolve. An example in the socio-educative domain is the problematisation of hierarchy (*i.e.*, “transcendence”) and collapse toward what Wilber (2000) called heterarchies. Accordingly, heterarchical *solutions*—whether proposed by web-of-life theorists,³⁰ communal pedagogical theorists, or others—toward a view that “all perspectives are equally valid” are generally contradictory due to *another* deficient conceptual space: namely, the categorical rejection of hierarchical structures altogether (see Table 1). Heterarchy attempts to replace both pathological hierarchies (*i.e.*, the perceived “problem”) and growth hierarchies (*i.e.*, the undiscerned “solution”). Simply put, without hierarchy-integration, there is only heterarchy-differentiation which produces another form of eco-epistemological flatness—precisely the condition enabling post-truth to appear legitimate. In truth, to permit disquotational reasoning on our part, there exists both pathological and growth heterarchies too. Thus, integral theorists extend the topography further (*e.g.*, *scala nature*) to remedy what Wilber (2000) postulated as *subtle reductionism*—a flatland ontology where mindbody metaphors, ideas, and concepts remain tilted toward the material, albeit systemic and interconnected, ecological dimensions (what Wilber called “its” or the “sum total of shadows”). The solutions we ought to seek are growth heterarchies *and* growth hierarchies, rather than replacing growth hierarchies with pathological heterarchies—a hypercommunion enterprise.

Table 1
Some Deficient Conceptual Spaces

Deficient Conceptual Space	Leads to ...	Extension
{Each, Many}	Holism, systems theory	{Each, Many, One}
{subject, object, <i>inter</i> -subject}	Social constructivism/ionism	{subject, object, <i>inter</i> -subject, <i>inter</i> -object}
{Hierarchy as Power}	Critical discourse theory	Hierarchy as: {disassociation (pathology), integrative}
{Heterarchical Growth}	Flatness, arbitrariness, post-truth, non sequitur thinking	{Heterarchical Growth, Hierarchy Growth}

Note. The extension to the {One} leads to a differentiation between metaphysics as *sophia perennis*, and metaphysics as philosophy (metaphysical realism). The extension of {inter-objectivity} leads to mindbody pedagogical extensions such as minding, caring, conversing, occasioning, and hermeneutic listening to name a few (Davis, 2004) and philosophically to deep ecology. The extension of integration leads to integral theory. Finally, the extension of hierarchical growth leads to our notion of epistemological depth—an articulation toward expertise for the one who has enveloped the conceptual deficiencies of rationality. When epistemological depth is shallow, post-truth arises as a crooked perspective (*i.e.*, there is no “higher perspective”).

When we extend the epistemological topography, when we re-conceptualise depth and hierarchical emergence into our educative and philosophical evaluations (alongside span and heterarchies), we can then challenge³¹ the definition of Earth as being “more-than-human” speculated upon heterarchical, span-

30. As Wilber (2000) wrote, ‘It is ironic, to say the least, that the social champions of the web of life deny hierarchy in any form while the sciences of the web of life insist upon it. And it is doubly ironic that the former often point to the latter for support’ (*e.g.*, “The new physics supports the equalitarian web of life”)’ (p. 8).

31. The hierarchical differentiation of Earth into biosphere, noosphere, and beyond—as conceptualised by Teilhard de Chardin and Vernadsky (Wilber, 2000; Samson & Pitt, 1999)—follows a pattern of gradual envelopmental interpenetrations: geological and inanimate matter (Earth) was interpenetrated by life to form the biosphere, which in turn was interpenetrated by rational mind to form the noosphere—each stage enveloping and transcending the previous whilst preserving it within a higher integration, such that the Earth we inhabit now is already the rational interpenetration of biological form. The term itself is etymologically linked to the Platonic *nous* (νοῦς), the higher mind that grasps the Forms, and root of the educational term *understanding* or *dianoia* (διάνοια; “through Nous”). Crucially, however, Chardin and Vernadsky coined *noospheric* in reference to the passive intellect (νοῦς *pathētikós*) rather than the active mind (νοῦς *poiētikós*)—remaining, despite the hierarchical aspiration of the concept, within the register of ordinary mentation rather than spiritual intellect. The passive mind corresponds to the “subtle state” in Buddhist terminology, which ‘is properly the realm of ψυχή [*psukhē*] and not that of νοῦς [Nous]; the latter in reality corresponds to *Buddhi*, that is to say to the supra-individual intellect’ (Guénon, 2004b, p. 92). *Buddhi*—in contradistinction to *manas* (“mind—is the “very subtle state” to which the Enjoyment Body or *Sambhogakāya* is achieved through a lucid dream body (Wallace, 2006, 2011), akin to the writings of Plato’s *Meno* and *Phaedro*. Keeping strictly to the pattern of hierarchical emergence, the fourth stage beyond the noosphere would be the centauric age—the half human, half animal symbolism of an integration of body and mind toward supra-rational aperspectivism or vision-logic (Wilber, 2017)—or the Spirit-Self of the Steinerian worldview, both of which would

oriented, and ecological grounds alone (Davis, 2004). Instead we can postulate Human or Man³²—akin to the Daoist doctrine of Ren (人)—as “more-than-Earth” based equally upon hierarchical, depth-oriented, and supra-formal grounds. Such an integrated framework (*i.e.*, we are more than material beings, we are envelopmental beings bridging matter to Spirit), allows for spiritual ways of knowing and remedies the very deficient conceptual spaces that enable post-truth to appear despite its philosophical vacuity masquerading as a verifiable worldview. The expanded conceptual space (*i.e.*, theoretical “extension”) offered through envelopmental depths directly corresponds to what Neufeld (2012) called “saving truths” found not on Earth, but envelopmentally transcendent within our immanent selves and developmentally within our co-participation as quasi-free agents. A unified view emerges wherein Modernity’s *crisis* of truth and post-Modernity’s subsequent *crook* of truth manifest not as discrete, historical ruptures (*re*: crises) but as complementary dimensions of epistemological flattening—one through excessive rationalism that reduces depth to quantification, the other through sentimentality masquerading as critical flexibility. Both are faces of the same loss that Steiner (1964) diagnosed as dead thinking, and whose remedy lies in the living thinking through which the envelopmental register becomes genuinely accessible.

The *Crisis* of Truth in Modernity and the *Crook* of post-Truth in post-Modernity

Truth realised at the rational order is perhaps the defining feature of the egoic-rational soul and crowning intellectual achievement of the modern era for both Man and culture (Gebser, 1985; Wilber, 2000); for ‘the modern *the true is the modern*’ (Malpas, 1992, p. 287). As the etymology would imply, post-Modernity is the cultural era/mutation *after* Modernity; to be post-Modern is to adopt an ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv)—namely, the historical legitimisation of modern science and philosophy through reference to a rational metadiscourse. The process of delegitimisation, the attack on metaphysics, universals, and reason, and the linguistic turn defines much of what post-Modernity *is* (“principled, but wrong”). But for Malpas (1992), the *crisis* of Modernity³³ carried, *unresolved*, into post-Modernity—most notably remnants of the Enlightenment that sought truth in transcendent exclusivity.

For us, the unresolved crisis of Modernity creates the conditions for the crooked structure of post-truth, wherein sentimentality masquerades as an *autonomous* order of truth rather than finding proper integration enveloped hierarchically *within* rationality. When post-Modernity rejected hierarchical structures, the necessary scaffolding for maintaining qualitative distinctions between analogous orders of truth collapsed into a materialistic flattening (Coomaraswamy, 1987). Materialism—not merely as philosophical position but as cultural orientation³⁴—renders the transcendent dimension of truth increasingly inaccessible. The flattened landscape of materialistic thought creates a fertile terrain or epistemological substrate (both grounding metaphors) for post-truth discourse, where distinctions between orders of knowing—between rational discernment and sentimental attachment—become increasingly blurred (and not constructively in the fuzzy logic kind of blurring). The logical structure of the post-truth *non sequitur* becomes clear: (1) Modernity’s conception of truth had limitations; (2) these limitations deserve critique; but then (3) therefore, we now exist in a world beyond truth. The third statement simply does not follow from the previous premises, representing a fundamental break in reasoning so characteristic of the “facts don’t matter”

inevitably interpenetrate the noosphere to form a new soulsphere Earth. The access to higher orders of knowing beyond ordinary mentation—through contemplative structural practices such as attention (*śamatha*), mindfulness (*sati*), and insight (*vipāśyanā*), coupled with the cultivation of the four immeasurables (Wallace, 2011)—points toward what Steiner (1964) named living thinking: the epistemological modality wherein concept and percept, Spirit and matter interpenetrate, and through which the envelopmental register genuinely becomes accessible. Any such contemplative doctrine would be sufficient—Eastern or Western—including Baggini’s (2017) advocacy of epistemic virtues as a secular parallel.

32. We use the integral notion of Man—closely aligned with Ren (人)—to symbolise the human-soul-Spirit trifecta rather than naturalistic bio-phenomenological entities that would be implied through the use of either man and/or woman (Guenon, 2004a; Wilber, 2017).

33. Which to Malpas (1992) was synonymous/engulfed with the “crisis of Europe” and “crisis of truth.”

34. Coomaraswamy (1987) noted that ‘in the literal meaning of their etymology, “sentimental” and “aesthetic” are identical, and both equivalent to “materialistic”; aesthetic being feeling, sense the means of feeling, and matter what is felt. To speak of aesthetic experience as “disinterested” properly involves an antinomy: it is rather a noetic [spiritual] or cognitive experience that can be disinterested’ (p. 339); hence the Buddhist notion on the cultivation of *non*-attachment at the level of *manas* (mind) to envelop sentimentality and reach higher structures of truth (through the subsequent envelopment of *ratio* toward spiritual knowing).

discourse.

Steiner (2005) observed precisely such a pattern of the post-truth condition in 1916, when he wrote that ‘the great sin of our culture today lies in the fact that it [judgements] lives in sentences that bear no content, without realising how empty these sentences are’ (p. 3). For Steiner (1964), the epistemological crisis—stemming from a “materialistic worldview—creates what he termed *dead thinking* where thought produces abstract concepts that appear to float (*i.e.*, dissociate) above physical reality, yet remains trapped within materialistic assumptions about the nature of consciousness and reality itself; material thought becomes incapable of perceiving the living, interpenetrating spiritual dimensions within material processes. Furthermore, unlike crude anti-materialist positions, Steiner (1988) recognised materialism as a necessary evolutionary stage in consciousness development albeit identifying how its extension beyond proper boundaries creates increasingly abstract concepts divorced from lived experience. One could say Steiner anticipated aspects of contemporary mimetic theory³⁵ by identifying how concepts, once detached from living experience, proliferate as hollow discourse. Dead thinking thus establishes the epistemological conditions wherein the non sequitur of “post-truth” as discourse becomes culturally plausible (as a condition)—allowing emotional resonance to appear (falsely) as an alternative to contextualised (factual) validity rather than recognising these domains as hierarchically and asymmetrically related. Modernity, for all its limitations, preserved the asymmetric ordering of these two domains—rationality above sentiment, as Figure 1 illustrates—even if the envelopmental integration of the higher—or *hidden*—worlds remained structurally unavailable within the Modernist framework. To Steiner (1997), ‘a worldview not fructified by a knowledge of the hidden element inevitably leads to desolation’ (pp. 60–61) which bears analogy to the post-truth condition. Moreover, the higher worlds were not abolished by Modernity so much as rendered unconscious, relegated to what Steiner identified as the sleeping dimension of our Being, both *meso*-cosmically (cultural spiritual sleep to ignite materialism and the advent of modern industry) and *micro*-cosmically (when we undergo *the* physical-etheric and astral-Ego separation each sleep cycle). The higher envelopmental dimensions are not foreign to human Nature—as the Platonic *Meno* and the Daskalian notion of *exosomatosis* jointly suggest, the soul already carries knowledge of the spiritual world, accessed between incarnations and recoverable through contemplative cultivation. Post-Modernity’s rejection of the asymmetric ordering thus forecloses even the unconscious vertical dimension that Modernity, however imperfectly, preserved. In tandem, Steiner’s identification of dead thinking also provides a historical foundation for understanding how epistemological flattening creates the conditions for the post-truth illusion while simultaneously demonstrating the philosophical impossibility of moving “beyond” truth without abandoning coherence altogether. Conversely, Steiner’s (1964) concept of *living thinking* offers a counterpoint to materialistic consciousness and post-truth discourse—a modality where concept and percept, spirit and matter, interpenetrate rather than remain artificially separate. We find such living thinking already back in Plato, whose ‘theory of language is based on a quite radical thesis: any saying can be the story only when it is committed to the truth. Without having a *telos*, any saying is merely a mechanical organization of language elements but not a living organism [*ζῶον, zōion*]’ (Pleshkov, 2017, p. 137). Living cognition not only creates a fertile intersection between contemporary enactivist approaches and spiritual epistemologies, but illuminates the vertical dimension missing in post-truth discourse where the incapacity to enliven sentences and thoughts with truthfulness remains inauthentic.

Envelopmental structures of knowing enable vertical integration across analogous orders of truth—precisely what modern consciousness progressively abandoned. The Modernist epistemological crisis thus metamorphosed into post-Modernity’s structural distortion, creating an intellectual milieu, where vertical dimensions of knowing have become increasingly opaque, if not wholly unintelligible. Unfortunately, the envelopmental structure capable of integrating immanent and transcendent dimensions that would render the post-truth condition inefficacious collapses under span-oriented and Aristotelian bivalent conditions. Whether post-truth manifests as what Nally (2021) identified as misrepresentation or what Baggini (2017)

35. The relationship between Steiner’s critique and contemporary discourse labeled as “post-truth” reveals how the post-truth non sequitur gains apparent validity through three mechanisms: (1) the misconstrual of emotional resonance as epistemologically equivalent to factual accuracy; (2) the social construction of perceived reality through mutual reinforcement that masquerades as verification; and (3) mimetic processes creating self-reinforcing systems that resist correction while appearing to constitute legitimate alternatives to truth-oriented discourse.

theorised as atrophied epistemic virtues, these developments mark an obstacle to truth inherited from an Enlightenment consciousness—the Malpasian retrieval. Thus, in order to detail the journey from crisis to crook, we must first contrast the Enlightenment era to our own era, and foreground a propensity that engenders a sociocultural antagonism between eras. As culture historically develops, the previous cultural era becomes the Devil and a cultural tool to move beyond the confines of paradigmatic structures that defined the old age or the old structures of consciousness (Wilber, 2000); ‘the God of one stage of evolution and development tends to become the Devil of the next’ (p. 269). Thus, the Nature God Pan ‘became the actual personification of the Devil for monotheism. And, at the next stage, when Reason became the God of the Enlightenment, the God of monotheistic and mythic religions became the oppressive Devil of free thought and full human potential’ (p. 269). Today, Reason—and thus the search of truth through individual effort³⁶ and transcendence—is seen as the new Devil with Gaia as the new heterarchical God(dess). Accompanying Gaia is a preference for the communal (vs agency), the feminine (vs masculine), collectivity (vs individualism), holism (vs parts), immanence (vs transcendence), and so on. The key is to distinguish a pre-Modern quality with our current post-Modern inclination toward that quality.

From Crisis to Crook

The Malpasian retrieval of truth demands a genealogical account of how post-truth arose—not as arbitrary cultural caprice but as the structurally predictable consequence of a specific philosophical trajectory. What follows traces how the Enlightenment’s conception of rational transcendence, once delegitimised by post-Modernity, left the epistemological field open to the post-truth inversion: the path from crisis to crook. The word *crisis* has a fascinating root; etymologically, “crisis” derives from the Greek *krínō* (κρίνω) meaning “to separate and decide” and reflects the Chinese 危机 meaning *wēi* (“danger”) and *jī* (“chance/opportunity”). For Stephin Toulmin (1990), the undoing of the crisis of Modernity was a sizable task owing to the assumptions of the 17th-century Rationalists that continued to shape our way(s) of thinking in post-Modern times. The agenda of the Modern was ripe with intellectual rigour, abstraction, mathematical exactitude, and idealistic certitude.³⁷ Descartes and contemporaries favoured certainty, formal logic, and permanence (*re*: universals) over humanism, rhetoric, and the transitory respectively; for 16th-century Humanists of the Renaissance—a century which *also* provided a basis for Modernity—it was best to suspend judgment about matters of general theory, and to concentrate on accumulating a rich perspective ... as we encounter them in our actual experience’ (p. 27). For Toulmin, giving credit to the originality of Renaissance thinkers implicated ‘the opening gambit of modern philosophy; [i.e.,] not the decontextualised rationalism of Descartes’ *Discourse and Meditations*, but Montaigne’s restatement of classical skepticism in the *Apology*’ (p. 42). Despite correspondence between 16th-century humanism and 21st-century values, transcendence as regards truth remains unresolved.

The “separation and decision” to forego Modernity’s quest for truth through rational transcendence—albeit a transcendence unbeknownst³⁸ to the rational mind (Wilber, 2000)—finds no resolution to the limits of rationality (*e.g.*, moratoriums on truth). The resolution follows two paths: either the envelopmental structure of higher integrative post-formal faculties beyond reason (*e.g.*, vision-logic, integral-aperspectival, meditation, knowing higher worlds, *et alia*)—found within meditative and Anthroposophical literature in the West—or the distorted structure of post-truth (*e.g.*, the elevation of sentiment over rationality). To re-

36. If we maintain strictly within post-truth literature, we can cite „harmful“ distortions such as hyper-individualism as a byproduct of post-Modernity (Kester, 2019) and individualism as a byproduct of neoliberalism and socio-economic mobility (Parker, 2020). Conversely, a weakening of individuality and spontaneity of the psychosocial subject is suggested for emotional appeal and the ‘problem of mass psychology’ (Ambrosio, 2021)—noting that „mass“ here is symbolic of the dis-qualified individual toward a purely quantitative unit of a collective (Guénon, 2004c).

37. In other words, toward universal determinism—with the Laplacian demon a socio-historical limit on the distortion of such rationality. Today, sensibilities toward local determinism—by virtue of chaos and complexity theory, the linguistic turn, *et alia*—resulted in a post-Modern way of knowing that offers a ‘sensitivity to differences [that] reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert’s homology, but the inventor’s paralogy’ (Lyotard, 1989 p. xxv).

38. Wilber (2000) noted that the *reason* „reason“ can innocently reflect upon the world as seemingly „separate“—a famous critique of Heidegger who forwarded the notion of Being-in-the-world—is due to the use of ‘reason without really knowing the ontogenetic stages that produced it. [It] is simply not immediately obvious to reason that reason itself developed or evolved’ (p. 450).

iterate Figure 1, within a domain circumscribed by sentiment and rationality alone, rationality functions as the ceiling of knowing. When post-Modernity delegitimised rationality—rightly identifying its limits, yet wrongly concluding no higher order exists—sentiment became the only remaining option within the flattened two-valued field. Post-truth is therefore the structurally inevitable consequence of the category error: the assumption that the domain of ratio and sentiment exhausts the epistemological topography. Consequently, the concept of post-truth has less to do with *conceived* truth in our shared post-Modern academic and cultural climate and more to do with a *counter-truth* against Modernity; that is to say, not *deviation* from truth, but a *subversion* thereof (Guénon, 2004c). Such an enterprise can only lead to the dissolution of truth toward what Guénon would call *infra-human* potentialities. Herein lies a trace of transcendence, for what is clearly down or below (*re: infra-*) must also admit an up; and while we will not seek an immediate answer to what precisely define *human* potentialities³⁹—we do point out that such human potentialities are “higher” than our *infra-human* ones ... to say nothing of *supra-human possibilities* (Guénon, 2004a). Moreover, although reason differentiates (*re: arises from, goes beyond, is higher than, et cetera*) belief and emotions, reason does not have the capacity of integration beyond reason. Acknowledging the limitation of one’s rationality is the starting point of a healthy developmental cycle of post-formal⁴⁰ possibilities capable of integrating body and mind: a mind looking at the mind intersubjectively as opposed to operating within the mind alone (*re: reflection paradigm*). Vision-logic is aptly defined as the transitional stage of *self* between rational perspectivism and subtler consciousness structures (*e.g., aperspectivism*). Wilber (2000) defined vision-logic as recognising hierarchies within hierarchies—or holarchies within holarchies—while still maintaining a network-mind within heterarchies. Vision-logic ‘consciously grasps this [holonic] fact for the first time, and thus finds its own operation increasingly transparent to itself [emphases added]’ (p. 193). Wilber (2000) himself was inspired by the developmental angle of Jean Gebser (1985). According to Gebser, from the *rational-perspectival* of Modernity emerged (hierarchically) the *integral-aperspectival* of post-Modernity—a grand and discontinuous mutation in consciousness. For Modernity, a rational-perspectival stage can “walk in another’s shoe;” for post-Modernity, an integral-aperspectival stage can add ‘up all the perspectives tout ensemble, and therefore privileges no perspective as final: it is aperspectival’ (Wilber, 2000, p. 193). From perspectivism to aperspectivism marks a clear transcendence or mutation toward what we call a *supra-perspectivism* perspective or what Wilber (2017) called simply a ‘fourth-person perspective’ (p. 51) that emerged (*re: mutated*) within post-Modern discourse; thus, whereas post-truth is categorically “aperspectivism madness” gone dissociation, vision-logic is aperspectivism gone integral and integrative (Wilber, 2017). The Devil is in the details.

A post-truth paradigm that counters rational truth is a cultural *cul-de-sac* and, to us, a “crooked dishonest trick” (*crōc* in Old English) that does not properly differentiate⁴¹ from the partiality of Reason (*i.e., the Modern Devil*). The key is to differentiate and then *integrate* prior stages into the present⁴² rather than seek simplicity—in contradistinction to complexity—in past longings. Post-truth discourse fails to recognise that truth requires coherent unity (Malpas, 1992). As Pleshkov (2017) explained, for Plato ‘the true understanding of cosmos and logos is possible only on the level of the coherent unity of the [anterior] whole, which represents the ideal [truth] paradigm in the best possible way’ (p. 128). The Malpasian retrieval requires what Plato distinguished in the *Republic* (444c) as the contrast between “straightness” (*εὐθύ, euthú*) and “crookedness” (*σκολιόν, skolión*) in the soul’s relation to truth. In the *Sophist* (230b-c), Plato further illuminated the distinction through “twisted opinions” (*δοξῶν διαστρόφους, doxôn diastrophous*) that divorce speech from its commitment to truth, while in the *Phaedrus* (270e) he cautioned against the rhetorical

39. Taylor (2003) argued authenticity as one potentiality; Heidegger (2023) and inceptive thinking as another; the list is indefinite.

40. We keep to literature but would prefer the term *supra-formal*, supra-rational, or simply post-rational.

41. An example of proper differentiation versus dissociation is as follows: although all perspectives have their own partial truth and subjective validity (a post-Modern intellectual victory of differentiation over decontextualised truth), not all perspectives are equally valid (assumed due to a flatness).

42. Educationally and developmentally, according to Keagen, the ‘subject of one stage becomes the object of the subject of the next stage’ (as cited in Wilber, 2017, p. 256). Wilber (2017) himself found the definition applicable to both healthy and pathological development; thus, redefining to strictly define healthy development: ‘the subject in the 1st-person subjective stream (“I”) becomes an object in the 1st-person objective stream (“me”) and eventually in the 1st-person possessive stream (“mine”) ... of the next stage’s subject in the 1st-person subjective stream (“I”)’ (p. 701). Our point is simply this: that each stage is a transcendence of the previous, incommensurate stage.

“twisted complexity” (πλοκῆ, *plokêi*) obscuration of truth. These metaphors of distortion (“twisting the truth”) does not resolve the crisis a Malpasian retrieval aims to overcome, and only dissolves truth’s spoken character as the crook of post-truth—a path leading away from the very coherence and evolving sense of the Good. And although

part of the cure is “derepression of the shadow—that is, recontacting the lower structure [body/sentiment] that has been alienated and distorted [... it] is not at all the same as discovering the higher [supra-rational]: and it is the higher that the true healing, and true integration, can occur. (Wilber, 2000, p. 715)

Accordingly, to Coomaraswamy (1987), the psychonoetic practice of sati (*i.e.*, from mind → enveloped higher mind)—far from the Westernised psychosomatic concept of mindfulness to contact the lower structure (*i.e.*, psychosomatic; from mind → body)—prepares us for a single-instantaneous awakening (*eka-kṣaṇa-sambodhi*), toward a peace with oneself (*śāntātman*), and toward a truth of Being (*gnosis*) through a *dementation* (*amanībhāva*). Therefore, not a post-truth, but a post-rational structure toward truth—a known historical example being the Platonic *intellect*.⁴³ Utilising strictly ‘Scholastic terminology, it is the pure intellect [Buddhi/voūç] which is *habitus principiorum*, while reason is only *habitus conclusionum*’ (Guénon, 1995, p. 293). Our intent in recapitulating such metaphysical doctrine is to argue against two-valued ways of thinking and articulating to which post-truth permeates within a two-valued soul. For *without* truths beyond what the rational mind may grasp, and *with* the legitimate philosophical problematisation on the limits of rationality—one is left with sentimentality to play the dual role as both *sub*-rational and *supra*-rational modes of thinking and knowing. We find no coincidence, therefore, when we read that the symbol of the heart, traditionally the symbol for intellectual intuition, in modern times now plays the dual role for ‘affectivity’ (p. 285) owing to a collapse of ontological ideation.

Bending over Backwards and the Dangers of a Crutch

Having delineated Modernity from post-Modernity, we now return to the crooked prefixed word. Taylor (1989) would call the modern inclination toward subjectivism philosophically ‘skewed’ (p. 102) which lends further symbolic value to our choice of the word “crook.” Any skewed truth statements that society naively accepts without due process—whether spoken or written, and emptied of spiritual content in the manner Steiner (2005) identified as dead thinking severed from its living vertical ground—are subject to error through prejudice, perspective, and bias. The remedy is greater clarity and insight gained through hard intellectual work (including work on overcoming bias within oneself). Therefore, a third-person approach—deemed rational or empirical—gleans inconsistencies and multiple perspectives to arrive at a coherent understanding for common or uncommon notions. Such a stance was never called a post-truth, simply *truth*—at least in Modern terms. The historical (*i.e.*, post-Modern) critique of Modernity is that truth at the rational or empirical level is often devoid of subject and lends itself to abstract, uniform, and mechanistic approaches to knowledge—the Heideggerean *technologia*;⁴⁴ all points well argued. Yet, the irony is that to achieve a *third*-person perspective one needs multiple perspectives of the historical enterprise.

Metaphysically, through the qualitative use of number, from first- to second- to third-person perspective marks a clear historical enterprise (Wilber, 2017). And a clear distinction is to be made of “contemporary perspectives” whether the movement is from third- to fourth-person perspective (*e.g.*, vision-logic) or third- to first-person perspective (*e.g.*, subjectivism). Whereas the former is a clear transcendence, the latter is what we see in post-truth culture: a “bending over backwards” to seemingly progressive and holistic *first-person* sensibilities (a sentimental “crutch”). Thus, *truth can never be a post-truth*; the impossibility exposes the non sequitur as the premise that truth is complex, situated, and difficult to articulate fully is erroneously

43. The intellect remedied the limitations of reason’s discursive and mediate character to ‘Aristotle and his Scholastic successors, for to them the intellect was in fact that faculty which possessed a direct knowledge of principles. Aristotle expressly declares that “the intellect is truer than science,” which amounts to saying that it is more true than the reason which constructs that science’ (Guénon, 2004a, p. 117).

44. With devastating consequences (*e.g.*, Nazism) which, according to Malpas (1992), was not only the fruition of Modernity taken to its technological limits, but the crisis of Europe and more generally, Modernity in general. Nazism was both the ‘destruction of transcendence’ (p. 291) and ‘destruction of the hope of modernism’ (p. 292).

concluded that sentiment can convincingly replace rational truth. While it is true that a sentimental truth is true or *right* at the sentimental order, it is simply *not* true that the same sentimental truth is more important than rational truth—except when there is a collapse or inversion of orders. And to support sentimentality at the level of rationality is a crutch (a literal “crook”)—one that does not ameliorate the complex historical situation of truth but simply makes poor concepts sound more palpable to a sentimentalism that realised them.

We close our section with a central question: is there a rightness *or* truth to the postulates of a post-truth *ideology* or *worldview* respectively? The *exaltation* of the infra-rational is ‘the tendency to see in sentiment what is most profound and most elevated in the being and to affirm the supremacy of this over intelligence;’ (Guénon, 1995, p. 285) where such a flattening ‘could not have come about except for the fact that intelligence had first been reduced to reason alone’ (p. 285). Such an exaltation of the sub-conscious becomes what the Buddhist doctrine would call a *near enemy*⁴⁵ to the supra-conscious. Historically, if the post-Modern, post-factual era has taught us there is no truth and the pre-Modern era (*e.g.*, Platonism, Daoism, et cetera) that there is Truth—and that such a truth is capable of being attained through hard contemplative work—we query the contextual limits of the former position. After all, just like any crooked figure is not remedied by a crutch without greater physiological effort, so, too, any crooked truth is not remedied without greater intellectual effort needed to overturn popular sentiment.

The Drop of a Book and Other Envelopmental Stories

We now turn to three stories of the Authors that exemplify higher perspectives acquired in our lives. When the primary Author was 22, now 19 years ago, there was a moment in time that I read a single passage in John Robbins (1998) *Diet for a New America*. After reading the passage time stood still, the energy left my body, and the book, in slow motion, dropped from my hands that had not the energy to hold the book up anymore. I remember the series of statements that came to a single conclusion: the intake of milk (as excess dietary protein) decalcifies the bones. As one with a Northern European heritage and who drank litres of milk per day, and who had just decided to move away from meat and dairy products—hence why I was reading the book—the result was literally shocking. For I “knew” milk builds calcium in the bones, it was at the very cultural core of by being. I recognised, for the first time, that my set of unquestioned knowledge, inculcated culturally, was in fact not *wrong*, but bounded by spatial and temporal circumstances—“particular practices” within “particular utterances” to quote Malpas (1992). It was certainly not a post-truth, simply a partial truth, with socio-economic and socio-ecological considerations that were not within my field of knowing. The main point was the sudden realisation that happened spontaneously—that is to say, instantaneously—that if such a supposed truth was partial, what else did I “know” that was also on, what Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993) would call, “groundless ground.” Far from a post-truth coupled with uncertainty, there was a deepening of knowing—with an accompanied realisation—at an existential level.

Another philosophical perspective comes from Dr Chunlei Lu. As a child, I often asked my parents or older friends if someone was a good or bad person—whether in life or when seen in movies. Later, I realised the simplicity of good or bad is ineffectual—incapable of going beyond a simple and shallow level of understanding; that there exists *levels* of understanding was taught to me during my years of studying Taijiquan 太极拳 in theory (and practice). At the level of a basketball rim, we see the rim as a line. With a line, we have a left and a right. Only by rising (our eyes higher than the rim) through stages of cultivation can we see the line for what it turns to: a circle. The domain of possibilities of a circle is not right and left, but equally round, centripetal, centrifugal, rotational, and so on. The line was never a line, but a circle from a limited and horizontal perspective: two incommensurate perspectives of the same idea, symbol, or thing. I also realised that the line was not incorrect, it was simply partial and appropriate to the certain level of child development—part of a deeper symbolism of the life journey that we all move through. Since my decades’

45. We appreciate Grossman’s (2011) elucidation of Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa’s concept of „near enemies“ in contradistinction to „far-enemies;“ the latter ‘are characteristics we usually conceive of as opposites, such as love and hate, kindness and cruelty. Near enemies ... are qualities that may outwardly or superficially appear very similar, although these qualities actually profoundly differ from each other’ (p. 1035). Examples: (1) compassion and pity; (2) equanimity and indifference; and (3) Western (psycho-somatic) mindfulness and Eastern (psycho-noetic) mindfulness.

learning in Taijiquan and life, I have come to deepen my understanding of the symbolism of the line and the circle even more. Symbolism itself matches the consciousness that contemplates what is symbolised. For me, the circle is not static, but dynamic; a dynamic circle is again incommensurate with a static perspective, the latter perspective being a simple snapshot of the entire process of life. Moreover, the external symbol became an inward reflection capable of addressing many aspects of life. One such aspect is the symbol of Taiji 太极. When I was younger, the symbol represented two halves that acted as contraries. Deepening the understanding of the symbol, I noticed the symbol was one of complementarities. A complementary perspective recognises the double or mixed nature within all things, including within ourselves (*e.g.*, we are not all good or all bad). Higher expressions of the symbol was disclosed to me much later, that of the *interpenetration* of the yin 阴 and the yang 阳 within all phenomenal things—whether in hierarchical or heterarchical ways. This is a more precise meaning of Taiji: Wu ji er tai ji 无极而太极 (Endlessness is the end).

Last, in the case of Dr Darren Stanley, I recall as a young graduate student being introduced to Bernt Capra's⁴⁶ 1990 film, *Mindwalk*, a story about a poet, a politician, and a physicist, who met on the tidal island of Mont Saint-Michel and ended up reflecting upon and sharing with one another their own personal worries and woes. As they spent the day connecting and disconnecting, like the tides, they contemplated and discussed not only politics and philosophy but also spirituality, matters of ecology, and the scientific. I watched the three strangers meander along stone-cobbled streets around the cathedral-topped island, now cut off from the mainland, and take in their conversations. Their individual perspectives, and not merely their worldly concerns, began to open up a new, more complex, perspective for me; not simply a richer perspective through multiplicity, but a higher lens through integration; therefore, not simply more lenses, but a new lens, the lens being complexity. Complexity suggested to me rich patterns and concepts far beyond what I can see and understand. As the story comes to an end, the poet ends their day-long contemplations with some lines from Pablo Neruda: 'I walked around as you do, investigating//the endless star,//and in my net, during the night, I woke up naked,//the only thing caught, a fish trapped inside the wind.' And, so, I look into my own net and wonder how it draws from this endless sea—this endless seeing—and leave so much behind...for another day? Perhaps my net needs mending, but I have come to find so much more than I have ever caught before. From the holes to the wholes and then even greater, integrated wholes. Clearly, there is much more to learn, much more to see and understand, but I surmise that there is so much more than I *can* see. As the tide begins to come back in, the trio leave the island and this medieval island off the coast of Normandy becomes, once again, seemingly cut off from the world around it on this "groundless ground."

Deliberating A Path Toward Epistemological Depth

In understanding stability, the tendency is to think our eyes are what keep us balanced. Yet, it is our ears that do so through our vestibular system—in tandem with interrelated brain mechanisms. When there is imbalance, it is usually through contradictory visuals our brain receives. Stability, then, is more sonorous than our field of vision. Similarly, "truth rings true" is an application of sonorous symbolism. The concept of post-truth simply does not ring true, and the most obvious reason may be in the hearing of the compound word, for anything sentimental cannot itself be true at the rational order when properly viewed within an epistemological framework *en-framing* depth over flatness.

As our etymological and conceptual analysis has suggested, post-truth represents neither a progression beyond truth nor a coherent philosophical position, but rather what Malpas and Tesich originally recognised: a concerning cultural condition. Both pointed toward the need for retrieval rather than rejection and their insights—misappropriated in subsequent literature—reinforce our central thesis that post-truth constitutes a counter-truth disguised as an intellectual *non sequitur*; born from a category error, the post-truth concept is shallow, etymologically vague, and a conceptual necessity (*re: crutch*) to support a limited domain of validity. The path forward demands both philosophical vigilance and educational re-imaginings. By recognising truth

46. The brother of Fritjof Capra.

paradigms as envelopmental rather than remaining wedded to flat and material bivalence, Philosophers of Education can expand rather than flatten epistemological topographies—a requirement to the very Taylorian articulation that gives coherence to our evolving sense of the Good. A project against aperspectival madness demands the integration of rational discernment and spiritual insight rather than propagating empty signification—the structural dimensions of which, including the ordered process of discernment and the transformation paradox, are elaborated in the companion paper. The educational implications are significant: when teaching and scholarship reject the crookedness of post-truth discourse, they re-open pathways to what Neufeld (2009) aptly termed “saving truths” and Clark’s (2019) “*non*-post-truths” that restore depth and meaning to knowledge practices within truth paradigms.

We conclude where we began: with the recognition that truth cannot be “post” without ceasing to be truth. Thus, we argue that labelling post-truth as a *non sequitur* is the first step toward a “saving truth” of truth—to recoup ‘values associated with the era of truth, such as veracity, accountability, authenticity’ (Benesch, 2020, para. 2) as a meaningful Good (Taylor, 1989, 2003) and dialogue within languaging (Malpas, 1992). Considering the alternative, if post-truth is not a *non sequitur*, and we somehow live in disparate worldviews of “truth” and “post-truth” with the illusion of choice, such Malpasian attempts of retrieving truth would be “futile” (Benesch, 2020). The caveat, however, is that we *problematized* that we exist within a post-truth worldview; we find the propagation of the academic narrative supporting a post-truth worldview in educational philosophical discourse *problematic*. In the spirit of *parrhesia* and *vigilia*, Philosophers of Education are uniquely positioned to counteract the post-truth *non sequitur* by restoring the vertical dimension to truth—not merely as transcendence in the Malpasian rejection of exclusivity, but as the envelopmental structure that embraces both immanence and transcendence in their proper relation. We find such a task of unravelling spiritual knowing in the philosophy of education worthy of our times.

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Toward Truth Paradigms: Transformation, Epistemological Depth, and the Ordered Process of Discernment amidst the Post-Truth Condition

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ABSTRACT. Alfred Whitehead described the European historical enterprise as a series of footnotes to Plato. Today, educational philosophy is laden with transformative learning and post-truth rhetoric—neither bearing resemblance or refinement to the Platonic notions of metamórhōsis and reminiscence respectively. A fundamental paradox in contemporary educational philosophy persists in the celebration of transformation alongside the rejection of transcendence, creating contradictions that enable post-truth discourse to flourish within flattened ontologies amidst shallow epistemological landscapes. Building upon earlier critiques of post-truth as etymologically crooked, the accretive term epistemological depth is proposed as a constructive alternative—a distinct paradigm (injunction) of truth acquisition through progressive discernment wherein knowing emerges through an ordered process of envelopment rather than quantifiable accumulation or arbitrary (social) construction. Unlike approaches treating modes of knowing as constructed domains or arbitrary logoi to endlessly compare—Crosswhite’s post-truth condition—epistemological depth demonstrates how higher orders of discernment subsume rather than contrast prior understandings. By reconceptualising discernment as an envelopmental practice rather than a discriminatory one, I attempt to recover the Platonic dimension of truth as apprehended through contemplation, preserve the Taylorian emphasis on truth as articulated through meaningful expression, and embrace the Varelian understanding of truth as embodied through lived experience. The integrative framework honours spiritual dimensions of knowing while offering a path beyond post-truth discourse—not through returning to dogmatic certainty, but through progressing toward increasingly comprehensive frameworks that preserve rather than erase insights gained at each stage of extensional discernment within a non-Aristotelian system of logic.

ABSTRACT. Alfred North Whitehead charakterisierte das gesamte europäische Geistesunternehmen als eine Serie von Fußnoten zu Platon. Die gegenwärtige Bildungstheorie hingegen ist durchdrungen von Begrifflichkeiten des transformativen Lernens und einer postfaktischen Rhetorik – beides Konzepte, die weder der platonischen Vorstellung von metamórhōsis (Verwandlung) noch der Idee der Anamnesis (Erinnerung als Wiedererinnerung des Seins) gerecht werden oder daraus hervorgegangen sind. Ein fundamentales Paradox prägt somit die zeitgenössische Bildungstheorie: Sie feiert Transformation, während sie Transzendenz verleugnet – ein Widerspruch, der postfaktische Diskurse begünstigt und gedeihen lässt, indem er sie in einer ontologisch abgeflachten und epistemologisch verarmten Landschaft verankert. In Fortführung früherer Kritiken des Postfaktischen als etymologisch verquere Formation wird hier der akkumulierende Begriff epistemologische Tiefe als konstruktives Gegenmodell vorgeschlagen – ein eigenständiges Paradigma (bzw. eine erkenntnistheoretische Direktive), das Wahrheitsgewinnung nicht als quantifizierbare Anhäufung oder arbiträre soziale Konstruktion begreift, sondern als fortschreitenden Prozess der Einhüllung durch gestufte Unterscheidung. Wissen entsteht hierbei nicht durch bloße Addition von Informationen, sondern durch ein geordnetes, strukturierendes Einwachsen in Bedeutungszusammenhänge – ein Prozess, in dem höhere Ordnungen des Verstehens frühere

Erkenntnisstufen nicht negieren, sondern integrierend übersteigen. Im Gegensatz zu erkenntnistheoretischen Modellen, die Modi des Wissens als kontingente, sozial konstruierte Diskursräume oder als austauschbare logoi behandeln – wie etwa in Crosswhites Beschreibung des postfaktischen Zustands – zeigt der Begriff der epistemologischen Tiefe auf, wie sich Unterscheidung nicht im Kontrastieren erschöpft, sondern in der Fähigkeit, frühere Erkenntnisschichten in umfassendere Ordnungen einzuhüllen. Indem ich den Begriff der Unterscheidung von einem ausschließenden hin zu einem einhüllenden Verständnis verschiebe, wird der Versuch unternommen, die platonische Dimension von Wahrheit als kontemplative Erfahrung zurückzugewinnen, die taylorianische Perspektive von Wahrheit als existenziell ausgedrückter Bedeutung zu bewahren und die varelianische Auffassung von Wahrheit als verkörperte, gelebte Wirklichkeit zu integrieren. Dieser integrative Rahmen ehrt die spirituellen Dimensionen des Erkennens und eröffnet einen Weg jenseits des postfaktischen Diskurses – nicht durch eine Rückkehr zu dogmatischer Gewissheit, sondern durch ein Fortschreiten hin zu zunehmend umgreifenden Erkenntnisssystemen, die Einsichten jeder Stufe extensionaler Unterscheidung bewahren und aufheben – innerhalb eines nicht-aristotelischen logischen Gefüges.

A Sense of Truth and the Complexity of a Situation

Alfred Whitehead (1978) described the European historical enterprise as a series of footnotes to Plato. Today, educational philosophy is laden with transformative learning and post-truth rhetoric—neither bearing resemblance or refinement to the Platonic notions of *metamorphōsis* and *reminiscence* respectively. A fundamental paradox in contemporary educational philosophy persists in the celebration of transformation alongside the rejection of transcendence, creating contradictions that enable post-truth discourse to flourish within flattened ontologies amidst shallow epistemological landscapes. Building upon earlier critiques of post-truth as etymologically crooked,¹ the accretive term *epistemological depth* is proposed as a constructive alternative—a distinct paradigm (*injunctio*) of truth acquisition through progressive discernment wherein knowing emerges through an ordered process of envelopment rather than quantifiable accumulation or arbitrary (social) construction. Unlike approaches treating modes of knowing as constructed domains or arbitrary logoi to endlessly compare—Crosswhite’s (2018) post-truth condition—epistemological depth demonstrates how higher orders of discernment subsume rather than contrast prior understandings. By reconceptualising discernment as an envelopmental practice rather than a discriminatory one, I attempt to recover the Platonic dimension of truth as apprehended through contemplation, preserve the Taylorian (2001) emphasis on truth as articulated through meaningful expression, and embrace the Varelian understanding of truth as embodied through lived experience (Varela et al., 2016). The integrative framework honours spiritual dimensions of knowing while offering a path beyond post-truth discourse—not through returning to dogmatic certainty, but through progressing toward increasingly comprehensive frameworks that preserve rather than erase insights gained at each stage of extensional discernment within a non-Aristotelian system of logic.

My aim is to elucidate *a* truth paradigm—not *the* truth paradigm—in contestation with post-truth rhetoric whose ways of thinking and articulation against truth permeate a particularised worldview or outlook in educational discourse. The title draws inspiration from James Crosswhite’s (2018) *Toward Truth*, where he articulated a Protagorean perspective encapsulating a ‘willingness to accept conflicting conceptual schemes and competing logics, even contradictory “truths,” while still attempting to develop a productive political discourse’ (p. 371). According to Crosswhite, such a rhetorical view—rhetoric now in its virtuous sense of *ῥητορικὸς* (*rhētorikós*)—is befitting ‘perfectly to our time’ (p. 371) amidst a post-truth condition. Crosswhite categorised post-truth into (1) its cultural manifestation—where facts lose their power to inform public discourse—and (2) its *post*-Modern philosophical orientation that dissolves ontological permanence in favour of a Protagorean epistemology (*i.e.*, perpetual flux). I have previously addressed the former, cultural manifestation of post-truth,² examining how the phenomenon operates within contemporary discourse.

1. *cf.* the companion paper *The Crooked Structure of the Post-Truth non Sequitur*.

2. In the companion paper, we conducted a metaphysical analysis of post-truth as a cultural phenomenon, examining its etymological origins, conceptual inconsistencies, and the philosophical implications of its widespread acceptance in educational discourse (including the resemblance to the Steinerian „dead thinking“). The analysis revealed how post-truth inverts traditional epistemological hierarchies while simultaneously, and paradoxically, denying the validity of hierarchical structures altogether.

The previous analysis demonstrated how post-truth functions as both a crooked conceptual structure and a logical *non sequitur*—essentially serving as a counter-truth against Modernity. The paradox lies in the simultaneous inversion on the abstract ordering of knowledge—*i.e.*, where unsubstantiated opinion (sentimentalism) is *elevated* above reasoned judgment (rationalism) ... despite operating within a supposedly *non-hierarchical*, post-Modern, shallow epistemological landscape (see middle three columns of Figure 2). I also demonstrated how post-truth constitutes a limited *condition* or *point-of-view* (*Weltansicht*) rather than a comprehensive *world-view* (*Weltanschauung*) that contemporary educational discourse—with rare exceptions (Crosswhite, 2018; Nally, 2021; Clark, 2019)—uncritically assumes. Crosswhite (2018) lamented that ‘there is, in any case, no new theory of truth on offer that addresses our post-truth condition. If anything, we are producing ever new and more sophisticated theories of post-truth’ (p. 380). Thus, building upon the ontological diminution (*i.e.*, from worldview to point-of-view), I now wish to answer the call of Crosswhite and establish *epistemological depth* as a constructive alternative “toward truth paradigms;” epistemological depth contrasts the implications of post-truth’s philosophical incoherence *vis-à-vis* an epistemological *shallowness*. Definitionally, by “truth paradigm³,” I mean a structured framework through which truth can be apprehended, articulated, and embodied—an epistemological injunction (*re*: Kuhnian “paradigm”) within educational philosophy. And by “epistemological depth,” the current paradigm to be disclosed, I mean *a* truth paradigm whose structure of *extensional* practices of discernment hierarchically *envelops* truth. What follows is my attempt to unpack these dense definitions as a whole—in particular as they relate to transformation—so these two definitions deserve to be kept in mind throughout the manuscript.

Unpacking Definitions

Epistemological depth functions both as a truth paradigm—a mature, embodied understanding of the human being’s envelopmental relation to truth and environment—and as the structure through which truth paradigms themselves can be situated and discerned; the former is the emergent knowing, the latter is the theoretical terrain that makes expertise intelligible. The notion of fractal geometry informed and inspired my understanding of epistemological depth as disclosed by Mandelbrot (1982) through the computational visualisation of iterative complex sequences. Fractals, like epistemological depth, operates both as a truth paradigm—though rarely perceived in our shared reality until named—and foregrounds mathematical complexity through *structural* iteration; iterative sequences occur when outputs becomes the inputs of the next iteration⁴—thus, epistemological depth, like fractals, proceeds *envelopmentally* rather than *additively* (*i.e.*, not *more* information to accrue quantitatively, but an onto-historical process toward qualitative transformation whereby prior knowledge becomes a subset of higher understanding); however, unlike fractal self-similarity, each successive order of discernment that apprehends epistemological depth discloses a qualitatively deeper structural relationship rather than repeating the prior pattern at a different scale. That such an envelopmental structure has remained unnamed within educational philosophy is itself symptomatic of the very condition epistemological depth addresses—a post-truth condition arising from a flattened worldview where competing logoi have no *asymmetrical* relation. Epistemological depth, through iterative and envelopmental logic, is precisely what restores that asymmetrical relation—progressively maturing the human being from Aristotelian, binary designation toward non-Aristotelian (\tilde{A}), extensional, multi-ordinal orientation(s) that harmonises the nervous system and the entire psychophysiological complex (Korzybski, 1958).

3. Dominant theories of truth—*correspondence* (truth as agreement between proposition and fact), *coherence* (truth as internal consistency of a belief system), and *pragmatist* (truth as what works in practice)—each describe what truth is at a given epistemological level; see Glanzberg (2023) for an overview. A truth paradigm operates at a meta-level relative to these first-order theories: the concern is not with what truth is but with the ordered, envelopmental structure through which truth comes to be apprehended, articulated, and embodied across levels of knowing. Tellingly, the modern correspondence theory is itself a flattened residue of a primordial correspondence between human and cosmic order (Guénon, 2004b)—what was once a living, vertical, analogical relationship has been reduced to a horizontal propositional matching, precisely the epistemological shallowness that truth paradigms move to recover (and thus transmutes the interpretation of “correspondence” from modern \rightarrow perennial). Relatedly, Steiner’s (1995) epistemology envelops rather than simply opposes these accounts, for thinking in Steiner’s account is ‘neither subjective nor objective; it goes beyond both these concepts’ (p. 53)—dissolving the subject-object dualism in line with ecological and complexity theories today (Davis, 2004).

4. In the case of the Mandelbrot fractals, $z \mapsto z^2 + c$ where $z, c \in \mathbb{C}$.

Notably, both Alfred Korzybski and Rudolf Steiner independently identify the nervous system as the site where ordinary cognition arrests its own maturation—Korzybski structurally and semantically, Steiner spiritually and ontologically. For Korzybski (1958), such arrest manifests in degrees—from the ordinary semantic disturbances of daily life through to the delusions, illusions, and hallucinations of clinical psychiatry—all involving ‘the semantic [mis]identification *or confusions of the orders of abstractions*, the evaluation of lower orders of abstraction as higher, or higher as lower’ (p. 423)—the consequence of Aristotelian, two-valued orientation applied to our nervous system; for Steiner (1990), the same structural ceiling is diagnosed from the spiritual perspective: the nerve substance, cosmically alive in its origins, undergoes an earthly arrest upon descent into physical existence, tending toward cold, atomistic abstraction—the consequence of Ahrimanic influence within the earthly nerve substance—severed from the cosmic source that would enliven it toward higher knowing. Both thinkers identify the same human type in whom the Aristotelian-Ahrimanic arrest had become a settled orientation: for Korzybski (1958), pure intensionality—orientation by verbal definition alone, severed from living fact—is ‘possible, and often found in hospitals for the mentally ill, and in some chairs of philosophy’ (p. xlv); for Steiner (1990), the philosopher enveloped in Ahrimanic arrest is named outright as a homunculus—a thinker in whom everything tends ‘into homunculism, into spiritual emptiness’ (p. 45), producing logically correct concepts that remain false to living reality. Both thinkers correspondingly invoke living image-making as the path beyond arrest: for Korzybski (1958), through training in visualisation⁵ within a non-Aristotelian (*re*: extensional and organism-as-a-whole) orientation, restoring in well-balanced persons the harmonious working of all higher and lower centres (*e.g.*, nervous, affective, intellectual) on their proper levels; for Steiner (1990), through the cultivation of imaginative thinking—a pictorial, living mode of cognition that warms⁶ what had remained cold nerve-bound abstraction, finding its way from the nervous system toward the blood, and thus from the merely logically thought-out toward ‘the true to reality’ (p. 45). That two thinkers from the quantum sciences and esoteric sciences converge on the nervous system as the shared site of arrest, on the modern philosopher as its representative type, and on the cultivation of living image-making as the shared direction of remedy—whether \ddot{A} or Christic—intimates that epistemological depth names something real: the arc beyond that arrest, along which truth paradigms may be situated, discerned, and traversed.⁷

Discernment is often confined to theological studies. However, as an envelopmental meta-practice⁸ within \ddot{A} , the transmutation is from two-valued to three-valued (or n-valued) orientation; discernment is the meta-practice through which epistemological depth is progressively traversed rather than constructed—each act of extensional discernment absorbing prior understanding into a more comprehensive order. Truth paradigms, in turn, are the injunctions—whether cultural or individual—as ordered frameworks through which such traversal becomes educationally intelligible and communicable. A simple example is the injunction of General Relativity (GR) to remediate the issue with Newtonian Mechanic’s (NM) account of the mercurial orbit. GR does not replace NM, GR *envelops* NM—meaning the framework of NM emerges when the conditions of GR are limited to the domain of validity of NM. Education as a whole follows both the developmental *and* envelopmental processes—the former translative, the latter transformative.

The “depth” part of “epistemological depth” is discerned from *span* (Wilber, 2009). Whereas span would insist on material connotations (*e.g.*, in educational literature the Earth is “more-than-human” (Davis, 2004) since Earth is bigger than humans), *depth* is toward the immaterial and envelopmental (*e.g.*, Man as a spiritual Being is “more-than-Earth” as we envelop Earth as the mineral kingdom within us). These two views—“more-than-human” and “more-than-Earth”—are asymmetrical and incommensurable. Envelopment

5. Korzybski (1958) developed his *Structural Differential* (p. 427) as a pedagogical tool for precisely this work—training the visualisation through which misidentifications are dissolved and the centres brought into harmonious relation.

6. In the esoteric sciences, the gradual cultivation of imbuing warmth into our cool and rational thinking process develops a rose-pink light within our heart centre (Dr Robert J. Gilbert, personal communication, 2010).

7. Steiner (1990) opens by insisting that ‘the generalisation that all matter is a manifestation of the spiritual really says nothing at all; at most it is an easy philosophy for lazy people. All those who seriously strive for knowledge have to study how the world’s specific material phenomena manifest the spiritual’ (p. 32). Truth paradigms respond precisely to that demand.

8. A meta-practice is a spiritual response to the mechanistic way educational research practices have unfolded within the last century (Neufeld, 2009). The operationalisation of two meta-practices are (1) n-valued extensional discernment and (2) the ancient wisdom craft of mindfulness.

is ubiquitous, from our mind controlling our body to a math teacher teaching as an embodiment of a mathematician (rather than just mathematical concepts). Finally, extensionality contrasts to intensionality (with an “s”) as the latter mistakes its verbal map for the territory whilst remaining genuinely convinced of its truth (*re*: the post-truth condition); extensionality orients *evaluation* toward the relational structure of the territory that in Steiner’s terms is “true to reality” and in Korzybski’s (1958) terms is “structural knowledge.”

The Post-Truth Condition

Admittedly, these are not easy concepts nor are they necessarily empirically solvable—hence my articulation against post-truth (as a worldview) and toward truth paradigms is within the *spirit* of educational philosophy. Yet attempting to wrestle with these inter-related concepts and definitions nonetheless poses immediate problems for *any* philosopher of education, for the necessity of going deep into the complexity of a situation⁹ is demanded by the complexity of the idea (*i.e.*, the paradigm or injunction). For our conversation (myself and reader) on transformation (and against post-truth), we have “epistemology,” “depth,” “structure,” “extensional,” “discernment,” “hierarchy,” “envelopment,” all *implicitly* regarding a “paradigm” of “truth.” Logistically, we are dealing with complex *non-linear* situation(s) of truth constrained within linear prose—and to unpack an intuition *explicitly* about epistemological depth (my thesis) within the further constraints of a manuscript can be quite limiting indeed. By “constraints” I mean word limits and the simplification of arguments within a narrow field of interpretation in academia despite the very nature of complexity which demands multiple ideas that *converge*¹⁰ onto a thesis; for me, simplicity (*re*: shallowness) is the fuel for post-truth discourse for the sake of popularisation, and against our basic conceptions of *meaning* and *sense* (of truth).

Following Mario Di Paolantonio (2023), the *education* in educational philosophy is ‘the place *par excellence* in which the transgenerational sensibility—the significance of inheriting and “passing-on” the world—can be most readily felt’ (p. 3). Moreover, educational *philosophy* offers the

possibility of rendering the “transitory” into something durable and enduring [re: invariant] in the world is a fundamental aspect of education’s role in shaping our temporal sensibilities, all the while upholding the prospect of our active involvement in and enrichment of the “meaningfulness” of human coexistence. (p. 3)

What is durable and enduring is not substance, but *structure* (Korzybski, 1958). However, on top of “passing-on” (*e.g.*, tradition, culture, *et alia*), Di Paolantonio was looking for “something more” to pass on whilst preserving our inherited past against presentism and ‘the senselessness of the futurability of the future [that] depresses thinking and sickens the soul’ (p. 49). Di Paolantonio was gravely concerned with the *crisis* of the future amidst interconnected crises of truth, legitimacy, sense, listening, *et alia*, that education ought to provide resolution toward—in particular pathways toward meaning, sense, and hope and away from apathy (*apathēs*), senselessness, and hopelessness. Now, is the post-truth “era”—an era that supposedly marks the end of an era of truth, one that lends to an *infocracy* where no-thing is arrestable, stable, temporal—worthy of “something more?” Do we allow education to “pass-on” its instability (*re*: crookedness)? Not if we wish to *retrieve* truth within the complex and evolving *sense* of the (Platonic) Good.

To begin, I assume that the “crisis” of truth is very real¹¹—and very *felt*. The etymology¹² is important here because the reciprocal relationship between language and ontological structures points toward a

9. The Gesamtausgabe for Steiner alone contains over 350 volumes to unpack karma, reincarnation, spirituality, human wisdom, *et alia*.

10. Such “multiple ideas” is considered, strangely, as *sprawl* by reviewers ... even though “sprawl” implies a *divergence*—notwithstanding avoiding the struggle a reader must go through to connect-the-dots within the interpretative framework of the author.

11. Which to Malpas (1992) was synonymous/engulfed with the “crisis of Europe” and “crisis of Modernity.”

12. For Heidegger (1982), etymology posed ‘a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science’ (p. 29) which corresponds to an *attitude* found more authentically in metaphysical rather than strictly philosophical inquiry; metaphysicians treat word origins as revelatory of essential meanings rather than contextual or historical curiosities—viewing language as symbolising deeper structures of reality that simultaneously envelop the linguistic expressions through which we articulate them. Cf. Barfield (1928) on etymology as recovery of a participatory relation between word and world; and Steiner (GA 282) on the sound-gesture of language as spiritual participation rather than signification.

conception where words participate in the disclosure of truths beyond representation—a perspective crucial for exploring epistemological depth (and *structure* as a whole). For instance, the etymological nature of crisis, *krínō* (κρίνω) means to “separate” and “decide;” and if we are

to restore to the word its full meaning and original value—[crisis is] to some extent synonymous with the words ‘judgement’ and ‘discrimination’. The phase that can properly be termed ‘critical’ in any order of things is the one immediately preceding a resolution, be this favorable or unfavorable. (Guénon, 2004a, p. 3)

Crisis as *krínō* also reflects the Chinese 危機 meaning *wēi* (“danger”) and *jī* (“chance/opportunity”). The traditional form of *jī* (機) is considerably richer than its simplified counterpart (机), preserving the connection to weaving.¹³ Most relevant here is that *krínō* is cognate to Latin *cernō* which comes to mean “separation” and “dis-*cern*-ment;” the modern English word discernment functions as the discriminative (cognitive) faculty that distinguishes and separates, forming an essential component of the educational doctrine of *understanding*. Having shown the structure of post-truth as etymologically crooked,¹⁴ I now wish to convey how *discerning* is a transcendent experience which I unpack through the theory of envelopment—a perspective entirely absent from contemporary educational discourse (including post-truth discourse) at the expense of its complement (*re*: “development”) ubiquitous in educational philosophy and theory.

My last point here is that many educational theorists who engage with educational philosophy appear comfortable operating within a purported post-truth era or worldview—misrepresenting the seminal 1992 literature from Steve Tesich and Jeff Malpas. I say “misrepresented” ironically as post-truth is defined as a misrepresentation (Nally, 2021) in the socio-cultural sphere alongside a general abandonment of truth in the post-Modern philosophical sphere. Yet neither theorist—Tesich (1992) nor Malpas (1992)—*abandoned* truth as each aimed to *retrieve* (an updated notion of) truth within post-Modernity from the debris of Modernity. I use “appear comfortable” deliberately as, following Cornel Hamm¹⁵ (2005), these theorists¹⁶ rarely examine the underlying semantic, philosophical, and existential foundations of the term or the ontological situation a post-truth era presupposes—a true philosophical *lacūna* or gap in the literature. Personally, I find such a daunting task of unravelling post-truth in the philosophy of education worthy of our times. Moreover, following Guénon (2004a)—who predates the term “post-truth”—there ‘is no reason to submit passively to the disorder and obscurity [of post-truth¹⁷] that seem to be triumphing at the moment’ (p. 6). Just as ‘disorder itself must in the end find its place among the elements of universal order’ (2004b, p. 1), so too must post-truth find itself subsumed within the tradition of truth. If error, therefore, ‘is to be reduced to a *partial* and *distorted* aspect of some truth [e.g., the *crookedness* of post-truth], it is necessary to place oneself *above the level of the contingencies of the domain* to which that disorder and those errors as such belong [emphases added]’ (p. 3). In other words, from a *higher* set of principles which we find, in the West, within perennial and Anthroposophical discourse.

Although Crosswhite (2018) characterised post-truth as an evolved consciousness of *flux* or *physis*—a meta-awareness of “constant change” that builds upon Protagorean sophistry—my perspective focuses on

13. The weaving dimension of 機—preserving the connection between mechanical precision, structural complexity, and the moment of critical juncture—anticipates the primordial loom symbolism developed in the third unpublished paper of the Author’s dissertation. Like discernment, a Heideggerian mindfulness (*Besinnung*) or Eastern mindfulness is also a meta-practice against machination (*Machenschaft*); the warp/weft structure of the loom becomes the governing symbol for the vertical and horizontal dimensions of truth.

14. *cf.* the companion paper.

15. According to Hamm (2005), the educational philosopher asks: ‘(1) What do you mean? (Or, what does it—the word, concept—mean?) (2) How do you know? (Or, what, in general constitute the grounds or kinds of grounds for claiming to know something?) (3) What is presupposed? (Or, what assumptions or presuppositions are you now making or must you make for the proposition you are now asserting?)’ (p. 5).

16. I see no intellectual purpose in specifying names; moreover, the generality of the unexamined position is ubiquitous in educational literature. However, for scholarly purposes, see Parker (2020), Peters and Besley (2019), Peters, McLaren, and Jandrić (2022), Oleksiyenko and Jackson (2021), Ambrosio (2022), and Kester (2019), among others, who posit or operate within an assumed post-truth era or worldview without interrogating the foundations of the term; a more comprehensive situating of these positions is conducted in the companion paper published in this issue.

17. Technically of the “crisis of Modernity” which Malpas (1992) equated to a “crisis of truth” (which I am sure Guénon would essentially agree). Today, our inheritance of the crisis of Modernity has left us with the crook of post-Modernity (i.e., post-truth); hence my insertion is warranted.

how modern thought—as Guénon (2004b) detailed—remains unaware of its imprisonment within the *level* of contingency, severed from transcendent principles that would give contingent phenomena intelligible meaning. Guénon (2004a) had already diagnosed the post-truth condition or “confusion” almost a *century* ago as regards the notion of stability:

there is an exact correspondence between a world where everything seems to be in a state of mere ‘becoming’, leaving no place for the changeless and the permanent, and the state of mind of men [sic] who find all reality in this ‘becoming’, thus implicitly denying true knowledge as well as the object of that knowledge, namely transcendent and universal principles. (p. 39)

Here I enter into the *spirit* of educational metaphysics (literally *meta-physis* or beyond time/space/Nature), which I like to symbolise as a *thalweg*¹⁸—the deepest, densest, thereby slowest, current of a river—indifferent to the popularity of ideas. While critiquing post-truth, though rare, is within the realms of philosophy, *contextualising* its existence is even more urgent (and profound), to counteract its apparent traction within the disorder of our times. Evidently, to *un-fold/en-fold* my position, I follow the advice of Paul Standish (2010) who concluded that a good philosophical composer will hold the reader in suspense for much of the document and show their full hand only at the end to announce their conclusion(s) more convincingly.

My *focus* here will be on the paradox in contemporary educational philosophy that manifests in the celebration of transformation alongside the rejection of transcendence—which eventually relates back to discernment. The resulting contradiction enables post-truth discourse to flourish within flattened epistemological/philosophical landscapes. I propose epistemological depth as a distinct paradigm of truth acquisition through progressive envelopment—wherein knowing apprehends “truth” asymmetrically (from “whole” to “partial” to “higher”); an asymmetric approach, where discernment subsumes rather than contrasts prior understanding, overcomes Crosswhite’s post-truth condition where symmetric, flattened, and arbitrary *logoi* are endlessly compared. By reconceptualising discernment as an envelopmental practice rather than a discriminatory one (*i.e.*, from $A \rightarrow \bar{A}$), epistemological depth recovers the Platonic dimension of truth as *apprehended* through contemplation (Heidegger, 1967), preserves the Taylorian emphasis on truth as *articulated* through meaningful expression (Taylor, 2001, 2003), and embraces the Varelian understanding of truth as *embodied* or enacted through lived experience (Varela et al, 2016)—thus offering an integrative framework to educational philosophy¹⁹ that honours spiritual or intuitive dimensions of knowing. To unpack these holonic, systemic, and interrelated concepts, I explore the paradox and *contextualise* the existence of post-truth through three questions:

1. Can the concept of transcendence be revisited in educational theory in light of new details?
2. Does transformation—ubiquitous in educational literature—differ fundamentally to transcendence? Put succinctly: can you have transformation *without* transcendence (or hierarchy)?
3. How does discernment relate to truth, hierarchy, expertise, and measure (*homo mensura*)?

These three questions—the first being the densest—frame my inquiry into epistemological depth as a constructive response to the philosophical *lacuna* that has enabled post-truth discourse to flourish. Underlying all three questions is a shift in logical orientation that the paper presupposes throughout—from Aristotelian to non-Aristotelian (\bar{A}). For Korzybski (1958), the Aristotelian system is characterised by two-valued, intensional, either-or orientations: the Aristotelian system deals in kind rather than degree, in binary designation rather than structural relationship, and in verbal definition rather than the living complexity of fact. Such a system, adequate at the gross level of daily life, becomes epistemologically insufficient wherever truth, transformation, and discernment admit of degree, order, and envelopmental structure rather than binary demarcation. A non-Aristotelian (\bar{A}) system, by contrast, is infinite-valued, extensional, and process-oriented—orienting evaluation toward the relational structure of the territory rather than the verbal map through which the territory is represented (Korzybski, 1958); epistemological depth, as a truth paradigm, is

18. See also Karrow and Harvey (2024) who had a parallel inspiration for environmental education (EE).

19. Even though I have studied Anthroposophy for two decades, my aim here is not to present an anthroposophical perspective, rather, to present a potential bridge from educational philosophy to the human wisdom Steiner attempted to bring out in our world soul (*Weltseele*).

precisely such an \bar{A} orientation: the ordered, envelopmental process through which discernment progressively traverses from two-valued designation toward the multi-ordinal complexity that living truth demands. And by following the many aforementioned mentors/theorists, including Ilya Prigogine (1997), what I am attempting to articulate is not certainty, but simply a slice of certainty within a greater uncertain worldview.

Truth-as-Transcendence in Light of New Details

The first question—whether transcendence can be revisited in educational theory—requires examining the inherited philosophical understanding of *truth-as-transcendence* through which epistemological depth, as a truth paradigm, must be situated. Our inherited notion of truth-as-transcendence comes through a rich philosophical heritage: initially shrouded in mystery as regards its (1) metaphysical connection with the Platonic “Real;” then through its relationship with the (2) Cartesian *pseudo*-metaphysical²⁰ “problem of the external world;” and finally toward (3) phenomenology and the eventual problematisation of transcendence—alongside the notion of a “two world theory”—in modern philosophical scholarship (Heidegger, 1967; Malpas, 1992). For instance, Heidegger (1967) was perhaps the first to recognise the Cartesian problem of *Aussenwelt* (“external world”) as a phantom problem.²¹ The “problem of the external world” for Heidegger was a phantom question precisely because the “problem” was informed by a deficient conceptual understanding of “being” and “world.” For there to be Being, there must equally be a world, hence Being-in-the-world. Similarly, the *Heideggerian* Malpas (1992) argued that the notion of ‘transcendence exclusivity’ (p. 297) as regards truth (*i.e.*, “truth-as-transcendence”) was ‘mistaken’ (p. 297); ‘*truth as a relation which takes our speaking beyond the human into a unique reality exterior to us was a notion that had to be relinquished*’ (p. 297). Despite Malpas introducing the concept of post-truth back in 1992—merely as a playful alliteration—Malpas was dedicated to *retrieving* an updated notion of truth—that “something more” to continue the truth tradition—and pointed precisely to Martin Heidegger as the one *ordained* to retrieve truth from various crises (truth, Modernity, and Europe). Malpas did offer his own solution(s)—that truth would be found within *immanence* or a *ground*, arising through dialogue, and situated within an assumed unity (*re*: unicity) that proposes ‘the possibility of reconstituting meaning [insofar as] it lies ultimately in the unity of truth itself’ (p. 298). With respect to *linguaging*, the idea of *truth* ($\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$) in Greek, *alétheia* was to Heidegger disclosure or unconcealment, and to Malpas, *alétheia* ‘is neither a matter of transcendent speaking nor a product of human manufacture. In this sense the “event” of truth is something over which we can exercise no control and which will always remain opaque’ (p. 301). Moreover, notions of truth, grounded in the event which discerns “sameness and difference” (*re*: *distinction*) in the engagement, is equally *indeterminate*. When I read Malpas, I am transported *not* into an illegitimate worldview or era of post-truth, but a legitimate worldview of deep ecological distinctions and discernment as regards truth (see Figures 2 and 3); the humanness of languaging, understanding, and reflection correspond to an interconnected and ecological worldview dedicated to a preservation of truth-as-retrieval. Without being prescriptive, Malpas offered contours of a theory of truth: one ‘which recognises differentiation and contingency, and yet still allows the possibility of engagement and dialogue’ (p. 303). In other words, a *truth paradigm*.

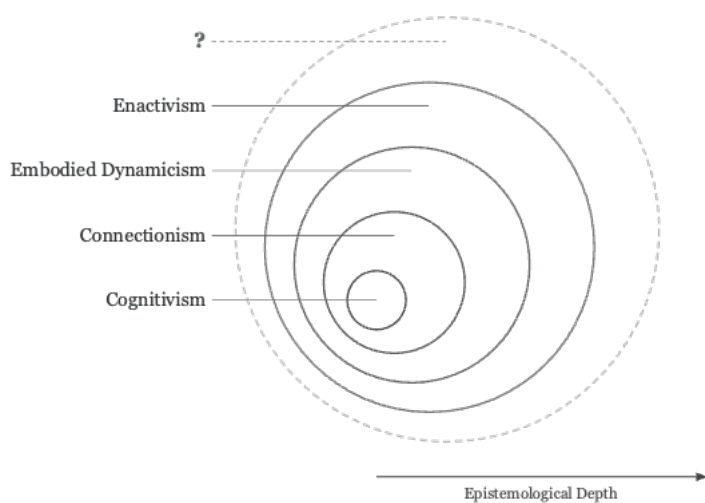
As an aside, the parallel with the Santiago Theory of Cognition is striking and merits attention. Republished in the same year, Maturana and Varela (1992) theorised, on the basis of biology, that unities are brought forth by any implicit or explicit *distinctions* of cognition—strictly through our co-participation of the encounter. Such encounters are not only the basis of our acts in language that bring forth *a* world—as opposed to *the* world—but also ‘in the final analysis, the groundwork of all ethics as a reflection on the legitimacy of the presence of others’ (p. 247). These seemingly disparate lineages of 1992—one rooted in the biological basis of knowledge and the other from an educational philosophy of knowledge—are analogous, for what is ‘transcendence exclusivity’ to Malpas is *commensurate* to ‘environmentally determined’ (to the perturbed agent) to Maturana and Varela; each problematised a demarcated *Other*, beyond our *existing*, and

20. Often confused as metaphysics as modern philosophers tend to conflate *metaphysical realism*—modern Cartesian science accompanied by modern philosophy—with *traditional metaphysics*—perennial philosophy (*sophia perennis*) as regards pure spirituality or true intellectuality. To my way of understanding, Anthroposophy is based upon the latter and updated for our times.

21. *cf.* Heidegger (1967) *Being and Time* (SZ §43, 224–252).

playing the role of our *Fates*. These demarcations of organism-environment and truth-transcendence—which already in 1933 Korzybski (1958) ascribed to an Aristotelian worldview—have led (scientific) philosophers to study and distinguish *structure* (or pattern/organisation) from *substance* (Capra, 1996). Such structural or organisational implications have shifted (*re: implicated*) educational theories of social constructivism and social constructionism as operating within inadequate assumptions—‘a disembodied observer or of a dis-worlded mind’ (Varela et al., 2016, p. 4) or ignoring ‘the messier and more demanding realms of morality, ethics, identity, and being-ontology’ (Davis, 1996, p. 234) in educational theory and philosophy. For instance, the co-participatory understanding within the Santiago Theory resonates with Malpas’ critique of social constructivism through his emphasis on underlying structure as regards *place*. The structural nature of place, for Malpas (2018), is prior to, and constitutive of, both subjectivity and objectivity—‘it is only within such a place that subjectivity—or, more generally, the structure in which subject and object both appear—is possible’ (p. 35). Malpas rejects social constructivist accounts precisely because they miss the fundamental structural relationship: ‘the social does not exist prior to place... and so the social cannot be that out of which, or solely by means of which, place is “constructed”’ (p. 35). The structural priority in Malpas’ thinking aligns with enactive cognition’s refusal to grant primacy to either organism or environment (Varela et al., 2016). Similarly, to Korzybski (1958), the *non-Aristotelian* (Á) perspective ‘establishes structure as the only possible content of knowledge’ (p. 9) that penetrates all aspects of existence, from the empirical world, to language, to our very nervous system—a true psychophysiological system of logic which abandons the *is* of identity²² and the law of *excluded third* for the purpose of a science of sanity.

Figure 1
Envelopmental Symbolism

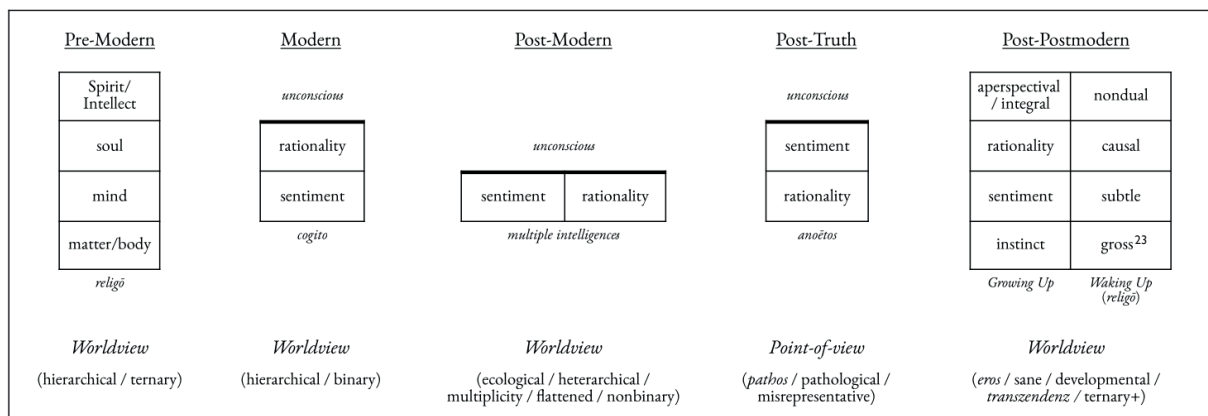


Note. New theories as injunctions (*re: “paradigms”*) are envelopmental through acts of discernment and higher unicities that harmonise competing logoi. The envelopmental structure can be applied ubiquitously from mathematics teaching to Steiner’s (1994, G9) “development” or cultivation (*Ausarbeitung*) of Man through Earth incarnations.

22. *cf. Science and Sanity* (Korzybski, 1958). I take for granted the premise that non-Aristotelian systems abandons the *is* of identity toward the intentional and conscious use of the multiordinality of natural language. I do not have the space to unpack the premise more fully here, however, for educational purposes, consider when we embrace the “*is*” of identity the tendency is to speak *sub specie aeternitatis* (Latin for “in the aspect of eternity”) and is often unconscious and lacks contextual specificity (*re: decontextualised*), hence, under greater scrutiny, false to facts. Conversely, by abandoning the law of identity, we embrace intentionality in language, meaning, semantics, and participate in the structure of both language and our own nervous system. Here I embrace multiordinality as that “something more” to pass on, which is what makes discernment as a transcendent experience even possible—and for the teacher in their vocation to query the student: what do you *mean*?

The educational theory of *enaction* is apropos from Varela et al. (2016). In short, the enactive approach represents a significant advancement in epistemological frameworks, completing an evolutionary progression that Thompson (2007) traced from cognitivism through connectionism and embodied dynamism to enaction. Where cognitivism treated mind as computational symbol processing and connectionism as emergent patterns in neural networks, embodied dynamism began to situate cognition in body-world interactions. Enaction transcends/envelops all these predecessors via an *injunction*—hence truth *paradigm*—by recognising cognition as fundamentally participatory—*neither* representing a pre-given external reality (cognitivism) *nor* emerging from neural architecture (connectionism), nor simply residing in body-environment dynamics (embodied dynamism), but actively bringing forth a world through structural coupling. The enactive understanding of cognition as world-constituting through participation—to use Heideggerian language, Being-in-*a*-world—aligns with my notion of epistemological depth; both approaches recognise knowing as an ordered process of increasing discernment that becomes progressively more encompassing while remaining open to further evolution and context-dependent application.

Figure 2
Conceptualising Perspectives of World-views and Point-of-view



Note. Columns three (Post-Modern) and four (Post-Truth) remain wedded to a notion of soul (ψυχή) of the Cartesian *cogito*—though not wedded to its dualism. Modern philosophy is stuck between these two columns. The bold line represents a conceptual limit—beyond which exists the unconscious or what Steiner (1990, GA 16/17) would call *thresholds*.²⁴ These conceptual limits result in deficient conceptual spaces whose remedy was the life work of Martin Heidegger and Alfred Korzybski. The concept of Intellect can be subdivided in many ways depending on doctrinal or integral teaching(s). The loss of *true intellectuality* (Plato’s Intellect) which is synonymous with *pure spirituality* ‘has made possible two errors [in modern times] which, although seemingly opposed, are in reality correlative and complementary: rationalism and sentimentalism’ (Guénon, 1995, p. 1). When hierarchy collapsed to a network of intelligences, and Spirit became confused with soul, and later soul with mind, and when spirituality came to be denied or wholly ignored, ‘as has been the case since Descartes, the logical end was positivism and agnosticism’ (p. 1) which found its climax in Modernity. Finally, the *religō* of Pre-Modern is iteratively updated as the *Waking Up* in Post-Postmodern. The reason Post-Truth is a *point-of-view* rather than a world-view is that the inversion of orders cannot be conceptually extracted from subsets of post-Postmodernity whereas the Modern world-view *can*, as can the Post-Modern world given that it is simply a flatland ontology, with intuition being beside rationality (if I had the extra space) but simply absorbed in the concept of multiple intelligences.

The problem of *substance*—as distinct from an internal, autonomous, and dynamically changing *pattern* or *structure* whose ‘ontogenic transformation of a unity ceases only with its dis-integration’ (Maturana &

23. I could also use Steiner’s fourfold nature of physical, etheric, astral, and Ego here.

24. I allude to doctrinal teachings on the unconscious as higher than our conscious experience toward the *supra*-conscious, such as deep sleep or as Steiner states, the miniature death we experience each night when the Ego and astral undergo a *exosomatosis*, and *not* (1) the collective unconscious of Jung which would be conceptually situated *below* conscious experience, and thus attributable to the sub-conscious; or (2) the medical term unconscious from the physical sciences which would indicate a coma.


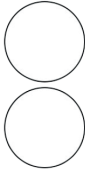
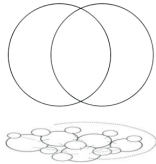
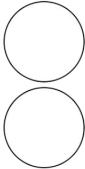

Varela, 1992, p. 74)—lies in the continuum of existence (*i.e.*, there exists no true vacuum). Whether we find problematical “Being and world” or “mind and body” or “organism and environment” or even “truth and transcendence” ... the structural concept of the substantive problem is the same: two demarcated circles (see “Modern” in Figure 3). However, truth-*as*-transcendence presents a subtle paradox within philosophical discourse. While Heidegger maintained healthy skepticism toward the cultural and philosophical baggage the term “transcendence” had accumulated in modern philosophy—particularly the implications of a “two-world theory”—Heidegger never abandoned the concept of truth-*as-transzendenz* in his work.²⁵ According to Moran (2014), Heidegger’s intellectual struggle centred on retaining transcendence despite new philosophical developments of phenomenology and existentialism, leading Heidegger to concepts like “finite transcendence” (*endliche Transzendenz*), “projection” (*Entwurf*), and “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) to articulate our relationship to Reality in light of new details. Meanwhile, Malpas explicitly rejected truth-*as*-transcendence while simultaneously looking to Heidegger for philosophical salvation in retrieving an updated notion of truth. Such an apparent contradiction raises essential questions: how can Malpas reject what Heidegger affirms, yet still look to Heidegger as the solution? What higher perspective might resolve these seemingly incompatible positions (*re*: competing logoi)?

The philosophical tension between Malpas and Heidegger—often unnoticed—illuminates the limitations of classical logic when addressing nuanced philosophical concepts. In classical Boolean logic, with adherence to the law of excluded third, “truth-*as*-transcendence” must be either true or false—classical Aristotelian logic permits no middle ground. As an aside, intuitionistic logic, formalised through Heyting algebra, suspends the rigid binary by allowing propositions to exist in states that are neither proven true nor proven false (Hamkins, 2020). Intuitionistic logic permits philosophers to withhold judgment until sufficient conceptual construction or verification occurs, recognising propositions like “truth-*as*-transcendence” may not yet be well-formed enough to assign definitive truth values. The process of construction in intuitionistic logic—distinct from social constructivism’s relativistic implications—involves the precise articulation and building of philosophical concepts until their verification conditions become clear. Through discernment, construction emerges, revealing that what appears contradictory in classical logic may simply represent undiscerned complexity awaiting proper articulation and disclosure.

The resolution to the paradox becomes elegantly apparent through discernment and envelopment: what Malpas rejected is not identical to what Heidegger affirmed ... despite sharing the same label. When extracting the hidden semantics of each position, we find that Malpas contested “truth-*{exclusivity}*-*as*-*{infinite}*-transcendence”—a conception of truth as utterly external and unreachable—while Heidegger affirmed “truth-*{implicitly}*-*as*-*{finite}*-transcendence—truth as disclosure within human finitude. Both shorten to “truth-*as*-transcendence” in conventional discourse whose difference remains concealed without proper discernment. Such discernment reveals a hierarchical, incommensurate, and envelopmental relationship between logical frameworks: as philosophical discernment becomes more precise, classical logic becomes increasingly applicable, though Boolean logic remains a *subset* of the more comprehensive Heyting logic that warrant epistemological conditions. Again, the intuitionistic approach acknowledges that philosophical concepts like “truth-*as*-transcendence” cannot be meaningfully assigned truth values until their verification conditions are adequately constructed. Where classical logic demands immediate designation as either true or false, intuitionistic logic creates space for the developing understanding that characterises genuine philosophical inquiry. The distinction parallels the deeper epistemological insight that knowledge emerges not through binary judgments but through progressive discernment that reveals increasingly nuanced structures of understanding. The commonality between Malpas and Heidegger, then, becomes clear: both thinkers recognised that the Greek concept of *alétheia* had been historically captured—or misinterpreted—within a two-valued Aristotelian logic system that imposed a “two-world theory” upon truth.

25. Even in Heidegger’s latter writings after Heidegger’s famous turn (*Kehre*) away from the limits of modern philosophy.

Figure 3
Conceptions of the Human Condition as regards Transcendence throughout the Eras.²⁶

Aristotelian World-Views (A)		\bar{A}	A	\bar{A}
Pre-Modern	Modern	Post-Modern	Post-Truth	Post-Postmodern
				
<i>Metaphysical</i> The dot (<i>spirit</i>) is larger than the circumference (<i>matter</i>) through inverted geometrical symbolism	<i>pseudo-Metaphysical</i> The problem of the external world	<i>Ecological</i> Horizon(t)al; the hard problem of consciousness; the web-of-life; the death of metaphysics	<i>Inverted Modern</i> An <i>illegitimate</i> caricature and counter-truth of Modernity	<i>Envelopmental/Transformative</i> Epistemological depth as a process of discernment; truth paradigms; the <i>re</i> -birth of metaphysics

Note. The key to de-mystifying truth-as-transcendence lies in disclosing its semantic complexity. The Pre-Modern metaphysical worldview depicts spirit (dot) as larger than matter (circumference), suggesting transcendence as inherent within immanence. The pseudo-Metaphysical worldview creates the artificial “problem of the external world” through binary separation, while the Post-Modern ecological view attempts holism and nested systems but leaves us with the “hard problem of consciousness” and an ontological flatland. Heidegger, unsurprisingly, even played with a notion of transcendence that was temporal and ‘horizonal’ (Moran, 2014, p. 499) (see “Post-Modern” in Figure 2). The Post-Truth column represents an illegitimate inversion of Modern hierarchies, a caricature that merely flips binaries without transcending them. In contrast, the Post-Postmodern envelopmental approach shows a series of concentric circles—visually representing how higher orders of understanding subsume and contextualise rather than erase prior understandings. The envelopmental structure resolves both the Modern problem of external reality and the Post-Modern struggle with consciousness by recognising that each “level” of understanding is structurally contained within more comprehensive levels. Through the structured process of discernment, truth emerges not as externally transcendent nor as merely immanent, but through an ordered relationship of envelopment that preserves distinctions while revealing their partialities and interconnections. Finally, the envelopmental model, based upon *depth*, is not the same as the ecological model of nested systems which is based upon *span*; hence epistemological *depth*.

The purpose of discernment, envelopment, and structure has profound implications for truth paradigms given our human finitude. When I examine the current philosophical landscape, I encounter three concerning patterns: first, as Korzybski (1958) detailed, the persistent gravitation toward the *is* of identity remains demonstrably false to empirical facts—language and reality simply do not operate through rigid identification and absolutes.²⁷ Second, and connected to the first, the constraints of boolean (Aristotelian) logic systematically arrest both cognitive development and emotional maturation by forcing complex phenomena into simplistic binary categories—perpetuating post-truth discourse. As Korzybski detailed from a semantic, psychophysiological, ontological, and structural point of view the post-truth condition (*also*) almost a century prior:

the stronger the structural ‘belief’ in the ‘truth’ of the representation, or, in other words, the more we identify the higher order abstractions [e.g., rational] with the lower [e.g., sentimental], which, in fact, are different, the more dangerous becomes the ‘emotional’ tension in the form of unjustified *evaluation*, which, ultimately, must involve *delusional* [misrepresentational] factors, no matter how slight, and result in semantic disturbances. (p. 198)

26. Alfred Korzybski (1958) in advancing *General Semantics* as regards non-Aristotelian systems, is *apropos*: (i) like Heidegger, Korzybski was a European scientific philosopher amidst the same crises that befell Europe; (ii) both men, in dealing with these crises (of war), attempted to re-define what it meant to be an educated person through re-defining what it meant to be human; (iii) Korzybski aimed to approach education through new structural “ways of thinking” whereas Heidegger was concerned with how a “matter of thinking” can be re-evaluated as regards the philosophy or question of Being (*Seinsphilosophie / Seinsfrage*).

27. Although one’s ontology certainly could be stuck or arrested within absolutist language which is generally the healthy starting point of uncovering the truth of the situation through mediated conversation.

Third, and perhaps most concerning, Western philosophical discourse has progressively abandoned the concept of transcendence (and metaphysics, see Figure 4)—a trend that extends well beyond Malpas. The wholesale rejection has created a philosophical environment wherein contemporary discourse struggles to establish the orienting principles²⁸ needed to effectively challenge post-truth rhetoric. Without acknowledging transcendent dimensions of understanding (*e.g.*, my reconceptualisation of discernment as a meta-practice in \tilde{A}), philosophers of education operate within an epistemological framework that limits their capacity to articulate alternatives to (1) post-truth—the lament of Crosswhite (2018)—and (2) expertise—the lament of Clark (2019); hence the call for *non*-post-truths by Clark. The separation of philosophy from metaphysics—or rationality from spiritual knowing—has fostered an intellectual landscape where transcendence appears incoherent and/or irrelevant, rather than essential to grappling with the finitude of the human condition (*e.g.*, through mindfulness, contemplation, or Steiner’s Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition). By reorienting discernment from a discriminatory “A” practice to an envelopmental “ \tilde{A} ” one—where higher orders of understanding subsume rather than erase prior perspectives—philosophers (and teachers) can create space for retrieving truth-as-transcendence within contemporary (and classroom) discourse without sacrificing intellectual rigour. The envelopmental approach to discernment acknowledges that many philosophical concepts exist in states requiring further construction and verification—not because these concepts lack meaning, but because these concepts represent the leading edge of human understanding still being articulated through the ongoing process of discernment and contemplation. One such leading edge is *transformation* where the process of becoming itself requires an intuitionistic logic that can hold both what is and what is not yet in proper discernment of terminology.

Retrieving the Sacrosanct Nature of Transformation in Educational Philosophy and Theory

The second question—whether authentic transformation is possible without transcendence or hierarchy—is addressed through both etymological and philosophical roots. Transformation has both ecclesiastical roots (*trānsfōrmātiō*) and metaphysical roots (*μεταμόρφωσις*, *metamorphōsis*). While scientism presumes mind manifest as a *metamorphōsis*—or *epi*-phenomenon—of matter (an ontologically insufficient reduction), scientific investigation recognises transformation across social-humanistic and rational-empirical domains—symbolising *metamorphōsis* as the butterfly hatching from the cocoon or the frog morphing beyond the larval (tadpole) stage. Traditional sciences²⁹ comprehend transformation as “passage beyond form”—transcendence of physical limitations (Guénon, 2004a). *Metamorphōsis* conceptually parallels *μετεμψύχωσις* (*metempsychōsis*; transmigration of soul). The etymological distinction between *μορφή* (*morphē*, “form” from PIE *mer-/mor-* “to gleam, shine”) and *ψυχή* (*psychē*, “soul³⁰” from PIE *bhes-/bheu-* “to breathe, blow” denoting vital principle and conscious awareness) reflects the ontological hierarchy distinguishing visible form from invisible essence-Being—a fundamental dimension of ontological depth. Pythagorean and Platonic traditions prioritised *metempsychōsis* over corporeal *metamorphōsis*, establishing metaphysical precedence that structured ancient educational praxis³¹ (Coomaraswamy, 1987). Both concepts maintain identity

28. Current literature in educational philosophy is connecting our relationship to post-truth with Hannah Arendt and her notion of making *dōxa* (δόξα) transparent to oneself and others. However, the *contextualisation* of post-truth as the abandonment of principles/transcendence is absent. Yet even this lack of context has its truth within a greater context (*i.e.*, a flatland); also, the very notion of attributing nuance to post-truth to Arendt is transcendently “in the air” so to speak (*i.e.*, popular)—a scope of disclosure beyond the manuscript that I mention only in passing.

29. Some examples are sacred science, *sophia perennis*, perennial philosophy, metaphysics, and so on, with Anthroposophy as a modern derivative.

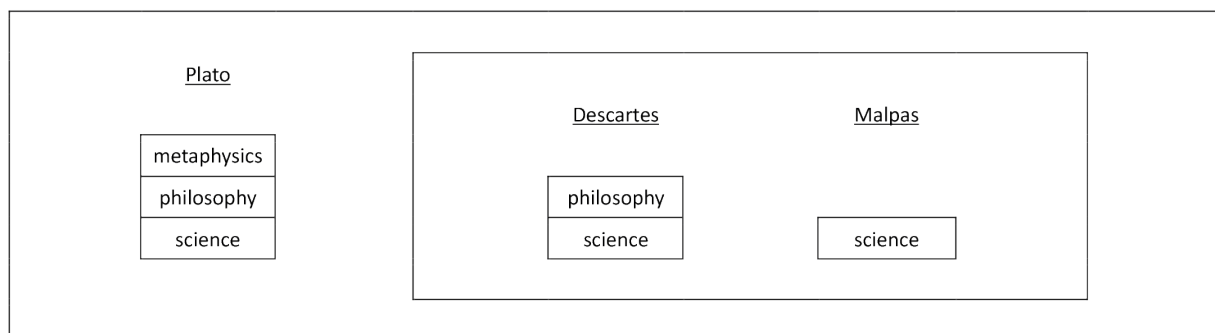
30. Conceptually the astral form of the fourfold Human Being.

31. It is prudent to understand what I mean by “praxis” here. From a critical pedagogical angle, *praxis* generally lends to transformation or emancipation. However, from a deep ecological perspective, Chet Bowers (2010) argued that ‘the universal [uniform] goal of educating each generation to emancipate themselves from the influences of previous generations’ (p. 4) provides a ‘legitimacy to a totalizing way of thinking that represents all customs (traditions) as oppressive and the source of injustice’ (p. 5). When progress equates to change, ‘the assumption ... leads to viewing the intergenerational knowledge and networks of mutual aid as a necessary part of becoming modern’ (p. 5). From the perspective of Di Paolantonio (2023), the anti-critical view of Bowers *eco-justice* is justified, as education ceases to “pass on” for the sole aim of “something more.” So much for the modern discernment, the traditional discernment acknowledges that, to Aristotle, *praxis* (πράξις) was the *lowest* order of human activity, with production or *poiesis* (ποίησις) as the middle order, and contemplation or *theoria* (θεωρία) as the highest order of human activity.

through transformation: metamórphōsis preserves essence despite formal alteration; metempsychōsis preserves soul-identity across varied embodiments. Mystery traditions³² operationalised these principles pedagogically, employing ritual death-rebirth symbolism to facilitate ontological transformation. The etymology suggests traditional education's central concern was with alchemical metamórphōsis rather than informational acquisition—a transformative dimension of ontological depth largely abandoned in contemporary educational paradigms privileging information over formation. As an aside, from a strictly educational philosophical perspective, and within an infocracy, the crisis of the future is very much linked to the crisis of self-formation (Di Paolantonio, 2023).

Figure 4

Fractal Discernment into the Flattening of the World



Note. According to Guénon (2004a), it was ‘in the nineteenth century that men [*sic*] began to glory in their ignorance—for to proclaim oneself an agnostic means nothing else—and claimed to deny to others any knowledge to which they had no access themselves; and this marked yet one more stage in the intellectual [metaphysical] decline of the West’ (p. 45). The result of the collapse of metaphysics is really the collapse of the Universal to the Individual, then further still to the extension of the Individual (general) or even further down to the particular or “collective” which is the realm of empiricism (2004b); to Heidegger (1967), a flattening of *Dasein* to the zoological (ζῷον). The acquisition of knowledge, ‘by means of these successive degradations, [reduces] all things to the level of sensory knowledge [αἰσθησις], which many indeed regard as the only kind of knowledge possible’ (2004e, p. 26). Interestingly, sense-perception (*aísthēsis*) for Plato was the shadows in the Cave Allegory. The smaller rectangle, as self-similar to the larger rectangle, is the inferred interpretative frame of Malpas.

In order to discern transformation, we must grasp the contextual tension between metaphysics and modern philosophy. According to Guénon (1991), in its primordial form, *philosophy* is branch of metaphysics—etymologically and literally “the love of wisdom” and thus not wisdom itself (see “Pre-Modern” in Figures 2 and 3; “Plato” in Figure 4). Today, metaphysics is either understood as metaphysical realism from a scientific point of view, or a contemplative branch of philosophy³³ (Figure 4, “Descartes”). When Heidegger(ians) criticise metaphysics, they tend to criticise an undiscerned *Cartesian* form of metaphysics. It was Descartes, after all, that ‘limited intelligence to reason [and] granted to what he thought might be called “metaphysics” the mere function of serving as a basis for physics ... the final limit of human knowledge’ (Guénon, 2004a, pp. 11-12). The flattening of intelligence to reason—or metaphysics to philosophy—strains the notion of truth to anti-transcendental or anti-hierarchical positions. Ironically, the context we find Malpas (1992) in is his lament of positioning truth, unresolved, in the ‘*reduction of the philosophical to the scientific* [emphasis mine]’ (p. 294) (see Figure 4).

Arguably, the last two decades have shown two overarching trends in educational literature: (i) the rise of “transformation;” and (ii) the critique, decline, and dismantling of “hierarchy.” These two educational trends are ubiquitous and display a negative correlation amongst theorists/institutions promoting transformation in sharp *increase*, and support for hierarchy in sharp *decrease*. Put another way, there is a *positive* correlation

32. The Eleusinian mysteries exemplified these approaches through experiential education enacting cosmological dramas.

33. Hence why many interpreters of Rudolf Steiner take his sacred science of Anthroposophia (“human wisdom”) as merely philosophical. The same can be said of Daoism of the East.

in educational literature between transformation and *an-archy*—literal “negation of hierarchy” or “absence of principle.” And without guiding principles, and within a flattened ontology and worldview, the concept of post-truth arises much like the phantom problem noticed by Heidegger. Yet, when we consider literature from the hard sciences, there is neither interest in dismantling hierarchy, nor dwindling of its definitional and conceptual rigour. One would comment that mathematicians and hard scientists, including ecologists, are quite comfortable with the term. As Wilber (2009) noted,

it is ironic, to say the least, that the social champions of the web of life deny hierarchy in any form while the sciences of the web of life insist upon it. And it is doubly ironic that the former often point to the latter for support (e.g., “The new physics supports the equalitarian [heterarchical] web of life”). (p. 31)

Thus, to Wilber, the idea of *wholeness* is synonymous with *hierarchy* insofar as you cannot have wholeness without there being an organisational *structure* of its parts; a web is not a strand, and without a higher *principle* of organisation, the mutual network of strands will never become *integrated* into a web. However, hierarchy as a “higher principle” seems distant to an implication of “transgression,” “imbalanced power dynamics,” “alienation of students or subordinates,” and so on, in critical theory discourse. The issue is a lack of discernment. Here Wilber discerned between what is *self-adaptation* (heterarchical growth; going beyond), and *self-transcendence* (hierarchical growth; also a going beyond) used in scientific nomenclature—in particular the hard sciences. The problem in the social-humanistic sciences is that if semantically “going beyond” = “transformative learning” we have an ambiguous (re: undiscerned) statement.

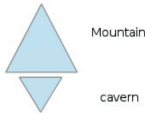
For instance, to Plato and the traditional notion of transformative learning, metamórfhōsis was internal and alchemical—found through the process of *philosophía* (φιλοσοφία; “lover of wisdom”) so that the *philósophos* (φιλόσοφος; “philosopher”) could become a *sophós* (σοφός; sage or skilled). The source of wisdom was beyond the rational and discursive mind; the path was laid out in the *Republic* through the symbolism of the Cave and the Golden Ratio of the Divided Line. Such an exiting (through transformation) of the tenebrous pole was a transformative learning akin to a “remembering.” As Coomaraswamy (1987) noted, ‘what we call “learning” is really a “remembering” and that our “knowledge” is by participation in the Omniscience of an immanent spiritual principle’ (p. 49). In remembering, the concept of Eastern mindfulness (*sati*) is foundational for ‘the beginning of virtually all paths of contemplation, the aim of which is the remembering that one’s true nature is Buddha-nature’ (Wilber, 2009, p. 339). Thus, “sati” resembles Platonic reminiscence or *anámnēsis* (ἀνάμνησις)—not a total *sum* of learning (*i.e.*, modern education)—in particular the accumulation of lessons, data, or information), but ‘on the contrary, an “awakening” of the latent possibilities that the being carries in itself’ (Guénon, 2004b, p. 59). All these metaphysical ideas are captured in what Wilber (2017) called Waking Up whose ontological stages have been largely structured millennia ago: *e.g.*, {matter, body, mind, soul, Spirit} of the Platonic-Plotinus lineage (Figure 2) or {physical, etheric, astral, Ego} of Anthroposophical lineage, and comprise what I have understood as *ontological depth*.

From the socio-educative point of view, transformative learning ‘is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change’ (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). Mezirow (correctly in my view) makes these changes of frames asymmetrical, noting that ‘such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to *guide action* [emphasis mine]’ (p. 58-9). These asymmetrical referential frames are ordered or measured as *better* through discernment and comprise what I have understood as the complement of ontological depth (re: epistemological depth) with its correlate of Growing Up. However, with discernment in mind, the notion of transformative learning largely remains ambiguous/undiscerned with respect to a *change* in *self-adaptation* or a *change* in *self-transcendence* (see Table 1). Again, according to Wilber (2009), the majority of “transformations” or transformative learning (around 90%) result in self-adaptation, *not* self-transcendence; the error is simply due to

self-adaptation and self-transcendence [being used] interchangeably, because both embody a type of “going beyond.” But apart from that similarity, the two are different in degree and in kind. In self-adaptation or communion, one finds oneself to be part of a larger whole; in self-transformation one becomes a new whole, which has its own new forms of agency (relative autonomy) and communion. (p. 50)

instance, in Steiner’s (1995) esoteric doctrine, freedom emerges not through the dismantling of hierarchies but through their conscious, holarchical ascent—transforming dead thinking³⁵ into living thought through the progressive stages of Imagination, Inspiration, and ultimately Intuition. Steiner’s “developmental” stages—from *spirit self* (manas) through *life spirit* (Buddhi) to *spirit man* (Atman)—demonstrate that freedom *en*-folds through hierarchical evolution, not horizontal liberation. In other words, Steiner’s metamorphosis of consciousness reveals freedom not as liberation from structure—as critical pedagogy theorists often advocate through increased individual agency—but as the capacity to freely navigate holarchical realities through spiritual activity. The abandonment of hierarchy ironically forecloses the very possibility of authenticity, which Steiner recognised as inseparable from the evolutionary spiritual impulse toward higher degrees of Love and Freedom.³⁶

Table 1
Discernment into the Many Facets of Transformation

	Hard Sciences	Soft Sciences (incl. Education)	Platonism or pre-Cartesian metaphysics ³⁷
Horizontal Heterarchical	<i>Self</i> -adaptation (e.g., bio-hacking, differentiation)	Transformation (e.g., 90% of educational theories)	Immanence Outer-Worldly Evolutionary
Vertical Hierarchical	<i>Self</i> -transcendence (e.g., body- <i>in</i> -mind, integration)	Transformation (e.g., 10% of educational theories)	Metamórphōsis / Metanoia Inner-Celestial Involutionary
Journey/Path <i>for</i> Spirituality	Growing Up (e.g., epistemological depth, <i>structure</i> -stages)		Waking Up (e.g., ontological depth, <i>state</i> -stages)
(Syncretic) Symbol <i>of</i> Education	<i>Officially none</i> (to date)		 <p>Platonic Cave of Shadows (e.g., <i>scala naturae</i>, <i>Divided Line</i>)</p>

Note. For instance, the metaphor of the sacred arch can be understood either as distinct entities “layered” or “stacked” beyond us (ladder/pre-ecological worldview) or as an embedded growth potential within us or around us (holonic/ecological worldview). In a Wilberian (2017) lens, the irony is the entire “woke” movement has nothing to do with Waking Up at all, and is entirely a Growing Up phenomenon (from rational-perspectivism to pluralism).

In summary, my second question asked if transformation differs from transcendence (and hierarchy) and if these two concepts were viable in educational theory. I argued transformation and transcendence are

35. In the companion paper, we related Steiner’s dead thinking to post-truth as yet another fore-running contextualisation a century prior. In this manuscript, I relate post-truth in a Korzybskian lens as an arrested development within a collapsed (or inversed) order of abstraction(s).

36. The Christic significance of these two qualities relate to our angelic function as the tenth order which represents a “something more” added to the first order being the Seraphim as angels of pure undifferentiated Love (personal communication, Dr. Robert J. Gilbert, 2012).

37. The concept of metaphysics itself could undergo a similar table as the Cartesian notion of metaphysics as a *basis* for physics—the same metaphysics Heidegger (1967) calls into question—is far removed from *sophia perennis* (‘perennial/primordial wisdom’) as doctrine.

structurally inseparable within holonic frameworks of understanding. Educational discourse that embraces transformation while rejecting hierarchical ordering unwittingly undermines the very possibility of genuine metamórhōsis, predominantly reducing transformative potential to lateral adaptation. Distinguishing between self-adaptation (heterarchical growth) and self-transcendence (hierarchical growth) reveals how contemporary educational theory often operates with an unexamined contradiction at its core—celebrating transformation while dismantling the structural conditions necessary for authentic transformation to occur. The abandonment of hierarchy ironically forecloses the possibility of the authentic freedom sought by critical pedagogy, which Steiner (1995) recognised as inseparable from the evolutionary spiritual impulse toward higher degrees of Love and Freedom. In *contrast* to hierarchical abandonment, and *complementing* ontological depth, epistemological depth constitutes a truth paradigm that preserves both structure and dynamism, hierarchy and complexity, within educational contexts where post-truth rhetoric otherwise thrives in flattened onto-epistemic landscapes. The subsequent section examines how discernment operates according to principles of envelopment alongside subsequent development—a distinction crucial for understanding epistemological depth as an ordered process through which truth paradigms can be progressively apprehended, articulated, and embodied.

The Extensionality of Discernment as Envelopment

In seeking an answer to the final question, discernment must be applied to what constitutes epistemological depth from a historical enterprise. Discernment functions etymologically as both secular cognitive faculty and theological virtue—a dual nature often disconnected in contemporary discourse that ought to be connected vertically—from *secular* to *sacred*. The word *discern* connects to education through *intelligence* (from *intellegēns*, literally “discerning”)—from *intellegō* (“understand”) combining *inter* (“between”) and *legō* (“choosing/reading”).³⁸ To discern (*discernō*) conventionally means to *cut* something into two—a process reflecting intensional logic through subject-predicate demarcation. Con-*tem*-plation similarly derives from *tem* (“to cut”) the sacred from profane through signifying meditation beyond *ratio* (i.e., reason’s discursiveness) before becoming horizontally redefined *as ratio* (e.g., “contemplating the future;” see “Ecological” in Figures 2/3). Both notions of discernment are trapped within intensional and Aristotelian systems of logic.

Truth paradigms emerge through *extensional* discernment—logical structures connecting concepts according to actual relationships rather than verbal, often implicit, associations. Korzybski (1958) identified that transitioning beyond Aristotelian systems requires shifting from intensional to extensional *orientation*, and from ‘subject-predicate to relational evaluations’ (p. lviii), noting our nervous systems have been ‘canalized in inadequate, intensional, often delusional, aristotelian orientations’ (p. l) for over two millennia. Far from a worldview or era, the post-truth condition has a *crooked* structure and inverts epistemological priorities by privileging definitions and verbal associations (intensional logic) while operating through arrested structures that elevate sentiment above rationality—what Korzybski would identify as semantic disturbances in the psycho-neural process-as-a-*whole*. Extensional discernment thus aligns with truth-as-a-*holon*, mediated by *injunction*—hence truth *paradigm*—and (1) apprehended through contemplation, (2) articulated through meaningful expression, and (3) embodied through lived experience—the *threefold* structure through which knowing *en*-folds into meaningful (ethical) *action*.³⁹

The notion of *en*-velopment proposed here complements *de*-velopment in educational philosophy. From Latin *educere* (“leads forward”) and Old French *desveloper* (“unwrap”), education conventionally emphasises uncovering perspectives (Neufeld, 2012). Educational theory lacks⁴⁰ the covering aspect essential to truth-acquisition. Envisaging discernment-*as*-velopment—much like truth-*as*-transcendence—articulates *gradual* truth acquisition within conceptual specificity, showing how higher understanding contextualises rather than replaces prior (limited) understanding—i.e., *partial* truths that form from onto-epistemic

38. Retrieved from Wiktionary, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/intelligent>, November 30, 2024.

39. The root of action is *karma*, a topic of insight to Steiner whose life purpose was to elucidate both karma and reincarnation in Christian doctrine.

40. When I search “education” AND “development” I get 4 million results in Web of Science databases. A similar search for “education” AND “envelopment” provides 4 thousand results. If I filter with NOT “data envelopment analysis” AND “philosophy” the result quickly drops to around four book or book reviews and zero articles within educational philosophy!

structures. Envelopment's asymmetry contrasts with development's linearity; where development accounts for differentiation and contingency through horizontal accumulation, envelopment creates the structural conditions for engagement and dialogue through vertical integration—mirroring Malpasian (1992) contours for retrieving truth within educational philosophy.

An example is apropos; consider a mathematician's understanding of infinity exemplifying epistemological depth: a novice (n_1) comprehends infinity as “a very big number.” At level n_2 , the student recognises different sizes of infinity (countable versus uncountable sets). At n_3 , the mathematician discerns how infinity operates within specific mathematical structures. At n_4 , understanding integrates transfinite recursion and metamathematical frameworks. At n_5 , the mathematician recognises infinity as fundamentally metaphysical, distinguishing between mathematical applications (infinitesimal or indefinite) and metaphysical reality (Guénon, 1991).⁴¹ For an easier example: consider the role of multiplication in mathematics education. Starting from addition and subtraction alone, multiplication (and division) envelops a larger set of operations. Then to differentiate between the variable x , multiplication turns into a dot. Later the dot becomes a scalar product in contradistinction to a vector product, and so on. Each level envelops previous levels—demonstrating epistemological depth's fundamental structure toward expertise. Expertise, therefore, emerges as function $f(w,t,n)$, where worldview (w) influences conceptual possibilities, topic (t) specifies domain-relevance, while epistemological depth (n) determines discernment achieved. The function provides an understanding of how truth paradigms and expertise operate through specific contexts and levels of discernment. Expertise itself represents a form of transcendence—as the capacity to discern patterns and relationships invisible to the novice, thereby accessing “higher” perspectives that envelop “lower” perspectives.

Korzybski (1958) observed that definitions ultimately rest on undefined terms, producing ‘affective disturbances’ (p. 25) when individuals are pressed beyond defined terms—indicating a lack of boundary between articulated knowledge and experiential understanding within a psychophysiological science of sanity. Perhaps the most philosophically compelling concept of *truth* today (in the non-Aristotelian perspective) remains *undefined* where “truth paradigms” operates as an extensional definition. Epistemological depth offers what Crosswhite sought—a *measure* through which competing *logoi* may be evaluated without dissolving into relativism. The homo mensura principle reconceived through discernment-as-envelopment and \tilde{A} systems are that humans measure truth not through arbitrary opinion—but through ordered processes that progressively disclose deeper structural and ontological relationships. Of course, such a “measure⁴²” must imply that we have, within us, the holarchical or hierarchical spiritual faculties of knowing that are latent, such as Steiner's (1995) Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition, and Guénon's (2004b) intellectual intuition.

A Brief Summary

The philosophical space opened through epistemological depth points toward a reclaiming of truth-as-transcendence within educational philosophy. By re-conceiving discernment as an envelopmental practice rather than a discriminatory one, the possibility emerges for retrieving a truth paradigm that honours both vertical understanding and the complexity revealed by post-Modern thought. Such a paradigm offers educational philosophy a path through post-truth discourse—a discourse reflecting Steiner's dead thinking and Korzybski's semantic disturbances—not through returning to dogmatic certainty, but through progressing toward increasingly comprehensive frameworks of understanding that *preserve* (from whole → *part* of an enveloped whole) rather than erase the insights gained at each stage of discernment. The integral nature of epistemological depth suggests possibilities for reconciling apparently contradictory perspectives (*re*: competing *logoi*) within educational philosophy, enabling a return to the sacrosanct nature of *trans*-formation and Di Paolantonio's (2023) *self*-formation through the ordered process of discernment.

41. The actual pathway of epistemological depth is varied and individual-specific, though structurally ordered through discernment.

42. We are all a *measure* (*metiri, mātra*) against Spirit, a primordial relationship (*materia*), according to Coomaraswamy (1987), intended to unfold, and enfold, the possibilities of manifestation inherent in *Ātmā* (Spirit).

Truth paradigms, so conceived, are apprehended through contemplation, articulated through meaningful expression, and embodied through lived experience—a tripartite (soul-mind-body) structure operationalised within a non-Aristotelian (\tilde{A}) orientation that restores epistemological depth amidst the post-truth condition. Epistemological depth as a truth paradigm responds to Crosswhite's (2018) call for theories of truth beyond post-truth discourse, while facilitating what Clark (2019) recognised as the urgent recovery of expertise through “*non*-post-truths” so vital to contemporary educational philosophy and theory.

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Staunen im pädagogischen Kontext

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die Studie untersucht das Phänomen des Staunens in seiner Bedeutung für pädagogisches Wahrnehmen und Handeln. Ausgehend von der Arbeit mit Wahrnehmungsvignetten nach Barth & Wiehl (2023) wird Staunen als eigenständige, der Reflexion vorgelagerte Phase beschrieben: ein Moment des Innehaltens zwischen sinnlicher Wahrnehmung und begrifflichem Verstehen. In seiner Ambivalenz – zwischen Neugier und Irritation, Öffnung und Schrecken – liegt sein epistemisches Potenzial: Es unterbricht vorschnelle Kategorisierungen und schafft die Voraussetzung für eine reflexive pädagogische Haltung.

Der Beitrag plädiert dafür, Staunen als lernbare pädagogische Grundhaltung zu begreifen – als Ressource für gelingende Beziehungsgestaltung und eine Bildungspraxis, die das Unvorhersehbare als Einladung zur Begegnung versteht.

Einleitung

Im Rahmen der Erforschung von Wahrnehmungsvignetten rücken Angelika Wiehl und Ulrike Barth die Erfahrung des Staunens in den Mittelpunkt. Zwischen dem phänomenologischen Wahrnehmen und dem Beobachten einer Situation oder Person entfaltet sich ein Moment des Innehaltens – ein kurzes Verweilen im Staunen, in Irritation oder auch in Ehrfurcht. Diese oftmals nur flüchtige innere Regung ist in unterschiedlichen Kontexten bereits beschrieben und untersucht worden. Für die Arbeit an und mit Wahrnehmungsvignetten gewinnt sie jedoch eine besondere Bedeutung: Sie markiert eine eigenständige Phase, die den Prozess der Verschriftlichung des beobachteten Phänomens sowie die daran anschließenden drei Reflexionsphasen vorbereitet und ihnen vorgelagert ist.

Die Auseinandersetzung mit der Thematik des Staunens führte zu einem gewachsenen umfangreichen Forschungsbestand im deutschsprachigen Raum. Besonders hervorzuheben sind die Studien und Zusammenstellungen von Mireille Schnyder und Nicola Gess, die im Rahmen des schweizerischen Sinergia-Projekts die Bedeutung des Staunens für Poetik und Ästhetik aus historischer wie auch systematischer Perspektive untersuchen (Gess, 2023). Diese Arbeiten machen deutlich, dass Staunen kein einheitlich zu fassendes Phänomen ist, sondern in seiner begrifflichen Ausprägung, Bewertung und Funktion historisch wie systematisch variiert.

Über diese Differenzen hinweg zeigt sich eine grundlegende Gemeinsamkeit: Seit der Antike wird Staunen als zentrales Moment von Erkenntnisprozessen und Wissenskulturen verstanden. Am Anfang der Philosophie steht das Staunen – als ein Innehalten, das zwischen sinnlicher Wahrnehmung und begrifflichem Denken vermittelt (Röder, 2019). Gerade in dieser vermittelnden Funktion wird Staunen für die Arbeit

mit Wahrnehmungsvignetten anschlussfähig. Es markiert jenen Moment, in dem Wahrnehmung nicht unmittelbar in Deutung überführt wird, sondern zunächst offen bleibt und sich der Situation aussetzt.

Staunen verweist dabei auf Erfahrungen, die bestehende „Regel- und Ordnungssysteme“ überschreiten (Stommel, 2023, S. 190). Während das Unerwartete Verwunderung auslöst, zeigt sich im Unerwartbaren eine gesteigerte Form des Staunens, deren Ursprung in der Erschütterung und vorübergehenden Suspendierung des Eigenen liegt (Stommel, 2023, S. 190). Genau in dieser Irritation liegt das epistemische Potenzial des Staunens: Es eröffnet einen Wahrnehmungsraum, der vorschnelle Kategorisierungen unterbricht und damit die Voraussetzung für eine phänomenologisch orientierte, reflexive Annäherung an pädagogische Situationen schafft.

Auch wenn Staunen als „Anfang des Erkundens und Verstehens von Menschen und Welt, wie es einem kleinen Kind unmittelbar eigen ist“ beschrieben werden kann (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 94), ist es zugleich eng mit Irritation, Zweifel und dem Gefühl von Unsicherheit verbunden und daher keineswegs ausschließlich positiv konnotiert. Auch Nicola Gess versteht Staunen nicht allein als Wohlgefühl, sondern weist darauf hin, dass dieser Moment ebenso Schrecken oder Erfahrungen von Ohnmacht in sich tragen kann (Gess, 2023).

Staunen, das „ausgelöst durch Momente, die die Grenzen des Gewöhnlichen in Richtung des Unerwarteten [...] überschreiten“ (Gess, 2019, S. 15), manifestiert sich also als ein Innehalten. Es verortet sich zwischen Erkenntnis und Nicht-Wissen, zwischen Lösung, Antwort und offenem Verstehen (Röder, 2019). Zwar lässt sich die innere Ausrichtung der staunenden Person analytisch von der Wirkung des zu bestaunenden Gegenübers unterscheiden, doch erst in der Verschränkung von Subjekt und Objekt entsteht jenes resonante Dazwischen, in dem der suchende Blick innehält und ein Verweilen sowie eine kontemplative Haltung möglich werden (Han, 2009, S. 45).

Obwohl Staunen einen Anfang markiert, birgt es zugleich das Potenzial, Phänomenen mit einer offenen und nicht vorschnell festlegenden Haltung neu zu begegnen. Gerade diese Fähigkeit erweist sich als grundlegend für die Zielsetzung der Arbeit mit Wahrnehmungsvignetten. Sie bewegt sich in einem Grenzgang phänomenologischer Entdeckung, dessen methodologische Operatoren zwar zum Kerngeschäft der Phänomenologie gehören, in der praktischen Anwendung jedoch auch Grenzen und Bruchstellen aufweisen können (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 99). Mit den Wahrnehmungsvignetten sind drei Reflexionsebenen verbunden, innerhalb derer unterschiedliche Perspektiven auf den Moment der Wahrnehmung und auch des Staunens zur Sprache kommen können. Dies ist von zentraler Bedeutung, da es weder eine einzige Erklärung für den Ausdruck eines wahrgenommenen Moments gibt noch eine abschließende Antwort auf das Geschehen, über das gestaunt wurde.

Es bleibt zu erkunden, was auf diesen ersten Moment des Wahrnehmens von etwas oder jemandem folgt – jeweils situativ und kontextabhängig. Staunen ereignet sich an der Schwelle vom noch nicht Beobachten-Können zum aufmerksamen Entdecken. Innere Empfindungen und Gefühle schwingen dabei mit und lassen zunächst eine empathische, resonierende Haltung erkennen, mitunter aber auch Irritation oder sogar Abwehr. Wahrnehmungsvignetten bringen dieses Erstaunen zum Ausdruck und können selbst als Phänomene dieser Qualität verstanden werden. Der Zustand des Staunens und Wunderns, der einem unvermittelt widerfährt (Meyer-Drawe, 2011, S. 197), vergeht häufig, noch bevor er bewusst erfasst wird.

Die pädagogische Phänomenologie gründet im Staunen über das Phänomen, insbesondere in Anlehnung an Goethes Ansatz. Sie verbindet subjektives Erleben mit dem Anderen und integriert dabei zwei philosophische Perspektiven: Zum einen eine platonische Sichtweise, die von einem sich unmittelbar zeigenden Sinngehalt eines Phänomens oder einer Begegnung ausgeht, zum anderen eine aristotelische Perspektive, die erweiterte Sinnhorizonte und Deutungskontexte in den Reflexionsphasen sowie im Prozess der Erkenntnisgewinnung berücksichtigt (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 99).

Theresa Stommel hat in ihrer Dissertation *Bildung und Staunen. Eine bildungsphilosophische Perspektive im Kontext geistiger und schwerer Behinderung* (2023) die bildungsbezogene Bedeutung des Staunens als Wirkung des Fremden herausgearbeitet. Grundlegend fasst sie Staunen als „Erfahrung des Fremden“ (Stommel, 2023, S. 175) und bringt es damit in enge Beziehung zu Bildungsprozessen. Im Staunen liegen Innehalten und

Erstarren – eine Deutung, die Stommel über eine präzise Herleitung der Wortbedeutung entfaltet – und gerade darin gewinnt das Staunen Bedeutung für Prozesse der Veränderung und Transformation (Stommel, 2023, S. 175).

Vor dem Hintergrund der dargestellten theoretischen Perspektiven auf Bedeutung und Wirkung des Staunens lag es nahe, diese Überlegungen auch im praktischen pädagogischen Kontext weiterzuentwickeln. In diesem Zusammenhang entstand die Forschungsarbeit zum Staunen in pädagogischen Zusammenhängen im Rahmen der Masterarbeit von Liliana Olea. Sie knüpft unmittelbar an das Verständnis des Staunens als Moment des Innehaltens, der Irritation und der Öffnung gegenüber dem Fremden an und vertieft diese Annahmen durch eine besonders fundierte Auseinandersetzung mit internationalen Forschungspositionen.

Während Stommel auf die Verbindung von Staunen und Lernen in der griechischen Antike verweist (2023, S. 175), wird in Oleas empirischer Arbeit sichtbar, wie sich eine aristotelisch geprägte Annäherung an das Staunen in pädagogischer Praxis entfalten kann. Anhand konkreter Wahrnehmungsmomente und deren Reflexionen zeigt sie, wie bedeutsam es ist, das „Staunen für den pädagogischen Kontext wiederzugewinnen und als zu übendes Terrain auszuweisen“ (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 105).

Gerade unerwartete Verhaltensweisen im pädagogischen Alltag erfordern eine solche Haltung des Staunens: das Unbekannte zuzulassen, im Wahrnehmen innezuhalten, mögliche Zukünfte zu entwerfen und zugleich lösungsorientiert zu denken und zu handeln. Damit schließt Oleas Arbeit an die zuvor beschriebene Arbeit an und mit Wahrnehmungsvignetten an, in denen das Staunen als vorbereitender Moment einer reflexiven pädagogischen Haltung verstanden wird. Die Orientierung am Möglichen und Zukünftigen wird durch die Fähigkeit des Staunens eröffnet und in den anschließenden Reflexionsphasen der Wahrnehmungsvignetten weiter befragt und differenziert (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 105).

Da es in der Verantwortung des Einzelnen liegt, das eigene Staunen wertschätzend auszurichten (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, S. 108), begab sich Liliana Olea im Rahmen ihrer Forschungsarbeit auf diesen Weg. Aufbauend auf der Annahme von Nicola Gess, dass sich Staunen erlernen lässt (Gess, 2023), integriert Olea in ihrer Arbeit das Clowning als Methode, um das Staunen aktiv zu üben und erfahrbar zu machen.

Den subtilen Zauber des Staunens für eine relevante Bildungszukunft

Die aktuelle Diskussion über die Situation an Schulen ist häufig von einer negativen Perspektive geprägt, nicht nur gegenüber dem Bildungssystem, sondern auch gegenüber der heutigen Jugend (Twardella, 2010). Immer wieder wird von ständigen Störungen im Unterricht berichtet, von Kindern, die keine Lernmotivation zeigen, „nicht wollen“ oder „nur stören“. Demgegenüber stehen Lehrkräfte, die sich überfordert und belastet fühlen, oft am Rande eines scheinbar unvermeidbaren Burnouts (Oesterreich, 2008, S. 23 & 53). Alle Beteiligten – Eltern, Lehrkräfte und Institutionen – teilen den Wunsch, „das Beste“ für die Kinder zu erreichen, ohne dass jedoch Einigkeit darüber besteht, was dies konkret sein könnte.

Der Zweck von Bildung hat sich im Lauf der Geschichte deutlich gewandelt: von der Vorbereitung auf die Arbeitswelt hin zur Förderung individueller Selbstverwirklichung, zunehmend losgelöst von rein ökonomischen Zielsetzungen (Edelstein & Veith, 2017). Gemeinsame Grundlage bleibt das Ziel, Menschen zu befähigen, ein selbstbestimmtes und verantwortungsbewusstes Leben in der Gegenwart zu führen (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018). Was junge Menschen heute brauchen, lässt sich nicht theoretisch von Lehrkräften, Eltern oder staatlichen Instanzen festlegen, sondern ergibt sich aus individueller Lebensrealität jedes einzelnen Schülers und jeder Schülerin. Da kein Mensch dem anderen gleicht, wird Beobachtung zu einem zentralen pädagogischen Werkzeug.

Das, was im Unterricht oft als „Störung“ bezeichnet wird, ist für Lehrpersonen meist ein Moment der Frustration – eine Unterbrechung des geplanten Ablaufs, die sich scheinbar endlos wiederholt und keine klare Lösung erkennen lässt. Gleichzeitig folgen solche Verhaltensweisen häufig wiederkehrenden Mustern, in denen die Reaktionen der Lehrperson konstant bleiben. So entstehen Gewohnheiten und Überzeugungen,

die die tatsächliche Situation nicht immer angemessen widerspiegeln (Hehn-Oldiges, 2024, S. 9).

Jede Störung im pädagogischen Raum trägt zugleich eine Botschaft in sich: Sie verweist auf ein Bedürfnis des jungen Menschen (Twardella, 2010). Ihre Bearbeitung setzt jedoch ein wesentliches Element voraus: Beziehung. Beziehung entsteht im echten Kontakt zwischen zwei Menschen und eröffnet Raum für Selbstreflexion, Selbsterkenntnis und Begegnung. Eine pädagogische Beziehung, die das Bedürfnis nach Gesehenwerden anerkennt und Zugehörigkeit zu einer Gemeinschaft stärkt, ist eine Beziehung, die Entwicklung ermöglicht. Sie ist eine Beziehung des „Sehens und Gesehenwerdens“, in der Verletzlichkeit nicht als Schwäche, sondern als Grundlage von Vertrauen verstanden wird (Puchmayr, 2024).

Das Staunen als Weg der Beziehung

Die zentrale Frage lautet daher: Wie lässt sich eine solche konstruktive Beziehung gestalten? Die vorgestellte Masterarbeit schlägt das Staunen als bewusste pädagogische Haltung vor – als Methode, um das Fremde, Unerwartete oder Unverständliche im Gegenüber wahrzunehmen, anzunehmen und dadurch neue Reaktionsmöglichkeiten zu erschließen. Durch die Praxis des Staunens kann die Lehrperson gewohnte Handlungsmuster aufbrechen, tiefere Beziehungen zu den Schüler*innen entwickeln und zugleich in einen authentischen Kontakt mit der eigenen inneren Haltung treten.

Ziel ist es, im schulischen Alltag in Verbindung zu bleiben – sowohl mit dem eigenen inneren Erleben als auch mit der lebendigen Realität des Unterrichtsgeschehens – und die Schule zu einem Ort wirklich bedeutsamer Erfahrungen zu machen. Aus der aktuellen Forschung ist bekannt, dass das Erleben von Staunen vielfältige Wirkungen auf den Menschen haben kann (Allen, 2018).

Ein zentraler Teil der Masterarbeit bestand darin, zu untersuchen, wie das in realen Unterrichtssituationen einer ersten Klasse erlebte Staunen die Wahrnehmung der Lehrerin gegenüber den Schüler*innen, ihre Reaktionen und den Verlauf der Interaktion beeinflusste. Die Erlebnisse wurden in Form von Wahrnehmungsvignetten festgehalten und auf drei Ebenen reflektiert: den inneren Erlebnisraum der Lehrperson, die Wirkung des Staunens auf sie selbst und auf die Kinder sowie die daraus entstehenden pädagogischen Implikationen.

Im Folgenden wird eine dieser Wahrnehmungsvignetten samt Reflexionen vorgestellt, um exemplarisch die möglichen Wirkungen des Staunens im schulischen Kontext sichtbar zu machen.

Ein A an der Wand (Valentin)

„Wir haben gerade erst gegessen und sind im Prozess raus in die Pause zu gehen. Alles ist hektisch. Kinder toben im Klassenzimmer und es wird draußen im Gang geschrien. Plötzlich kommt ein Kind angerannt und erklärt, dass du die Wand angemalt hast. Ich fühle gleich Wut und Irritation. Ich gehe raus in den Flur. Du ziehst dich gerade um. Ich frage dich ruhig wo du die Wand angemalt hast, und du zeigst mir beschämt die große Markierung. Es ist ein „A“ so groß wie meine Hand auf der lasierten Wand. Ich weiß nicht, was ich sagen soll. Ich sage „Wow... wie ist das denn passiert?“. Du erklärst mir auf einer selbstverständlichen Weise, dass du einen Stift gefunden hast und den musstest du ausprobieren. Ich fühle mich ruhiger. Ich frage dich, ob es eine gute Idee war, das an der Wand zu machen. Du denkst erst eine Weile darüber nach und sagst dann, dass es auf einem Blatt besser gewesen wäre zu malen. Wir einigen uns, dass das A an der Wand nicht so schön aussieht, und du versuchst es mit einem Radiergummi, den ich dir anbiete, wegzuradieren bis du mit dem Ergebnis zufrieden bist.“ (WV 4.1)

Erste Reflexionsebene: Zu den inneren Erlebnissen der Lehrperson in der Situation

Die Regel lautet: Sitzkissen und Ranzen ins Regal, im Flur umziehen und anschließend in den Pausenhof gehen. Mein Fokus liegt auf der Aufrechterhaltung von Ordnung im hektischen Geschehen. Als ich erfahre, dass die Wand bemalt wurde, fühle ich Überforderung. Um mich dem Kind zuzuwenden, muss ich meine

Kontrolle über den Pausenprozess teilweise aufgeben.

Beim Anblick des „A“ empfinde ich zugleich Irritation und Freude: Irritation, weil das Kind beschämt wirkte und sich seines Fehlverhaltens bewusst zu sein schien; Freude, weil es sich um einen Buchstaben handelte, den wir erst kürzlich gelernt hatten. Der Aufwand, die Bemalung zu entfernen, löste jedoch Ärger aus. Valentins ehrliche Erklärung traf mich unerwartet – sie widerlegte meine Annahmen über seine Motivation und konfrontierte mich mit meiner Tendenz, vorschnell zu urteilen.

Statt ihn zu tadeln, fragte ich Valentin nach seiner Einschätzung der Situation. Er erkannte, dass die Wand kein geeigneter Ort war, und wollte den Buchstaben eigenständig entfernen. In diesem Moment entstand eine Begegnung auf Augenhöhe: Lehrperson und Schüler suchten gemeinsam nach einer Lösung. Am Ende übernahm Valentin Verantwortung, und es blieb das Gefühl einer geteilten Lernerfahrung, die unsere Beziehung vertiefte.

Zweite Reflexionsebene: zur Wirkung des Staunens auf die Lehrperson und auf den Schüler

Ich befand mich in einer emotional aufgeladenen, stressreichen Situation. Anstatt unmittelbar auf meine Irritation zu reagieren, entschied ich mich bewusst fürs Innehalten und antwortete mit: „Wow... wie ist das denn passiert?“ Diese kleine sprachliche Intervention öffnete einen Raum der Wahrnehmung. Sprache beeinflusst physiologische Reaktionen; Ausrufe des Staunens können, laut Keltner (2024), eine körperliche Haltung des Staunens aktivieren und somit die Wahrnehmung modulieren (S. 50).

Valentins unschuldige Erklärung kollidierte mit meiner Vorstellung der Wahrheit. Es war ein Moment kognitiver Dissonanz, der Staunen auslöste. Ich erkannte, dass die kindliche Motivation komplexer war, als ich angenommen hatte, und dass mein pädagogisches Verständnis stets unvollständig bleibt. Dieses Erleben von Ungewissheit, Demut und Neugier entspricht den in der Literatur beschriebenen Merkmalen des Staunens (Shiota et al., 2007; Zhang & Keltner, 2016). Daraus resultierte eine erhöhte Bereitschaft zur Kooperation und ein intensiveres Erleben von Gegenwärtigkeit. Staunen kann, so Allen (2018) und Stommel (2023), das subjektive Zeitempfinden dehnen und dadurch Aufmerksamkeit vertiefen.

Mein Zögern irritierte Valentin zunächst, eröffnete jedoch Raum für seine aktive Beteiligung. Nach Moser (2010) ist Mitbestimmung in persönlich relevanten Situationen zentral für die Entwicklung von Eigenverantwortung (S. 74). Offene, nicht wertende Fragen fördern Reflexion und stärken das Selbstwirksamkeitserleben des Kindes. Die Frage, wo das „A“ besser hätte stehen können, regte Valentin an, sein Handeln eigenständig zu überdenken. Indem ich auf moralische Bewertung verzichtete, fühlte er sich ernst genommen und anerkannt (Rosenberg, 2007, S.16). Eine emotional stabile, respektvolle Haltung verhindert Schuldzuschreibungen und fördert Einsicht (Janson & King, 2006). So wurde die Beziehung durch eine dialogische Haltung gestärkt. Nach Rosenberg (2015) zeigt sich Respekt in der Bereitschaft, Perspektiven anzuhören und zu verstehen (S. 20) – ein Ausdruck von Begegnung auf Augenhöhe, die Kooperation ermöglicht und fördert (Rosenberg, 2013, S. 7). Valentins aktive Mitwirkung und Verantwortungsübernahme spiegelten diese Dynamik exemplarisch wider.

Dritte Reflexionsebene: Zu den pädagogischen Konsequenzen des Staunens

Mein Erstaunen unterbrach, was sonst eine impulsive Reaktion gewesen wäre. Es wurde zu einem Moment des Innehaltens, der Abstand und Bewusstheit schuf. Trotz der hektischen Umgebung richtete sich meine Aufmerksamkeit auf das Kind und seine Beweggründe, nicht mehr auf meine Erwartungen.

Das Staunen löste ein Bewusstsein für die Begrenztheit meiner eigenen Perspektive aus und ließ eine demütige Haltung entstehen. Es ließ mich meine Reaktionen und Prioritäten hinterfragen und Raum schaffen für das, was im Kind lebendig war. Der Fokus verlagerte sich von meinen Emotionen auf seine Gedanken. Aus der Unterbrechung des Kontrollimpulses entstand Offenheit für die kindliche Perspektive, für das Hier und Jetzt und für einen Prozess, der sich ohne Eingriff entfalten durfte.

Diese Offenheit brachte Ruhe, Geduld und Empathie hervor. Wo zuvor Druck herrschte, entstand Kooperation und ein feines Gespür für das Bedürfnis, verstanden zu werden. Zwischen uns wuchs ein Gefühl von Verbundenheit; das Kind wurde nicht zum Objekt meiner Erziehung, sondern zum Partner eines gemeinsamen Lernmoments.

Der Drang zur Kontrolle ließ nach, und an seine Stelle trat Präsenz. Diese Präsenz schuf für das Kind einen Raum, in dem Selbstregulation, Verantwortungsübernahme und Selbstwirksamkeit möglich wurden. Indem ich es handeln ließ, wurde seine Kompetenz sichtbar und mit ihr ein gegenseitiges Vertrauen.

So nährte das Staunen sowohl Beziehung als auch Lernatmosphäre. Es war das Gefühl des Nichtwissens, das diese Öffnung ermöglichte, ein Sich-Einlassen auf das Unvorhersehbare, das Druck löste, neue Sichtweisen eröffnete und kreative Handlungsspielräume entstehen ließ. In der Gelassenheit des Augenblicks fand sich nicht nur eine Lösung, sondern auch die Erkenntnis, dass Lernen, Beziehung und Staunen untrennbar miteinander verwoben sind.

Einführung in die Schule des Staunens

Die aus den reflektierten Wahrnehmungsvignetten gewonnenen Erkenntnisse deuten auf das (positive) Potenzial des Staunens als pädagogisches Instrument hin. Gleichzeitig stellt sich die Frage, ob Staunen gezielt gesteuert oder bewusst im Unterrichtskontext eingesetzt werden kann. Bestimmte Bedingungen scheinen das Staunen zu begünstigen – etwa bewusstes Innehalten, Achtsamkeit für den Moment und eine offene Haltung gegenüber dem Unvorhersehbaren. Dies zeigte sich in allen Situationen, die in den Wahrnehmungsvignetten festgehalten wurden: Staunen trat stets als spontane Reaktion auf.

Daraus ergibt sich die zentrale Frage: Kann Staunen gezielt hervorgerufen werden, um es im Unterricht bewusst zu kultivieren? Die aktuelle Forschung legt nahe, dass dies möglich ist: Die Fähigkeit zu staunen lässt sich trainieren und durch regelmäßige Übung in unterschiedlichen Kontexten aktivieren (Keltner, 2024, S. 106-107).

Im Rahmen der Masterarbeit von Liliana Olea wird das Theater-Clowning als methodischer Ansatz vorgestellt, der Lehrpersonen ermöglicht, eine Haltung der Offenheit, Neugier und Präsenz zu entwickeln. Durch die bewusste Schulung dieser inneren Bereitschaft entsteht ein Erfahrungsraum, in dem echtes Staunen spontan und authentisch aufblühen kann – sowohl in der Begegnung mit den Schüler*innen als auch im Kontakt mit der eigenen inneren Haltung.

Theater Clowning

„Theater clowning ist der Moment, wo sich das scheinbar Absurde mit der Wirklichkeit trifft. Es ist ungewohnt und verblüffend einfach.“ (Oberstufe Lehrerbildung, Teilnehmer)

Die Art zu unterrichten kann durch die Praxis des Theater-Clownings nachhaltig beeinflusst werden. Sie verfeinert die intuitive Entscheidungsfähigkeit im Moment der authentischen und herzlichen Interaktion mit den Schüler*innen. Diese Kunstform unterstützt das Entschleunigen, das Durchatmen in herausfordernden Situationen, das Üben von liebevoller Neugier und offenen Fragen – und schafft so die Grundlage für ein inneres „Wow“.

Der Clown eröffnet eine Welt jenseits von Theorien, Bewertungen oder festgelegten Erwartungen gegenüber Menschen, mit tiefem Respekt für unsere Unterschiede und Achtung vor dem, was tatsächlich geschieht, anstatt vor dem, was wir gerne sehen würden. Die interaktiven Eigenschaften des Clowns – die Beziehung zu sich selbst, zu anderen und zur Situation – führen über die bloße Präsenz hinaus zu intuitivem Handeln. Der Theaterclown achtet auf die eigenen Gefühle, die der anderen und insbesondere auf den Geist des Spielerischen, verbunden mit gleichwertiger Kommunikation, Vertrauen in das Leben und Offenheit für die eigene Entwicklung.

Was ist Theaterclowning genau?

Der Theaterclown lebt jedes Gefühl mit vollem Herzen. In der magischen Welt des Augenblicks ist er vollständig von den kleinen Dingen eingenommen, lebt in Bildern und Vorstellungen, taucht in die Welt der Gefühle ein und bleibt offen für Veränderungen. Herausforderungen nimmt er mit offenen Armen an und erfreut sich an Problemen. Es geht ihm weniger darum, was er tut, als vielmehr wie er es tut. Er steigt aus dem Zug der linearen Zeit aus und bewegt sich fließend im gegenwärtigen Moment.

An der Schnittstelle von Individuum und Öffentlichkeit stehen Clowns in einem fortwährenden Dialog mit dem Publikum, hören auf die Wirkungen ihrer Handlungen und reagieren augenblicklich – selbst dann, wenn dies zunächst unpassend oder zusammenhangslos erscheint. Die Welt und die Menschen auf unterschiedliche Arten zu betrachten, bildet die Haupttätigkeit des Clowns. Clowning lädt dazu ein, individuelle und absurde Arten der Weltbetrachtung zu entwickeln, mit ihnen zu spielen und sie auszuprobieren. So kann ein Clown, wenn er einen Stuhl sieht, ohne erkennbaren Grund selbst zum Stuhl werden und das Leben eines Stuhls mit großer Intensität erleben: Wie sieht die Welt aus, wenn dich die Menschen kaum beachten und ganze Tage auf dir sitzen? Auf diese Weise wird Clowning zu einer kraftvollen Metapher, die unsere Perspektive auf die Welt nachhaltig verändern kann.

Theater-Clowning-Workshops oder Unterrichtsblöcke sind experimentell gestaltet und ermöglichen es den Teilnehmer*innen, zwischen Aktivität und Reflexion zu wechseln. Die Übungen erfordern keinerlei Vorkenntnisse und können beliebig oft wiederholt werden, da sich bei jedem Mal neue Erfahrungen ergeben. Der Clown ermutigt dazu, mit Leib und Seele engagiert, neugierig und interessiert zu sein – selbst in den größten Stressmomenten die Verbindung zur eigenen inneren Stimme zu halten. Ängste und Verwundbarkeit werden wohlwollend angenommen, ebenso wie der Kontrollverlust und das Nichtwissen, die Teil des Lern- und Erfahrungsprozesses sind.

Erlebnis, nicht Ergebnis

Diese Richtung des Theaterclownings, ursprünglich an Jacques Lecoqs Theaterschule in Paris entwickelt, legt den Schwerpunkt auf Spiel und Improvisation und zielt nicht auf darstellerische Fertigkeiten oder technische Perfektion ab. Es geht nicht darum, besonders lustig zu sein – auch wenn dabei viel gelacht wird. Viele Elemente des Improvisationstheaters werden genutzt, erhalten jedoch einen anderen Charakter: Im Vordergrund steht die Ermutigung zu voller persönlicher Anteilnahme beim Handeln, gleichzeitig wird eine gesunde Selbstdistanz gewahrt, insbesondere in den Feedback-Runden. Jede Übung markiert den Beginn eines Erkundungsprozesses – für den Einzelnen, die Gruppe und die *Anleiterin*.

Lehrkräfte, die an mehreren Clownerie-Workshops teilgenommen haben, berichten übereinstimmend, wie das Clowning ihren Unterricht beeinflusst hat:

- „Durch die Clownerie hat sich meine Wahrnehmung verändert. Ich bin offener für Situationen und andere Menschen geworden.“
- „Der Clown begleitet mich immer im Unterricht und hilft mir, offen und aufmerksam zu sein und Situationen nicht zu schnell zu beurteilen.“
- „In meiner Arbeit mit Schüler*innen und im Unterricht habe ich gelernt, zu vertrauen, ein Gespür dafür zu entwickeln, was als Nächstes kommt, meinem Selbstbewusstsein zu vertrauen und zu wissen, was in einem bestimmten Moment zu tun ist. Ich übe mich darin, zuzuhören und mir selbst zu vertrauen, über das Geschehene nachzudenken und bewusste Entscheidungen darüber zu treffen, was als Nächstes zu tun ist. Zuerst ein „Wow“. Danach spüre ich mich in die Situation hinein.“

Was hat das Clowning mit dem Urprinzip des Staunens zu tun?

Ein zentrales Werkzeug im Theater_Clowning ist die Kunst der „Suspension“ – des Innehaltens. Sie bedeutet, sich Zeit zu nehmen, nicht sofort zu reagieren, sich umzuschauen, zu atmen und erst dann zu handeln. Wird „Suspension“ mit einem inneren „Wow“ verbunden, entsteht die Möglichkeit, bewusst zu handeln, statt automatisch zu reagieren. Indem wir üben, tief durchzuatmen, aufmerksam zu sein, zu empfangen und ein inneres „Wow“ zu erleben, öffnen wir einen Raum, in dem alte Verhaltensmuster gelöst und Kommunikationsstile hinterfragt werden können, die unserem höheren Selbst vielleicht nicht mehr dienen. Theater-Clownerie wird so zu einem Spielplatz, auf dem natürliche Intelligenz, Wärme und Offenheit kultiviert werden, während zugleich Toleranz geübt und die unbekannte Zukunft willkommen geheißen wird.

So entsteht ein Raum für ein ganzes Universum an Gefühlen: Staunen, Verwirrung, Angst, Wut, Überforderung, Begeisterung – all diese Emotionen können im „Wow“ auftreten, gehalten und erforscht werden. Genau dies beschreibt das Staunen: das Verweilen in einer „Zwischenzeit“ des Einlassens, ohne Ereignisdichte und vorzeitige Zielorientierung (Han, 2009, S. 42). Staunen ist dabei nicht immer gleich Staunen – es kann unterschiedliche Formen und Intensitäten annehmen.

Theater-Clownerie ist zugleich ein aktives und interaktives Training, durch das wir lernen, uns selbst, anderen und Situationen auf empfängliche, offenherzige und vorurteilsfreie Weise zu nähern. Üben wir, der Welt mit tiefer Neugier, Staunen und ohne Vorurteile zu begegnen, entsteht Raum für echte Begegnungen, in denen alle Beteiligten wachsen und sich verändern können.

Im pädagogischen Kontext kann Staunen dazu beitragen, den täglichen Herausforderungen mit Aufmerksamkeit zu begegnen, das Nichtwissen auszuhalten und die Zwischenzeit des Innehaltens zu nutzen, bevor Handlungen folgen. Durch Clownerie lässt sich eine großzügige innere Haltung kultivieren, die akzeptiert, dass wir nicht alles wissen oder verstehen müssen. Wir können einfach innehalten, beobachten und staunen – ein bewusstes, staunendes Staunen mit offenem Herzen.

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Wonder in an Educational Context

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the phenomenon of wonder in terms of its significance for pedagogical perception and practice. Drawing on the use of perception vignettes developed by Barth & Wiehl (2023), wonder is described as a distinct phase that precedes reflection: a moment of pause between sensory perception and conceptual understanding. Its epistemic potential lies in its ambivalence – between curiosity and irritation, openness and fear – for interrupts hasty categorizations and creates the conditions for a reflective pedagogical attitude.

The article argues for understanding wonder as a learnable pedagogical attitude which can be a resource for building successful relationships and an educational practice that views unpredictability as an invitation to encounter one another.

Introduction

In their research on perception vignettes, Angelika Wiehl and Ulrike Barth focus on the experience of wonder. Between the phenomenological perception and the observation of a situation or person, there is a moment of pause – a brief flash of amazement, irritation, or even awe. This often-fleeting inner emotion has already been described and studied in various contexts. However, it takes on special significance in the work on and with perception vignettes: it marks an independent phase that prepares for and precedes the process of writing down the observed phenomenon and the three subsequent phases of reflection.

The examination of the topic of wonder has led to a growing body of research in German-speaking countries. Particularly noteworthy are the studies and compilations by Mireille Schnyder and Nicola Gess, who are investigating the significance of wonder in the fields of poetics and aesthetics from both a historical and systematic perspective as part of the Swiss Sinergia project (Gess, 2023). These works make it clear that wonder is not a phenomenon that can be simply be understood in uniform terms, rather one that varies historically and systematically in its conceptual expression, evaluation, and function.

Beyond these differences, there is a fundamental commonality: since ancient times, wonder has been understood as a central element of cognitive processes and cultures of knowledge. Philosophy begins with wonder – as a pause that mediates between sensory perception and conceptual thinking (Röder, 2019). It is precisely in this mediating function that wonder becomes relevant for working with perception vignettes because it marks the moment when perception is not immediately interpreted, a pause, a space that opens up a situation.

Amazement refers to experiences that transcend existing “systems of rules and order” (Stommel, 2023, p. 190). While the unexpected can trigger amazement, it can also reveal an intensified form of wonder, the origin of which lies both in the shock and temporary suspension of one’s own self (Stommel, 2023, p. 190). It is precisely in this moment that the epistemic potential of amazement lies: it opens up a space of perception that interrupts hasty categorizations and thus creates the conditions for a phenomenologically oriented, reflexive approach to educational situations.

Although wonder can be described as “the starting point for exploring and understanding people and the world, as is immediately inherent in a small child” (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 94), it is at the same time closely linked to confusion, doubt and a feeling of uncertainty, and therefore by no means has exclusively positive connotations. Nicola Gess, too, does not view wonder solely as a feeling of well-being, but points out that this moment can equally encompass terror or experiences of powerlessness (Gess, 2023).

Wonder, which is “triggered by moments that transcend the boundaries of the ordinary towards the unexpected [...]” (Gess, 2019, p. 15), thus manifests itself as a pause. It is situated between insight and not-knowing, between solution, answer, and open understanding (Röder, 2019). Although the inner orientation of the person experiencing wonder can be analytically distinguished from the effect of the object of wonder, it is only in the intertwining of subject and object that the resonant in-between emerges, in which the searching gaze pauses and a lingering as well as a contemplative attitude become possible (Han, 2009, p. 45).

Although wonder marks a beginning, it simultaneously holds the potential to encounter phenomena anew with an open and non-hasty attitude. It is precisely this ability that proves fundamental to the objective of working with perceptual vignettes. It operates on the borderline of phenomenological discovery, whose methodological operators, whilst belonging to the core of phenomenology, may also exhibit limitations and points of rupture in practical application (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 99). Three levels of reflection are associated with the perception vignettes, within which different perspectives on the moment of perception and of wonder can be articulated. This is of vital importance, as there is neither a single explanation for the expression of a perceived moment nor a definitive answer to the event that was the object of wonder.

The question to explore is what follows this initial moment of perceiving something or someone – in each case situationally and contextually dependent. Wonder occurs at the threshold between what is not yet observable and attentive curious discovery. Inner sensations and feelings resonate with this, initially revealing an empathetic, resonant attitude, but at times also irritation or even defensiveness. Perceptual vignettes express this sense of wonder and can themselves be understood as phenomena of this nature. The state of wonder and amazement that befalls one unexpectedly (Meyer-Drawe, 2011, p. 197) often passes before it we grasp it consciously.

Educational phenomenology is rooted in wonder at the phenomenon, particularly drawing on Goethe’s approach. It connects subjective experience with the ‘other’, thereby integrating two philosophical perspectives: on the one hand, a Platonic view, which assumes an immediately apparent meaning of a phenomenon or an encounter; on the other hand, an Aristotelian perspective, which takes into account expanded horizons of meaning and interpretative contexts in the phases of reflection as well as in the process of gaining knowledge (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 99).

In her dissertation **Education and Wonder: A Philosophical Perspective on Education in the Context of Intellectual and Severe Disabilities** (2023), Theresa Stommel has explored the educational significance of wonder as an effect of the unfamiliar. Fundamentally, she defines wonder as an ‘experience of the unfamiliar’ (Stommel, 2023, p. 175), thereby linking it closely to educational processes. Wonder involves pausing and becoming transfixed – an interpretation that Stommel develops through a precise derivation of the word’s meaning – and it is precisely in this moment that wonder gains significance for processes of change and transformation (Stommel, 2023, p. 175).

Against the backdrop of the theoretical perspectives outlined above regarding the significance and impact of wonder, it seemed natural to explore these ideas further within a practical educational context. It was in this context that the research on wonder in educational contexts emerged as part of Liliana Olea’s Master’s

thesis. It builds directly on the understanding of wonder as a moment of pause, of disorientation, of conscious openness to the unfamiliar, and deepens these assumptions through a particularly thorough examination of international research perspectives.

Whilst Stommel refers to the connection between wonder and learning in ancient Greece (2023, p. 175), Olea's empirical work reveals how an Aristotelian approach to wonder can unfold in educational practice. Using specific moments of perception and their reflections, she demonstrates how significant it is to 'reclaim wonder for the educational context and designate it as a terrain to be practised' (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 105).

Unexpected behaviours in everyday educational practice particularly require such an attitude of wonder: allowing the unknown, pausing in perception, envisioning possible futures, and at the same time thinking and acting in a solution-oriented manner. Olea's work builds on the previously described work on and with perceptual vignettes, in which wonder is understood as a preparatory moment for a reflective pedagogical attitude. The focus on possibilities and the future is opened up by the capacity for wonder and is further explored and refined in the subsequent reflection phases of the perception vignettes (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 105).

Since it is the responsibility of the individual to direct their own sense of wonder in an appreciative manner (Barth & Wiehl, 2023, p. 108), Liliana Olea embarked on this path as part of her research work. Building on Nicola Gess's assumption that wonder is a skill or attitude that can be learnt (Gess, 2023), Olea integrates clowning into her work as a method for actively practising wonder and making it tangible.

The subtle magic of wonder for a relevant educational future

The current discussion about the situation in schools is often characterised by a negative perspective, not only towards the education system but also towards today's youth (Twardella, 2010). Repeatedly, there are reports of constant disruptions in lessons, of children who show no motivation to learn, who 'don't want to' or 'just cause trouble'. In contrast, there are teachers who feel overwhelmed and stressed, often on the brink of what seems like an inevitable burnout (Oesterreich, 2008, pp. 23 & 53). All those involved – parents, teachers and institutions – share the desire to achieve 'the best' for the children, yet there is no consensus on what this might entail.

The purpose of education has changed significantly over the course of history: from preparation for the world of work to the promotion of individual self-fulfilment, increasingly detached from purely economic objectives (Edelstein & Veith, 2017). The common ground remains the goal of empowering people to lead a self-determined and responsible life in the present (Federal Agency for Civic Education, 2018). What young people need today cannot be determined theoretically by teachers, parents, or state authorities, but arises from the individual life circumstances of each and every pupil. Since no two people are alike, observation becomes a key pedagogical tool.

What is often referred to as 'disruption' in the classroom is usually a source of frustration for teachers – an interruption to the planned lesson that seems to repeat itself endlessly, with no clear solution in sight. At the same time, such behaviours often follow recurring patterns in which the teacher's reactions remain constant. This gives rise to habits and beliefs that do not always accurately reflect the actual situation (Hehn-Oldiges, 2024, p. 9).

Every disruption in the educational setting carries a message within it: it points to a need of the young person (Twardella, 2010). Addressing this, however, requires one essential element: relationship. Relationship arises from genuine contact between two people which opens up space for self-reflection, self-awareness, and encounter. An educational relationship that acknowledges an individual's need to be seen and strengthens a sense of belonging to a community is a relationship that enables development. It is a relationship of 'seeing and being seen', in which vulnerability is understood not as a weakness, but as the foundation of trust (Puchmayr, 2024).

Wonder as a path to relationship

The central question is therefore: How can such a constructive relationship be fostered? This master's thesis proposes wonder as a conscious pedagogical stance – as a method for perceiving and accepting the unfamiliar, unexpected, or incomprehensible in the other, thereby opening up new possibilities for response. Through the practice of wonder, the teacher can break out of familiar patterns of behaviour, develop deeper relationships with the pupils and, at the same time, step closer into authentic contact with their own inner attitude.

The aim is to remain connected in everyday school life – both with one's own inner experience and with the living reality of the classroom – and to make the school a place of truly meaningful experiences. Current research shows that the experience of wonder can have a wide range of effects on people (Allen, 2018).

A central part of the Master's thesis involved investigating how the wonder experienced in real classroom situations in a Year 1 class influenced the teacher's perception of the pupils, her reactions, and the course of the interaction. The experiences were recorded in the form of perceptual vignettes and reflected upon on three levels: the teacher's inner experiential space, the effect of wonder on the teacher herself and on the children, and the resulting pedagogical implications.

One of these perceptual vignettes, together with reflections, is presented below to illustrate the possible effects of wonder in a school context.

An A on the wall (Valentin)

“We've just finished eating and are in the process of heading out for break. Everything is hectic. Children are running about in the classroom and there's shouting outside in the corridor. Suddenly, a child comes running up and explains that you've painted on the wall. I immediately feel anger and irritation. I go out into the corridor. You're just getting changed. I calmly ask you where you've drawn on the wall, and you sheepishly show me the large mark. It's an 'A' as big as my hand on the glazed wall. I don't know what to say. I say, 'Wow... how did that happen?'. You explain to me matter-of-factly that you found a pen and had to try it out. I feel calmer. I ask you if it was a good idea to do that on the wall. You think about it for a moment and then say that it would have been better to draw it on a piece of paper. We agree that the A on the wall doesn't look very nice, and you try to rub it off with an eraser I offer you until you're happy with the result.” (WV 4.1)

First level of reflection: on the teacher's inner experiences in the situation

The structures are: put seat cushions and school bags on the shelf, get changed in the corridor and then go out into the playground. My focus is on maintaining order amidst the hectic goings-on. When I find out that the wall had been painted on, I feel overwhelmed. To turn my attention to the child, I would have to relinquish some control over the break routine.

At the sight of the 'A', I feel both irritation and joy: irritation because the child seemed ashamed and appeared to be aware of his misbehaviour; joy because it was a letter we had only recently learnt. However, the effort required to remove the drawing caused me annoyance. Valentin's honest explanation took me by surprise – it contradicted my assumptions about his motivation and confronted me with my tendency to judge too quickly.

Instead of reprimanding him, I asked Valentin for his take on the situation. He realised that the wall was not a suitable place and wanted to remove the letter himself. At that moment, a meeting of minds took place: teacher and pupil sought a solution together. In the end, Valentin took responsibility, and what remained was a sense of a shared learning experience that deepened our relationship.

Second level of reflection: on the effect of wonder on the teacher and the pupil

I found myself in an emotionally charged, stressful situation. Instead of reacting immediately to my irritation, I made a conscious decision to pause and replied: “Wow... how did that happen?” This small

linguistic intervention opened a space for perception. Language influences physiological reactions, according to Keltner (2024), exclamations of wonder can activate a physical posture of wonder and thus modulate perception (p. 50).

Valentin's innocent explanation clashed with my conception of the truth. It was a moment of cognitive dissonance that triggered wonder. I realised that the child's motivation was more complex than I had assumed, and that my pedagogical understanding remains incomplete. This experience of uncertainty, humility and curiosity corresponds to the characteristics of wonder described in the literature (Shiota et al., 2007; Zhang & Keltner, 2016). This resulted in an increased willingness to cooperate and a more intense experience of presence. According to Allen (2018) and Stommel (2023), wonder can extend the subjective perception of time and thereby deepen attention.

My hesitation initially confused Valentin, but it opened up space for his active participation. According to Moser (2010), having a say in personally relevant situations is central to the development of personal responsibility (p. 74). Open, non-judgemental questions encourage reflection and strengthen the child's sense of self-efficacy. The question of where the 'A' might have been better placed prompted Valentin to reflect on his actions independently. By refraining from moral judgement, he felt taken seriously and acknowledged (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 16). An emotionally stable, respectful attitude prevents the attribution of blame and promotes insight (Janson & King, 2006). Thus, the relationship was strengthened by a curious dialogue. According to Rosenberg (2015), respect is demonstrated by a willingness to listen to and understand different perspectives (p. 20) – an expression of meeting on equal terms, which enables and promotes cooperation (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 7). Valentin's active participation and assumption of responsibility exemplified this dynamic.

Third level of reflection: on the educational implications of wonder

My sense of wonder interrupted what would otherwise have been an impulsive reaction. It became a moment of pause that created distance and awareness. Despite the hectic surroundings, my attention turned to the child and their motivations, rather than to my own expectations.

The sense of wonder triggered an awareness of the limitations of my own perspective and fostered a humble attitude. It led me to question my reactions and priorities and to make space for what was alive within the child. The focus shifted from my emotions to their thoughts. The interruption of the impulse to control gave rise to openness to the child's perspective, to the here and now, and to a process that unfolded without intervention.

This openness brought about calm, patience and empathy. Where pressure had previously prevailed, cooperation emerged, along with a keen sense of the need to be understood. A feeling of connection grew between us; the child did not become the object of my parenting, but a partner in a shared learning moment.

The urge to control subsided, and presence took its place. This presence created a space for the child in which self-regulation, taking responsibility and self-efficacy became possible. By letting the child act, their competence became visible, and with it, mutual trust.

Thus, wonder nourished both the relationship and the learning atmosphere. It was the feeling of not knowing that made this openness possible – an openness to the unpredictable that released pressure, made space for new perspectives and allowed creative scope for action to emerge. In the serenity of the moment, I found not only a solution, but also the realisation that learning, relationship and wonder are inextricably intertwined.

An introduction to the school of wonder

The insights gained from the reflective perception vignettes point to the (positive) potential of wonder as an educational tool. At the same time, the question arises as to whether wonder can be deliberately

guided or consciously employed in a classroom context. Certain conditions appear to foster wonder – such as consciously pausing, being mindful of the moment, and maintaining an open attitude towards the unpredictable. This was evident in all situations recorded in the perceptual vignettes: wonder always emerged as a spontaneous reaction.

This raises the central question: Can wonder be deliberately evoked in order to consciously cultivate it in the classroom? Current research suggests that this is possible: the capacity for wonder can be trained and activated through regular practice in various contexts (Keltner, 2024, pp. 106–107).

In Liliana Olea's Master's thesis, the art of theatre clowning is presented as a methodological approach that enables teachers to develop an attitude of openness, curiosity and presence. Through the conscious cultivation of this inner readiness, a space for experience is created in which genuine wonder can blossom spontaneously and authentically – both in encounters with pupils and in contact with one's own inner attitude.

Theatre Clowning

“Theatre clowning is the moment when the seemingly absurd meets reality. It is unfamiliar and astonishingly simple.” (Upper Secondary Teacher Training, participant)

The practice of theatre clowning has been confirmed to have a lasting influence on teachers and teaching methods. It refines the ability to make intuitive decisions in the moment of authentic and heartfelt interaction with pupils. This art form encourages slowing down, taking a deep breath in challenging situations, practising loving curiosity and asking open questions – and thus creates the foundation for an inner ‘wow’.

The clown opens up a world beyond theories, judgements or fixed expectations of people, with deep respect for our differences and appreciation for what is actually happening, rather than what we would like to see. The interactive essence and qualities of the clown – the relationship to oneself – and to others and to the situation – lead beyond mere presence to intuitive action. The theatre clown is attentive to their own feelings, those of others and, is deeply devoted to the spirit of playfulness. Clown is a communicate being with a absurd trust in the unfolding of life and curiosity for development.

What exactly is theatre clowning?

The theatre clown lives every feeling with their whole heart. In the magical world of the moment, they are completely absorbed by whatever gets their attention: they live in a world of in images and ideas, immerse themselves in the world of emotions and remain open to change. They embrace challenges with open arms and delight in problems. For them, it is less about what they do and more about how they do it. They step off the train of linear time and move fluidly within the present moment.

At the intersection of the individual and the public sphere, clowns engage in a constant dialogue with the audience, attuning themselves to the effects of their actions and reacting instantly – even when this initially seems inappropriate or out of context. Observing the world and people in different ways is the clown's primary activity. Clowning invites us to develop individual and absurd ways of viewing the world, to play with them and to try them out. Thus, when a clown sees a chair, they can, for no apparent reason, become the chair themselves and experience the life of a chair with great intensity: what does the world look like when people barely notice you and sit on you all day long? In this way, clowning becomes a powerful metaphor that can permanently change our perspective on the world.

Theatre clowning workshops or teaching modules are designed to be experimental and allow participants to switch between activity and reflection. The exercises require no prior knowledge and can be repeated as often as desired, as new experiences arise each time. The clown encourages us to be fully committed, curious and engaged – to maintain a connection with our own inner voice even in the most stressful moments. Fears

and vulnerability are accepted with loving kindness, as are the loss of control and not knowing, which are part of the learning and experiential process.

Experience, not outcome

This approach to theatrical clowning, originally developed at Jacques Lecoq's theatre school in Paris, focuses on play and improvisation and does not aim for acting skills or technical perfection. The direction is authenticity. It is not about being particularly funny – even though there is plenty of laughter. Many elements of improvisational theatre are used, but they take on a different character: the focus is on encouraging full personal engagement in the action, whilst at the same time maintaining a healthy sense of self-distance, particularly during the feedback sessions. Each exercise marks the beginning of a process of exploration – for the individual, the group and the facilitator.

Teachers who have taken part in several clowning workshops consistently report how clowning has influenced their teaching:

- “Clowning has changed my perception. I have become more open to situations and other people.”
- “The clown is always with me in the classroom and helps me to be open and attentive, and not to judge situations too quickly.”
- “In my work with pupils and in the classroom, I have learnt to trust, to develop a sense of what comes next, to trust my self-confidence and to know what to do in a given moment. I practise listening and trusting myself, reflecting on what has happened, and making conscious decisions about what to do next. First, a ‘Wow’. Then I feel my way into the situation.”

What does clowning have to do with the primal principle of wonder?

A key tool in theatrical clowning is the art of ‘suspension’ – of pausing. It means taking time, not reacting immediately, looking around, breathing, and only then acting. When ‘suspension’ is linked to an inner ‘wow’, the opportunity arises to act consciously rather than react automatically. By practising taking a deep breath, being attentive, receiving and experiencing an inner ‘wow’, we open a space in which old patterns of behaviour can be released and communication styles questioned that may no longer serve our higher self. Theatrical clowning thus becomes a playground where natural intelligence, warmth and openness are cultivated, whilst at the same time tolerance is practised and the unknown future is welcomed.

This creates a space for a whole universe of feelings: wonder, confusion, fear, anger, feeling overwhelmed, enthusiasm – all these emotions can arise in the ‘wow’, be held and explored. This is precisely what wonder describes: lingering in an ‘interim’ of openness, without a density of events or premature goal-orientation (Han, 2009, p. 42). Wonder is not always the same – it can take on different forms and intensities.

Theatre clowning is both an active and interactive form of training through which we learn to approach ourselves, others and situations in a receptive, open-hearted and unbiased manner. If we practise encountering the world with deep curiosity, wonder and without prejudice, space is created for genuine encounters in which all those involved can grow and change.

In an educational context, wonder can help us to face daily challenges with mindfulness, to tolerate not knowing, and to make use of the pause before taking action. Through clowning, we can cultivate a generous inner attitude that accepts that we do not need to know or understand everything. We can simply pause, observe and marvel – a conscious, wonder-filled sense of wonder with an open heart. Wow.

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El asombro en el contexto pedagógico

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Alanus Hochschule, Fachbereich Bildungswissenschaft, Alfter / Deutschland Abstract

ABSTRACT. El artículo analiza el fenómeno del asombro y su importancia para la percepción y la práctica pedagógica. Sobre la base del trabajo con viñetas de percepción de Barth y Wiehl (2023), se describe el asombro como una fase independiente, previa a la reflexión: un momento de pausa entre la percepción sensorial y la comprensión conceptual. En su ambivalencia - entre curiosidad e irritación, apertura y miedo - reside su potencial epistémico: interrumpe las categorizaciones precipitadas y crea las condiciones necesarias para una disposición pedagógica reflexiva.

El artículo propone una comprensión del asombro como una actitud pedagógica básica que se puede aprender, como un recurso para establecer relaciones relevantes y llenadoras y una práctica educativa que entiende lo imprevisible como una invitación al encuentro.

Introducción

En el marco de la investigación sobre viñetas de percepción, Angelika Wiehl y Ulrike Barth se centran en la experiencia del asombro. Entre la percepción fenomenológica y la observación de una situación o persona se produce un momento de pausa, una breve permanencia en el asombro, en la irritación o incluso en el respeto. Esta emoción interior, a menudo fugaz, ya ha sido descrita y estudiada en diferentes contextos. Sin embargo, adquiere un significado especial para el trabajo con viñetas de percepción: marca una fase independiente que prepara y precede al proceso de redacción del fenómeno observado, así como a las tres fases de reflexión posteriores.

El análisis del tema del asombro ha dado lugar a una amplia base de investigación en los países de habla alemana. Cabe destacar especialmente los estudios y recopilaciones de Mireille Schnyder y Nicola Gess, que, en el marco del proyecto suizo Sinergia, investigan la importancia del asombro para la poética y la estética desde una perspectiva histórica y sistemática (Gess, 2023). Estos trabajos dejan claro que el asombro no es un fenómeno que pueda definirse de manera uniforme, sino que varía histórica y sistemáticamente en su significado conceptual, su valoración y su función.

Más allá de estas diferencias, existe un punto en común fundamental: desde la Antigüedad, el asombro se ha entendido como un momento central de los procesos de conocimiento (la percepción de aquello que es nuevo) y de las culturas del saber (la adquisición de nuevas certezas). El asombro es el punto de partida de la filosofía, como una pausa que media entre la percepción sensorial y el pensamiento conceptual (Röder, 2019). Es precisamente en esta función mediadora donde el asombro se vuelve compatible con el trabajo con viñetas de percepción. Marca ese momento en el que la percepción no se traduce inmediatamente en interpretación, sino que primero permanece abierta y se expone a la situación desconocida.

El asombro se refiere a experiencias que trascienden los «sistemas de normas y orden» existentes (Stommel, 2023, p. 190). Mientras que lo inesperado provoca asombro, lo imprevisto muestra una forma intensificada de asombro, cuyo origen se encuentra en la conmoción y la posterior detención temporal de los prejuicios y concepciones propias sobre el mundo (Stommel, 2023, p. 190). Es precisamente en esta irritación donde reside el potencial epistémico del asombro: abre un espacio de percepción que interrumpe las categorizaciones precipitadas y, con ello, crea las condiciones para un enfoque reflexivo y orientado a la fenomenología de las situaciones pedagógicas.

Aunque el asombro puede describirse como «el inicio de la exploración y la comprensión de las personas y el mundo, tal y como lo experimenta de forma inmediata un niño pequeño» (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 94), también está estrechamente relacionado con la irritación, la duda y la sensación de inseguridad, por lo que no tiene una connotación exclusivamente positiva. Nicola Gess tampoco entiende el asombro únicamente como una sensación de bienestar, sino que señala que este momento también puede conllevar miedo o experiencias de impotencia (Gess, 2023).

El asombro, «provocado por momentos que traspasan los límites de lo habitual hacia lo inesperado [...]» (Gess, 2019, p. 15), se manifiesta como una pausa. Se sitúa entre el conocimiento y el desconocimiento, entre la solución, la respuesta y la comprensión abierta (Röder, 2019). Aunque la orientación interna de la persona que se sorprende puede distinguirse analíticamente del efecto de la contraparte que se admira, solo en el entrelazamiento del sujeto y el objeto surge ese entremedio resonante en el que la mirada inquisitiva se detiene y se hace posible una pausa y una actitud contemplativa (Han, 2009, p. 45).

Aunque el asombro marca un comienzo, también ofrece la posibilidad de abordar los fenómenos con una actitud abierta y sin prejuicios. Precisamente esta capacidad resulta fundamental para el objetivo del trabajo con viñetas de percepción. Se mueve en una frontera del descubrimiento fenomenológico, cuyos operadores metodológicos, aunque forman parte del núcleo de la fenomenología, también pueden presentar límites y puntos de ruptura en su aplicación práctica (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 99). A las viñetas de percepción se asocian tres niveles de reflexión, dentro de los cuales pueden expresarse diferentes perspectivas sobre el momento de la percepción y también del asombro. Esto es de vital importancia, ya que no existe una única explicación para la expresión de un momento percibido ni una respuesta definitiva al acontecimiento que ha suscitado el asombro.

Queda por explorar lo que sigue a ese primer momento de percepción de algo o alguien, dependiendo de la situación y el contexto. El asombro se produce en el umbral entre la incapacidad de observar claramente y el descubrimiento consciente. Las sensaciones y los sentimientos internos se mueven con lo vivido y, en un primer momento, permiten una actitud empática y resonante, como a veces también una respuesta de irritación o incluso rechazo. Las viñetas de percepción expresan este asombro y pueden entenderse en sí mismas como fenómenos de esta calidad. El estado de asombro y maravilla que nos sobreviene de forma repentina (Meyer-Drawe, 2011, p. 197) suele desaparecer antes de que podamos captarlo conscientemente.

La fenomenología pedagógica se basa en el asombro ante el fenómeno, especialmente siguiendo el enfoque de Goethe. Combina la experiencia subjetiva con la del otro e integra dos perspectivas filosóficas: por un lado, una visión platónica, que parte del significado evidente de un fenómeno o un encuentro, y por otro, una perspectiva aristotélica, que tiene en cuenta horizontes de significado ampliados y contextos interpretativos subjetivos en las fases de reflexión, así como en el proceso de adquisición de conocimientos (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 99).

En su tesis doctoral «Bildung und Staunen. Eine bildungsphilosophische Perspektive im Kontext geistiger und schwerer Behinderung» (Educación y asombro. Una perspectiva filosófica de la educación en el contexto de la discapacidad intelectual y física grave) (2023), Theresa Stommel ha analizado la importancia del asombro en la educación como efecto de aquello que es ajeno. Básicamente, define el asombro como «la experiencia de lo desconocido» (Stommel, 2023, p. 175) y lo relaciona estrechamente con los procesos educativos. El asombro implica detenerse y quedarse paralizado, una interpretación que Stommel desarrolla a partir de una derivación precisa del significado de la palabra (en Alemán: “Innehalten” y “Erstarren”), y

es precisamente ahí donde el asombro cobra importancia para los procesos de cambio y transformación (Stommel, 2023, p. 175).

En el contexto de las perspectivas teóricas expuestas sobre el significado y el efecto del asombro, resultaba lógico continuar con estas reflexiones también en el contexto pedagógico práctico. En este ámbito, surgió el trabajo de investigación sobre el asombro en contextos pedagógicos en el marco de la tesis de maestría de Liliana Olea. Este trabajo se basa directamente en la concepción del asombro como un momento de pausa, de irritación y de apertura hacia lo desconocido, y profundiza estas hipótesis mediante un análisis especialmente fundamentado en las posiciones de investigación internacionales.

Mientras que Stommel se refiere a la conexión entre el asombro y el aprendizaje en la Antigua Grecia (2023, p. 175), el trabajo empírico de Olea muestra cómo un enfoque aristotélico del asombro puede desarrollarse en la práctica pedagógica. A partir de momentos concretos de percepción y sus reflexiones, muestra lo importante que es «recuperar el asombro para el contexto pedagógico y considerarlo un terreno que merece la pena explorar» (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 105).

Precisamente los comportamientos inesperados en el día a día pedagógico requieren una actitud de asombro: permitir lo desconocido, detenerse en la percepción, esbozar posibles futuros y, al mismo tiempo, pensar y actuar orientados a la búsqueda de soluciones. De este modo, el trabajo de Olea se une al trabajo descrito anteriormente y a las viñetas de percepción, en las que el asombro se entiende como un momento preparatorio de una actitud pedagógica reflexiva. La orientación hacia lo posible y lo futuro se abre gracias a la capacidad de asombro y se cuestiona y diferencia aún más en las fases de reflexión posteriores de las viñetas de percepción (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 105).

Dado que es responsabilidad de cada individuo orientar su propio asombro de manera apreciativa (Barth y Wiehl, 2023, p. 108), Liliana Olea emprendió este camino en el marco de su trabajo de investigación. Partiendo de la hipótesis de Nicola Gess de que el asombro se puede aprender (Gess, 2023), Olea integra en su trabajo el arte del clowning teatral como método para practicar activamente el asombro y hacerlo tangible.

El sutil poder del asombro para un futuro educativo relevante

El debate actual sobre la situación en las escuelas suele estar marcado por una perspectiva negativa, no solo hacia el sistema educativo, sino también hacia la juventud actual (Twardella, 2010). A menudo se habla de constantes interrupciones en las clases, de niños que no muestran motivación por aprender, que «no quieren» o «solo molestan». Por otro lado, están los maestros, que se sienten abrumados y estresados, a menudo al borde de un burn-out aparentemente inevitable (Oesterreich, 2008, págs. 23 y 53). Todas las partes implicadas - padres, maestros e instituciones - comparten el deseo de lograr “lo que es mejor” para los niños, sin que haya acuerdo sobre lo que esto podría significar concretamente.

El propósito de la educación ha cambiado significativamente a lo largo de la historia: ha pasado de ser una preparación para el mundo laboral a promover la realización personal, cada vez más alejada de los objetivos puramente económicos (Edelstein y Veith, 2017). La base común sigue siendo el objetivo de capacitar a las personas para que lleven una vida autónoma y responsable en el presente (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018). Lo que los jóvenes necesitan hoy en día no puede ser determinado teóricamente por los/las maestro/as, los padres o las autoridades estatales, sino que se deriva de la realidad individual de cada joven. Dado que no hay dos personas iguales, la observación fenomenológica se convierte en una herramienta pedagógica fundamental.

Lo que en clase se suele denominar «perturbación» suele ser para los profesores un momento de frustración: una interrupción del desarrollo previsto que se repite con frecuencia y para la que no se vislumbra una solución clara. Al mismo tiempo, este tipo de comportamientos suelen seguir patrones recurrentes en los que las reacciones de el/la maestro/a se mantienen constantes. Así se crean hábitos y creencias que no siempre reflejan adecuadamente la situación real (Hehn-Oldiges, 2024, p. 9).

Cada perturbación en el ámbito educativo conlleva al mismo tiempo un mensaje: hace referencia a una necesidad del joven (Twardella, 2010). Sin embargo, su tratamiento requiere un elemento esencial: la relación. La relación surge del contacto auténtico entre dos personas y abre un espacio para la autorreflexión, el autoconocimiento y el encuentro. Una relación pedagógica que reconoce la necesidad de ser visto y refuerza la pertenencia a una comunidad es una relación que permite el desarrollo. Es una relación de “ver y ser visto”, en la que la vulnerabilidad no se entiende como una debilidad, sino como la base de la confianza (Puchmayr, 2024).

El asombro como camino hacia una relación pedagógica constructiva

Por lo tanto, la pregunta central es: ¿cómo se puede crear aquella relación constructiva? La tesis de máster de Olea propone el asombro como una actitud pedagógica consciente; como un método para el/la maestro/a para percibir y aceptar lo desconocido, lo inesperado o lo incomprensible en el otro y, de este modo, abrir nuevas posibilidades de reacción frente a aquellas “perturbaciones”. Mediante la práctica del asombro, el profesor puede romper los patrones de comportamiento habituales, desarrollar relaciones más profundas con los alumnos y, al mismo tiempo, entrar en contacto auténtico con su propia disposición interior.

El objetivo es mantenerse conectado en el día a día escolar, tanto con la propia experiencia interior como con la realidad viva de lo que ocurre en el aula, y convertir la escuela en un lugar de experiencias verdaderamente significativas. Las investigaciones actuales han demostrado que la experiencia del asombro puede tener múltiples efectos en las personas (Allen, 2018).

Una parte fundamental de la tesis de máster consistió en investigar cómo el asombro experimentado en situaciones pedagógicas reales en un curso de primero básico (niños de 6-8 años) influye en la percepción de la profesora hacia los alumnos, en sus reacciones y en el desarrollo de la interacción. Las experiencias se registraron en forma de viñetas de percepción y se reflexionaron en tres niveles: La experiencia de la profesora, el efecto del asombro sobre ella misma y sobre los niños, y las implicaciones pedagógicas resultantes.

A continuación se presenta una de estas viñetas de percepción, seguido de una corta demostración de su reflexión en tres niveles, con el fin de ilustrar los posibles efectos del asombro en el contexto escolar.

Una A en la pared (Valentín)

«Acabamos de comer y estamos a punto de salir al recreo. Todo es un caos. Los niños corretean por el aula y se oyen gritos en el pasillo. De repente, un niño viene corriendo y dice que has pintado la pared. Siento rabia e irritación. Salgo al pasillo. Te estás cambiando de ropa. Te pregunto con calma dónde has pintado la pared y tú me muestras avergonzado la gran marca. Es una «A» tan grande como mi mano en la pared barnizada. No sé qué decir. Digo: «Guau... ¿cómo ha pasado eso?». Me explicas con naturalidad que has encontrado un lápiz y que simplemente tenías que probarlo. Me siento más tranquila. Te pregunto si ha sido una buena idea hacerlo en la pared. Lo piensas un momento y luego dices que habría sido mejor dibujar en una hoja. Coincidimos en que la A no queda muy bonita en la pared y tú intentas borrarla con una goma de borrar que te ofrezco hasta que quedas satisfecho con el resultado.» (WV 4.1)

Primer nivel de reflexión: sobre la experiencia interna de la maestra en la situación.

La regla de todos los días es: dejar los cojines y las mochilas en la estantería, cambiarse de ropa en el pasillo y luego ir al patio de recreo. Mi objetivo es mantener el orden en medio del ajetreo. Cuando me entero de que han pintado la pared, me siento abrumada. Para poder atender al niño, tengo que renunciar en parte al control sobre el proceso del recreo.

Al ver la “A”, sentí irritación y alegría al mismo tiempo: irritación porque Valentín parecía avergonzado y consciente de su mala conducta; alegría porque se trataba de una letra que habíamos aprendido recientemente.

Sin embargo, el esfuerzo que supondría eliminar la marca me enfadó. La sincera explicación de Valentín me tomó por sorpresa: refutaba mis suposiciones sobre su motivación y me enfrentó con mi tendencia a juzgar precipitadamente. En lugar de regañarlo, le pregunté a Valentín cuál era su opinión sobre la situación. Él reconoció que la pared no era un lugar adecuado y quiso quitar la letra por su cuenta. En ese momento se produjo un encuentro entre iguales: la maestra y el alumno buscaron juntos una solución. Al final, Valentín asumió la responsabilidad y lo que permaneció fue una sensación de una experiencia de aprendizaje compartida que profundizó nuestra relación.

Segundo nivel de reflexión: sobre el efecto del asombro en el docente y en el alumno.

Me encontraba en una situación emocionalmente cargada y estresante. En lugar de reaccionar inmediatamente a mi irritación, decidí conscientemente hacer una pausa y respondí con: «Guau... ¿cómo ha sucedido eso?». Esta pequeña intervención lingüística abrió un espacio de percepción. El lenguaje influye en las reacciones fisiológicas; según Keltner (2024), las exclamaciones de asombro pueden activar una postura corporal de asombro y, por lo tanto, modular la percepción (p. 50).

La inocente explicación de Valentín entró en conflicto con mi concepción de la verdad. Fue un momento de disonancia cognitiva que me provocó asombro. Me di cuenta de que la motivación de Valentín era más compleja de lo que había supuesto y reconocí que mi comprensión pedagógica siempre sería incompleta. Esta experiencia de incertidumbre, humildad y curiosidad se corresponde con las características del asombro descritas en la literatura (Shiota et al., 2007; Zhang y Keltner, 2016). El resultado fue una mayor disposición a cooperar y una experiencia más intensa del presente. Según Allen (2018) y Stommel (2023), el asombro puede prolongar la percepción subjetiva del tiempo y, por lo tanto, profundizar la atención.

Mi pregunta abierta y la ausencia de un reproche desconcertaron inicialmente a Valentín, pero le abrió espacio para participar activamente en la situación. Según Moser (2010), la participación activa en situaciones personalmente relevantes es fundamental para el desarrollo de la responsabilidad personal (p. 74). Las preguntas abiertas y sin juicios de valor fomentan la reflexión y refuerzan la experiencia de autoeficacia del niño. La pregunta de dónde habría sido mejor escribir la «A» animó a Valentín a reflexionar por sí mismo sobre su comportamiento. Al abstenerme de hacer juicios morales, él se sintió tratado con seriedad y reconocido (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 16). Una actitud emocionalmente estable y respetuosa evita la atribución de culpa y fomenta la comprensión (Janson y King, 2006). Así, la relación se fortaleció gracias a una actitud dialogante. Según Rosenberg (2015), el respeto se manifiesta en la disposición a escuchar y comprender otras perspectivas (p. 20), una expresión de encuentro entre iguales que permite y fomenta la cooperación (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 7). La participación activa y la asunción de responsabilidad por parte de Valentín reflejaban de manera ejemplar esta dinámica.

Tercer nivel de reflexión: sobre las consecuencias pedagógicas del asombro

Mi sorpresa interrumpió lo que de otro modo habría sido una reacción impulsiva. Se convirtió en un momento de pausa que creó distancia y conciencia. A pesar del entorno agitado, mi atención se centró en el niño y sus motivos, y ya no en mis expectativas.

El asombro me hizo tomar conciencia de lo limitada que es mi propia percepción y me llevó a adoptar una actitud humilde. Me hizo cuestionar mis reacciones y prioridades y crear espacio para lo que estaba desarrollándose en el mundo interno del niño. Mi foco pasó de mis emociones de rechazo a los pensamientos de Valentín. La interrupción de mi impulso de control dio lugar a una apertura hacia la perspectiva del otro, hacia el aquí y ahora y hacia un proceso que pudo desarrollarse sin intervención.

Esta actitud abierta generó tranquilidad, paciencia y empatía. Donde antes predominaba la presión, surgió la cooperación y una delicada sensibilidad hacia la necesidad de ser comprendido. Entre nosotros creció un

sentimiento de conexión; el niño no se convirtió en el objeto de mi educación, sino en el compañero de un momento de aprendizaje compartido.

El impulso de controlar disminuyó y fue sustituido por la presencia. Esta presencia creó un espacio para el niño en el que fue posible la autorregulación, la asunción de responsabilidad y la autoeficacia. Al dejarle actuar, su competencia se hizo visible y, con ella, la confianza mutua.

Así, el asombro nutrió tanto la relación como el ambiente de aprendizaje. Fue la sensación de desconocimiento lo que permitió esta apertura, el dejarse llevar por lo impredecible, lo que liberó la presión, abrió nuevas perspectivas y dio lugar a un margen de maniobra creativo. En la serenidad del momento no solo se encontró una solución, sino también la comprensión de que el aprendizaje, la relación y el asombro están inseparablemente entrelazados.

Una introducción a la escuela del asombro

Los conocimientos obtenidos a partir de la reflexión de las viñetas de percepción apuntan al potencial (positivo) del asombro como instrumento pedagógico. Al mismo tiempo, surge la pregunta de si el asombro puede controlarse de forma específica o utilizarse conscientemente en el contexto educativo. Ciertas condiciones parecen favorecer la emergencia del asombro, como la pausa consciente, la atención al momento presente y una actitud abierta ante lo impredecible. Lo siguiente se observó en todas las situaciones recopiladas en las viñetas de percepción: el asombro siempre se produjo como una reacción espontánea.

De ahí surge la pregunta central: ¿se puede provocar el asombro de forma específica para cultivarlo conscientemente en el aula? Las investigaciones actuales sugieren que esto es posible: la capacidad de asombrarse se puede entrenar y activar mediante la práctica regular en diferentes contextos (Keltner, 2024, pp. 106-107).

En el marco de la tesis de máster de Liliana Olea, se presenta el clowning teatral como un enfoque metodológico que permite a los docentes desarrollar una actitud de apertura, curiosidad y presencia. Mediante el entrenamiento consciente de esta disposición interior, se crea un espacio de experiencia en el que el asombro genuino puede florecer de forma espontánea y auténtica, tanto en el encuentro con los/las alumnos/as como en el contacto con la propia disposición interior.

Clowning teatral

«El clowning teatral es el momento en el que lo aparentemente absurdo se encuentra con la realidad. Es inusual y sorprendentemente sencillo». (Formación de profesores de secundaria, participante)

La forma de enseñar puede verse influida de manera duradera por la práctica del clowning teatral. Refina la capacidad de tomar decisiones intuitivas en el momento de la interacción auténtica y afectuosa con los alumnos. Esta forma de arte favorece la desaceleración, la respiración profunda en situaciones difíciles, el ejercicio de la curiosidad afectuosa y las preguntas abiertas, creando así la base para un “Guau” (asombro) interior.

El payaso abre un mundo más allá de teorías, juicios o expectativas preestablecidas hacia las personas, con un profundo respeto por nuestras diferencias y consideración por lo que realmente sucede, en lugar de lo que nos gustaría que ocurriera. Las cualidades interactivas del payaso - la relación consigo mismo, con los demás y con la situación - conducen, más allá de la mera presencia, a una acción intuitiva. El payaso teatral presta atención a sus propios sentimientos, a los de los demás y, especialmente, al espíritu lúdico, unido a una comunicación en igualdad de condiciones, confianza en la vida y apertura hacia el propio desarrollo.

¿Qué es exactamente el clowning teatral?

El payaso teatral vive cada sentimiento con todo el corazón. En el mundo mágico del instante está completamente absorbido por las pequeñas cosas, vive en imágenes y representaciones, se sumerge en el mundo de las emociones y permanece abierto a los cambios. Acepta los desafíos con los brazos abiertos y disfruta de los problemas. Para él/ella, importa menos lo que hace que cómo lo hace. Abandona el tiempo lineal y se mueve con fluidez en el momento presente.

En la intersección entre el individuo y el espacio público, los payasos se encuentran en un diálogo constante con el público, escuchan los efectos de sus acciones y reaccionan al instante, incluso cuando esto puede parecer, en un primer momento, inapropiado o carente de relación. Mirar el mundo y a las personas de diferentes maneras constituye la actividad principal del payaso. El clowning invita a desarrollar formas individuales y absurdas de contemplar el mundo, a jugar con ellas y a ponerlas a prueba.

Así, cuando un payaso ve una silla, puede, sin motivo aparente, convertirse él mismo en una silla y experimentar con gran intensidad la vida de una silla: ¿Cómo se ve el mundo cuando las personas apenas te prestan atención y pasan días enteros sentándose sobre ti? De este modo, el clowning se convierte en una poderosa metáfora capaz de transformar de manera duradera nuestra perspectiva sobre el mundo.

Los talleres o bloques de clases de clowning teatral están diseñados de manera experimental y permiten a los/las participantes alternar entre la actividad y la reflexión. Los ejercicios no requieren conocimientos previos y pueden repetirse tantas veces como se desee, ya que en cada ocasión surgen nuevas experiencias. El clown anima a comprometerse en cuerpo y alma, con curiosidad e interés, y a mantener la conexión con la propia voz interior incluso en los momentos de mayor estrés. Los miedos y la vulnerabilidad son acogidos con benevolencia, al igual que la pérdida de control y el no saber, que forman parte del proceso de aprendizaje y de la experiencia.

Se trata de la vivencia, no del resultado

Esta corriente del teatro clown, desarrollada originalmente en la escuela de teatro de Jacques Lecoq en París, pone el énfasis en el juego y la improvisación, y no busca habilidades interpretativas ni perfección técnica. No se trata de ser especialmente gracioso, aunque se ría mucho en el proceso. Se utilizan muchos elementos del teatro de improvisación, pero adquieren un carácter distinto: lo central es la motivación hacia una plena implicación personal en la acción, manteniendo al mismo tiempo una sana distancia de uno mismo, especialmente en las rondas de reflexión. Cada ejercicio marca el inicio de un proceso de exploración, tanto para la persona individual como para el grupo y la persona facilitadora.

Docentes que han participado en varios talleres de clowning teatral coinciden al relatar cómo el clowning ha influido en su enseñanza:

«A través del clowning teatral ha cambiado mi percepción. Me he vuelto más abierta a las situaciones y a otras personas.»

«El clown me acompaña siempre en clase y me ayuda a mantenerme abierta y atenta, y a no juzgar las situaciones con demasiada rapidez.»

«En mi trabajo con los jóvenes y en las clases, he aprendido a confiar, a desarrollar una intuición sobre lo que va a pasar a continuación, a confiar en mi instinto y a saber qué hay que hacer en cada momento. Practico escuchar y confiar en mí misma, reflexionar sobre lo que ha sucedido y tomar decisiones conscientes sobre lo que debo hacer a continuación. Primero, un «¡guau!». Después me sintonizo con la situación.»

¿Qué tiene que ver el clown con el principio fundamental del asombro?

Una herramienta fundamental en el arte del clowning teatral es el arte de la «suspensión», es decir, la pausa. Significa tomarse tiempo, no reaccionar de inmediato, mirar a tu alrededor, respirar y solo entonces actuar. Si

la “suspensión” se combina con un “guau” interior, surge la posibilidad de actuar conscientemente en lugar de reaccionar automáticamente. Al practicar la respiración profunda, la atención, la recepción y la experiencia de un “guau” interior, abrimos un espacio en el que se pueden romper viejos patrones de comportamiento y cuestionar estilos de comunicación que quizá ya no estén al servicio de nuestro yo superior. El clowning teatral se convierte así en un espacio de juego en el que se cultiva la inteligencia natural, la calidez y la apertura, al mismo tiempo practicando la tolerancia y dándole la bienvenida al futuro desconocido.

Así se crea un espacio para todo un universo de sentimientos: asombro, confusión, miedo, ira, sobrecarga, entusiasmo. Todas estas emociones pueden surgir, mantenerse y explorarse en el “guau”. Esto es precisamente lo que describe el asombro: permanecer en un “tiempo suspendido” de aceptación, sin densidad de acontecimientos ni orientación prematura hacia un objetivo (Han, 2009, p. 42). El asombro no siempre es igual: puede adoptar diferentes formas e intensidades.

El clowning teatral es, al mismo tiempo, un entrenamiento activo e interactivo a través del cual aprendemos a acercarnos a nosotros mismos, a los demás y a las situaciones de manera receptiva, abierta y libre de prejuicios. Cuando practicamos encontrarnos con el mundo con profunda curiosidad, asombro y sin juicios previos, se crea un espacio para encuentros auténticos en los que todas las personas involucradas pueden crecer y transformarse.

En el contexto pedagógico, el asombro puede ayudar a afrontar los desafíos cotidianos con atención, a tolerar el no saber y a aprovechar el tiempo suspendido de la pausa antes de que sigan las acciones. A través del clowning teatral puede cultivarse una disposición interior generosa que acepta que no necesitamos saberlo ni comprenderlo todo. Podemos simplemente detenernos, observar y maravillarnos: un asombro consciente y lleno de admiración, con el corazón abierto.

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Types of discourses about Anthroposophy in relation to Waldorf education (Part 2)

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ABSTRACT. This paper (in two parts) outlines various types of discourses of Anthroposophy from the perspective of scholars of Waldorf education, offering a commentary on each one. The aim of the paper is to help provide a framework for scholars, students of Waldorf education, teachers and anyone who wishes to make informed judgements about the possible relationships between Waldorf education and anthroposophy. It makes a basic distinction between an individual's relationship to anthroposophy, which can be based on belief, conviction, or experience and which they are totally free to have, and the position of an institution like a school or university to the theory underpinning Waldorf education. The main problem that Waldorf education has in being taken seriously by the academy and the public is the association with esoteric and apparently unscientific aspects of Anthroposophy. Gaining acceptance for Anthroposophy as a legitimate science of the spirit is worth striving for but Waldorf education cannot wait that long. The discourses described include the charismatic nature of the anthroposophical movement, whether it is a religion or ideology, whether everything published in Steiner's name is Anthroposophy, Anthroposophy as a 'theory of everything' or grand narrative, Anthroposophy as an esoteric schooling and path of meditation and finally as a science of the spiritual. In the final section the paper addresses the possible role of Anthroposophy in teacher education and as a basis for Waldorf education. I argue that Steiner should be referenced like any other author, and anthroposophy should be referenced as a cultural phenomenon and studied using the appropriate hermeneutic methods. Ultimately if anthroposophy is seen as a spiritual activity of thinking and not as a body of knowledge, the relationship between Waldorf education and anthroposophy is not one of formal allegiance but of individual activity.

ABSTRAKT. In diesem Artikel (in zwei Teilen) werden verschiedene Arten von Diskursen der Anthroposophie aus der Perspektive der Waldorfpädagogik skizziert und kommentiert. Ziel des Artikels ist es, Wissenschaftler*innen, Studierende der Waldorfpädagogik, Lehrkräften und allen, die sich ein fundiertes Urteil über die möglichen Beziehungen zwischen Waldorfpädagogik und Anthroposophie bilden möchten, einen Rahmen zu bieten. Es wird grundlegend unterschieden zwischen der Beziehung eines Individuums zur Anthroposophie, die auf Glauben, Überzeugung oder Erfahrung basieren kann und die jeder für sich frei wählen kann, und der Position einer Institution wie einer Schule oder Universität zur Theorie, die der Waldorfpädagogik zugrunde liegt. Das Hauptproblem, das die Waldorfpädagogik hat, um von der Akademie und der Öffentlichkeit ernst genommen zu werden, ist die Verbindung mit esoterischen und scheinbar unwissenschaftlichen Aspekten der Anthroposophie. Die Anerkennung der Anthroposophie als legitime Geisteswissenschaft ist erstrebenswert, aber die Waldorfpädagogik kann nicht so lange warten. Die beschriebenen Diskurse umfassen die charismatische Natur der anthroposophischen Bewegung, ob es sich um eine Religion oder Ideologie handelt, ob alles, was in Steiners Namen veröffentlicht wird, Anthroposophie ist, Anthroposophie als „Theorie von allem“ oder große Narrative, Anthroposophie als esoterische Schulung und Meditationsweg und schließlich als Wissenschaft des Spirituellen. Im letzten Abschnitt befasst sich der Artikel mit der möglichen Rolle der Anthroposophie in

der Lehrkräftebildung und als Grundlage für die Waldorfpädagogik. Ich vertrete die Auffassung, dass Steiner wie jeder andere Autor referenziert und die Anthroposophie als kulturelles Phänomen betrachtet und mit den entsprechenden hermeneutischen Methoden untersucht werden sollte. Wenn Anthroposophie als eine geistige Aktivität des Denkens und nicht als ein Korpus von Erkenntnissen verstanden wird, ist die Beziehung zwischen Waldorfpädagogik und Anthroposophie letztlich nicht eine der formalen Zugehörigkeit, sondern eine der individuellen Aktivität.

In the first part of this paper the aim of the paper and the question of positionality were disused as well as the following discourses, anthroposophy as charismatic movement, world view (Weltanschauung), as being identical with Steiner's complete works, as grand narrative, a modern esoteric spiritual path through the School of Michael, a set of pathways of spiritual schooling, meditation and contemplative practices.

7. Anthroposophy as a (the) science of the spirit

Steiner always wanted his approach to be understood as scientific and A.P. Shephard (1961) aptly titled his biography of Steiner, *Scientist of the Invisible*. Steiner used the term *Geisteswissenschaft* (literally spiritual science) synonymously with anthroposophy. He presented his experiences of the spiritual world as being based on a scientific approach. Scientific method, however, as we use the term today, is based on the premise that explanatory theory is generated to account for phenomena, data is gathered and interpreted, and conclusions are formed that are plausible and where possible reproducible. Across the sciences, methods vary but all are governed by the principles of credibility, trustworthiness, transparency and validity. "A central criterion of today's scientific (not merely natural scientific) methods is the demand for intersubjective verifiability of research results" (Rittelmeyer, 2023, p. 67). In Steiner's day scientific method was somewhat narrower and was dominated by the positivist-empirical approaches of the natural sciences. The basic dilemma we face here is that although Steiner frequently said that anyone with an open mind and who follows the steps he took, will be able to verify the results of his spiritual research, to date very few people, if any, have plausibly claimed to have done so. Thus, Steiner's appears to be a one-man science, which is a tautology.

Steiner's theory of knowledge is an attempt to create an epistemological basis for the generation of knowledge about the world, which is first and foremost a scientific gesture. His aim was to show that there are no theoretical limits to knowledge, as Kant and other important philosophers had suggested. Steiner frequently cites the German physiologist, Emil du Bois-Reymond's statement that we can only push the boundaries of knowledge as far as we can make observations, beyond which *ignorabimus* (we will never know), though to be fair to du Bois-Reymond, he was referring to the nature of sensations and sentience in living beings (Finkelstein, 2013). The question of sentience has to this day not been entirely resolved. Du Bois-Reymond, who was also a polymath, charismatic speaker and one of the pioneers of the modern neurosciences, was in a way the antithesis of Steiner, because he sought a scientific account of the human psyche using experimental science, rather than spiritual imagination.

Comment

From the perspective of Waldorf education, there are three questions that concern us here, and none of them can be discussed in any detail (my aim here is merely to highlight what they are).

- How credible is anthroposophy as a science of the spirit?
- How can scholars deal with Steiner's texts in a scientific way?
- How can anthroposophical methods be used as part of educational research?

A Science of the spirit

In the West, since the Renaissance there has been a separation of religion, philosophy, art and science, though they all have common roots in human inquiry, and as Cassirer (1962) has shown, people use multiple and equally valid methods to express their understanding of the world include myth, religion, narrative, art, philosophy and science. The question is, what did Steiner actually mean by a scientific approach?

Part of the problem is that in German, the word *Geist* can have both a spiritual and a non-spiritual meaning, it can mean spirit or it can mean the mind and mental or cognitive activity in general, for example, the German translation of the neurologist Eric Kandel's 2007 book *In Search of Memory: The emergence of a new science of mind*, the subtitle was translated as: *Die Entstehung einer neuen Wissenschaft des Geistes* -literally the emergence of a new science of the spirit. In anthroposophy the translation of Geist into English is always ambivalent and in German this ambivalence works to the benefit of anthroposophy today.

Epistemology was a highly political and cultural topic in late 19th Century Germany (Finkelstein, 2013). Many leading thinkers, such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), were trying to establish the credibility of a social, cultural and human science, distinct from the science of nature (Naturwissenschaft), which was built on identifying and applying natural laws. The term *Geisteswissenschaft* (literally spiritual science) referring to the humanities, acquired this meaning mainly through the work of Dilthey. He distinguished the natural sciences from the humanities by their different functions. Natural science attempts to *explain* natural phenomena objectively and searches for causal explanations that are valid independently of human subjectivity. Dilthey (1883/1927) sought an alternative method to the positivist, empirical causality of natural phenomena in what he called a philosophy of life based on an intensification of the consciousness of experience. He argued that human life, its products and our history have their own self-created (rather naturally created) meaning and this requires the method of hermeneutics to understand them through interpretation. He also believed that the autonomy of the human mind cannot be determined by fixed natural laws but that it belongs to cultural and historical processes of change. Thus, people are not only determined by natural laws and forces but also have the potential to shape themselves through the process known as *Bildung*, by engaging with and recognizing the culture in which they are embedded.

The humanities have the task of *understanding* the human mind and human culture, as these are only produced by people themselves and cannot be fully explained by natural causes. This is why the humanities are central to the process of *Bildung*, which is a central and multi-valent concept in German culture, that the word education does not wholly encompass. What runs as a common thread through all versions of *Bildung* is the idea that the self-formation and maturation of the person as a life-long process in the direction of individual emancipation and the wellbeing of civil society via culture (Horlacher, 2017). The idea of *Bildung*, if not the word itself, has a much wider sphere of influence than the German speaking world, having travelled to America in the 19th Century (often referred to as continental philosophy, or humanist *Bildung*) through influential figures such as Emerson, Thoreau and Dewey and still influences many thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum (2011), whose theory of capabilities is a contemporary version of *Bildung*. More recently it has become very influential in China, which sees *Bildung* as aligned with Neo-Confucian notions of the harmonious development of the person in and through the family/community (Deng, 2013).

Later in his career, Dilthey changed his hermeneutic approach to the humanities, to the acknowledging a connection between experience, expression and understanding, which added a linguistic layer to understanding and also adds an element of reflexivity to the knowledge process. Dilthey's approach strongly influenced Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, Ernst Cassirer, Martin Buber, Theodor Adorno, Paul Ricoeur and many others.

In Dilthey's account of *Geisteswissenschaft* (2017/1883), spirit is identical to the Romantic concept of life and is based on experience, which is the basis for understanding the meaning of events. We understand because our individual mind is able to retrieve and recognize a higher meaning that is located in the spirit. Therefore, a hermeneutic approach to understanding human thought, history and creativity is appropriate. Understanding is therefore the rediscovery of the self in the other, because the self and the other have a common source in the spirit and spirit recognizes spirit. We understand the objects of the world because they

too are an expression of the spirit: We can understand whatever is a manifestation of the mind; whatever we can understand is a manifestation of the mind. Much of this account resonates with Steiner's.

As far as I know, only a few authors have tried to connect Steiner with Dilthey (one exception is Jörg Ewertowski, 2010). For me as a non-philosopher, there seem to be many fruitful overlaps. The most important difference between Dilthey and Steiner is that the latter saw anthroposophy as *the* spiritual science (singular) in relation to both the natural sciences and the cultural sciences. This distinction has been inadequately understood and this leaves a considerable ambivalence in the relationship between Waldorf education and Anthroposophy.

In Steiner's *A Science of Knowing: Outlines of an Epistemology implicit in the Goethean World View* (1988, originally published in 1886), he recommends grasping the interaction of causality in the inorganic world (much as Dilthey describes *Naturwissenschaft*), but,

Ultimately it is true for all science what Goethe expressed so aptly with the words 'In and for itself theory is worth nothing, except insofar as it makes us believe in the interconnections of phenomena'. Through science we are always bringing separate facts of our experience into connection with each other. In the inorganic nature we see causes and effects as separate from each other, and we seek their connections in the appropriate sciences. In the organic world, we perceive species and genera in the organic world and seek to establish their mutual relationships. In history, individual cultural epochs of humanity contrast with one another; we endeavour to recognize the inner dependence of one stage of development on another. "(Section III The task of science- here 'theory' is closer to the meaning of the Greek *theoria*, 'what thinking sees')."

One could say that here Steiner offers a synthesis of Dilthey's juxtaposition of natural and cultural sciences in his reinterpretation of experience in connection with the question of the relationship between idea and reality. His answer is that thinking is a higher experience in the experience and at the same time an interpreter that interprets the gestures of experience. In Steiner's theory of knowledge, the person's soul is a subjective arena of the encounter with the world mediated by the senses, and the thinking Self that makes sense of the resulting experiences, which is ultimately a phenomenological process. The title of Jap Sijmon's (2008) analysis of Steiner's method is apt: *Phenomenology and Idealism*. Dahlin, emphasizes that Steiner's theory of knowledge is non-representational, that is, the mind does not have to stop at the process of producing mental images to represent what has been perceived, but in a second step, experiences them as reality, or rather, in bringing experience and concept together, the subject produces reality.

In his book *Riddles of Philosophy*, Steiner considers the difference between the natural sciences and the humanities as follows:

Observations on the spiritual world in the manner of Dilthey or Eucken find the sum of humanity's cultural experiences as the spiritual world. With this world as the only comprehensible spiritual world, one does not stand on the ground that corresponds to the scientific way of thinking. The totality of world beings is organized for the natural scientific view in such a way that the physical human being in their individual existence appears like a summary, a unity, to which all other natural processes and natural beings point. The world of culture is that which is created by this human being. However, it is not an individual unity of a higher kind in relation to the individuality of the human being. The spiritual science referred to here, points to an experience that the soul can have independently of the body. And this experience reveals itself as an individual. It appears like a higher human being. (2010, S. 515, MR trans)

Steiner's starting horizon for his spiritual science was that the most important philosophical knowledge cannot be articulated in words; words can only indicate the presence of a concept. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whose thinking was close to Steiner's in many ways, referred to this as 'transcendental empiricism' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). Dahlin (2013) has noted that Steiner's theory of knowledge is also non-representational, intuitive and therefore immanent. It is active knowledge-in-the-moment and in-the-situation and is thus more suited to events and processes than fixed, permanent concepts. Steiner's knowledge of the physical world is based on polarities and transitions between states, in the organic world on types that describe processes and relationships rather than fixed categories. Our connection to the world through the senses is phenomenological, whilst our link to the spiritual world through thinking is a form of idealism, the concepts we intuit in thinking are deemed to be both universal and eternal. In the human

world the central narrative is changing consciousness. One may disagree with the examples Steiner gave and the structures he put them in (e.g. cultural epochs or historical periods as symptoms of a teleology) but his relational account of knowledge is very contemporary (see also Welburn, 2004, Amrine, 2019). Above all, his own method of cognition argues against using his categories and concepts as fixed truths. Steiner's knowledge is productive and emergent, meaning it has to be produced anew each time, rather than reproduced as fact (see da Veiga, 2016).

Steiner's claim that anthroposophy is a science of the spirit is one of the main stumbling blocks to any scientific recognition of anthroposophy. In many ways accepting anthroposophy as a 'Weltanschauung' or an esoteric system or even as a philosophy would be less problematic. Nobody would try to argue that Buddhism, Catholicism, the Kabbalah or indeed Theosophy are sciences but that that does not lessen their relevance and value as cultural phenomena. Rather, as Ernst Cassirer (1962) has argued, language, art, myth, religion, maths, geometry and science – and one can add esoteric systems – are all forms of symbolic imagination and intelligence that give people access to 'higher knowledge', in the sense that these symbolic systems can be used to express multiple if not unlimited relations between things and ideas. They are all different but equally valid fields of human inquiry and knowing. Perhaps, in his zeal to overcome materialism in a scientific age, his leap to claiming that anthroposophy is a science, was a step too far (unless you believe in his infallibility).

Later in his career, Steiner modified his notion of a spiritual science in relation to 'mainstream' science. In his book *Riddles of the Soul* (Steiner, 1917/2010 in German and 2010 in English) and the lecture "Anthroposophy has something to add to modern sciences" from 12.11.1917 (Steiner, 2005), he offers glimpses of a new approach, but emphasizes that as long as science refuses to acknowledge the spirit (as he understands it), and treats the human mind as a closed system and culture as the product of this system, it will not really understand the human being in the way anthroposophy does.

Steiner's criticisms of the science of his day are barely relevant given how much the sciences have changed over the past century, and anyway are not in themselves arguments for taking anthroposophy as a science seriously. In educational science it is quite possible today to base statements on hermeneutic interpretation. As Tyson (2025) there is a growing body of published empirical science related to Waldorf education and there could be much more, given better resources and more recognition that this is important.

Engaging with Steiner's texts in a scientific way

From an intercultural and global perspective, the discussion of whether the spirit is real or not is clearly a Western perspective. In Asia and Africa and many other parts of the world, not to mention indigenous people everywhere, the existence of a spiritual dimension is not in doubt. The fact is, at least in the English language scientific world, making reference to the spiritual dimension of life is by no means ruled out. There are even renowned peer-reviewed journals, in the field of education, psychology, philosophy and comparative religion in which topics of spirituality are regularly discussed. Examples include the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* or the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (transpersonal means non-bodily consciousness), both of which have published articles on Steiner and Waldorf. Today they speak of 'spiritual but not religious' and assume that there is a spiritual dimension to life that cannot be traced back to physical causes. Spirituality today is often defined as the experience of being part of a larger, non-material and meaningful whole that is not just the result of neuronal activity (Schreiber, 2012, Huss, 2014, Miller, 2015). The work of Lisa Miller (2015) from Columbia University New York builds a bridge to pedagogy. As we have seen above, talking about spirituality rather than religiosity, which has too many associations with specific religions, can open doors to understanding, that have often been closed.

The scientific approach to pedagogy and anthroposophical sources is an essential aspect of teacher education, because, as Desjepper & Schmelzer (2024) emphasize,

In this context, the development of a scientific attitude is central. Those who study anthroposophy should learn to perceive carefully, think clearly and arrive at appropriate judgements. Anthroposophy is not something pre-scientific but, as Rudolf Steiner's writings „Fundamentals of a Theory of Knowledge of Goethe's World View“ and his „Philosophy of Freedom“ show, is clearly and unambiguously based on the Enlightenment (2024, p.29).

Rather than treating Steiner texts as facts we can engage within them hermeneutically (see Rawson, 2021a, 2024, Rawson and Bransby, 2025). This means applying various steps of interpretation, by using for example, an empathic form of understanding (what does the text say in my own words?), followed by a dialogic form of understanding (contextualizing and interrogating the text) and then moving towards a transactional mode of understanding (in what way has working with this text changed me?). Secondly, as Rittlemeyer (1990, 2023) has suggested, Steiner's ideas should be treated as heuristic models to direct the researcher's attention towards certain phenomena.

Using anthroposophical research methods

As Schieren (2008, 2011) has discussed, anthroposophical research is best suited to understanding people, including self-observation. Göschel (2012) has shown how this can be done in his account of individual case studies in therapeutic education using a method he calls biographical mythos. This is an important step in establishing anthroposophical research methods. Göschel's (2012) study locates Steiner's spiritual science in Ken Wilber's (2001) third category of sciences. Alongside the empirical natural sciences and the hermeneutic human sciences, Wilber identifies a third category of sciences, the contemplative sciences. It is based on spiritual experiences that are gained through contemplative practices and that can be regarded as trans-subjective (i.e. beyond objective and subjective) results of intentional processes of consciousness that depend on the development and expansion of the researcher's awareness. Their focus extends to all areas of the physical, organic and psychological levels. Its scientific validity depends on contemplative-intersubjective plausibility, and its function is to direct the subject's attention and vision through an inductive, guiding use of language, which basically means, „If you want to know this, you have to do that“ (Wilbur, 2001, p.81, cited in Göschel, 2012). Contemplative science is always struggling to find a language to express the often-inexpressible experiences and has to make do with multiple descriptions that emphasize different aspects of an experience. As Göschel explains,

According to Steiner's anthroposophical method, the transition from the formal sciences, whose object is pure ideas, to contemplative spiritual science results from turning the thinking attention away from concepts, as the content of thinking, and towards the active thinking activity itself. The resulting direct experience of a completely transparent, living mental process at its point of origin leads to a change in the experienced quality of the thinking activity. The thinking consciousness learns more and more to familiarize itself with the dynamic-generative laws of nature that are effective as living forces of creation and order in the world and in the human being. These lose their abstract quality and are transformed in the experience of the cognizing subject into living views of being with inherent effectiveness and ontological status (2012, p. 119-20. MR trans)

Here we have the essence of anthroposophy as a method, as opposed to anthroposophy as a collection of fixed concepts. Concepts lose their static and abstract qualities and are transformed in the experience of the cognizing subject into a „living view of being with inherent efficacy and ontological status“ when the subject engages in an active path of schooling thinking through meditation and contemplation. This leads via the various stages that Steiner describes as imagination, inspiration and intuition. This is why Jan Göschel's (2012) scientific account and of the children's conference, or individual case study in the therapeutic field as a biographical myth and as a socio-artistic dialogue process is of great importance. We perceive people in their appearance and actions in space and time and try to experience the effect they have on us and then mutually, dialogically and in value-free ways, try to put this into words, so that something of the essence of the person can be experienced through intuition. Otto Scharmer (2016, see also Scharmer and Kaufer, 2025) describes a similar process in his Theory U, in which an attempt is made to recognize the emerging future as it arises. In this way, Steiner's theory of cognition can be transferred to the context of practice.

Anthroposophy as capacity building

Steiner often pointed out that becoming a Waldorf teacher requires active knowing, as well as what he calls passive knowing, what today we would call propositional knowledge. We could call Steiner's idea of

active knowing, knowing-in-practice (Kelly, 2006), which is the ability to observe and understand complex pedagogical situations and be able to intuitively respond in a meaningful way. Again, this is an application of Steiner's productive theory of knowing. This idea is closely related to a number of important ideas about knowledge that we can associate with John Dewey's (1938) notion of the continuum of experience in education, but also with Max van Manen (1991) notion of pedagogical tact or knowing-in-context and also John Elliott's (2009, Elliott and Lukes, 2008) 'case-based reasoning', and Gert Biesta's virtuosity (2015, 2020). All these authors in one way or another draw on Aristotle's notion of phronesis, or practical wisdom, which is about situated knowing rather than general, theoretical or idealist/essential knowledge. This involves in Elliott's words, "discerning the particularities of a situation from the standpoint of an ethical agent, and in the process, discriminating its practically relevant features" (Elliott, 2009, p. 29). The important aspect of this pedagogical intuition is that it involves action, rather than mere contemplation or understanding- in fact the full understanding may only occur in retrospective reflection.

Steiner's version of this explicitly takes the spiritual dimension into account. In Steiner's terms, this knowing cannot be based on passive, or acquired pre-existent knowledge or knowledge based only on what can be observed, but rather the mind needs to become sensitive to what is emergent within the whole human being, spiritually and psychologically by a process of empathy, in which the educator is able to experience the child or young person as an emergent Self. Ita Wegman, with whom Steiner developed anthroposophical medical and therapeutic practices, developed a similar 'case-based reasoning' through empathic identification, which allows an intuitive experience of the processes within the other person and out of this insight into what is needed at that moment, through 'the courage to heal' (Selg, 2017). Related to education, Steiner called this the right educator-disposition ("eine rechte Erziehungsgesinnung"), which is to be experienced in one's own will as a knowing activity. As Steiner puts it, „One does not get to know the human being through passive knowledge. What one knows about the human being must be experienced, at least to a certain degree, as feeling the creative aspect of one's own being: one must fulfil it in one's own volition as a knowing activity“ (Steiner, 2014, pp. 288-9, GA 36, lecture from 1.4.1923).

The relationship between Anthroposophy and Waldorf education that arises from such practices is not based on belief or imitation, but on an embodied understanding that is evaluated in practice through critical reflection, since intuitive actions are not always correct. The question is how this disposition can be learned. Steiner's suggestion, referred to as meditatively acquired knowledge, was to study anthroposophical anthropology, meditate or contemplate it and then be able to 'recall' it in a pedagogical situation as intuition.

Working with boundary ideas

In his (1978) book on Waldorf teacher education, Kiersch points out the connection between Steiner's ideas about boundary concepts and the acquisition of an educational attitude. In 1917 in his book *Riddles of the Soul* (The case for Anthroposophy) Steiner added to his epistemology by analysing the relationship between anthroposophy and what he referred to as anthropology, by which he meant the conventional humanities and cultural sciences. These, he insists, are both valid ways of investigating the human being which, although coming from different directions, meet at the same phenomena and therefore can complement each other. Steiner addresses the idea that knowledge based solely on sensory perception has its limits (a fact that no one in the social sciences would argue with today, which why we use theory). He advises that if the inquirer has the patience to think at the limits of cognition, they can gradually experience the fruitfulness of the ideas of anthroposophy in illuminating phenomena and that in this way one can gradually and systematically expand the limits of cognition. Furthermore, by dwelling at the limits of cognition, one can experience an imaginative energy that enlivens the normal process of experience that takes place when we create mental representations. He compares this to the difference between a photographic negative and a full colour print.

Through the process of dwelling at the boundary of cognition, we can begin to preserve the immediacy of lived experience before it becomes a mere representation. The connection of this idea with intuitive knowledge-in-practice as opposed to knowledge about practice becomes clear. Kiersch also suggests that boundary experiences can also be gained through artistic exercises and in social processes. In the activity of

engaging with phenomena, the boundary idea itself becomes the organ of looking, it becomes imaginative looking, or the heuristic lens that directs our gaze towards what is relevant.

In the fourth appendix of the *Riddles of the Soul / Case for Anthroposophy*, Steiner distinguishes between three cognitive processes, related to spiritual experiences, „1. psychic or soul processes leading to a spiritual perception; 2. spiritual perceptions themselves; 3. spiritual perceptions translated into concepts of ordinary consciousness.“ (2010, p.58). Such perceptions cannot be retained and retrieved like ordinary memories; the connection to the spiritual perception must be re-experienced in the soul. However, “what can, within memory, be retained of an actual spiritual perception is not the perception itself but the disposition of soul through which one attained the perception... What I should try to remember is something that will call back the psychic preparations that led me to the perception in the first place” (p. 57). In other words, the ‘seeing’ or ‘seeking’ is itself a disposition, a habit of mind, that directs our attention. It is the activity of seeing that is objective rather than the result in the form of a memory. However, Steiner adds that one can achieve the right relationship between the three processes mentioned above through careful practice; cultivating a way of looking that is not from the position of observer outside the phenomenon, but is a participation within the phenomenon, and as Steiner later says in the First Teachers Course, the place where this take place is the stage (as in theatre) of the mind, which reaches from within, out into the world and we as inquirers, dwell within that psychic/soul space.

My reading of this notion of boundary ideas can be expressed in the following diagram, which is based on Vygotsky’s (1987) idea of the zone of next development to describe the space in which the learner/researcher moves from a current horizon (1) of knowledge to a new horizon (2) by internalizing a boundary idea learned either through meditative/contemplative processes, through hermeneutic study (see below) or through participation in social or artistic processes. Vygotsky’s original idea is that learning precedes development. By analogy, by internalizing a boundary idea, a new level of understanding of something that could not be perceived before is achieved. The new understanding forms a new organ of knowledge and thus leads to a general mental development. As Dewey put it (1938), each substantial new experience fundamentally alter our possibilities for new experiences.

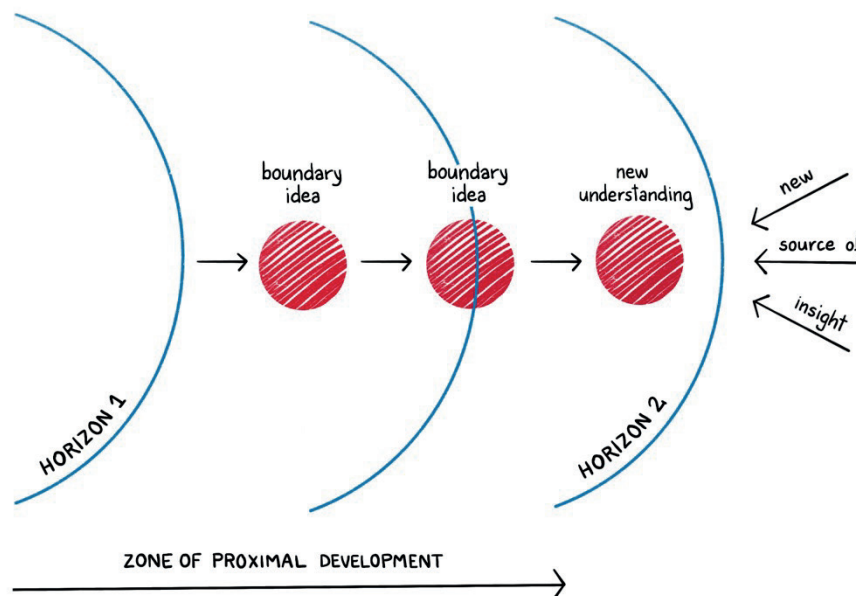


Illustration 2 Engaging with boundary ideas expands our horizon of knowing-in-practice.

Contemplative methods in pedagogical reflection and research

In 1920 Steiner (1982, GA302a) introduced the idea of the meditatively acquired knowledge of the human being, which in a way is another version of his presentation of the boundary ideas. This approach consists of studying the foundations of pedagogical anthropology, meditating on them and then ‘remembering’ them in practice. This approach has found many explanations. My interpretation, put as simply as possible, is to work hermeneutically with the text and the ideas it contains, i.e. to interpret and contextualize the content in such a way that the student can think and critically relate to the ideas themselves, thus internalizing or embodying them as ‘our’ ideas- they become ours and we can put them into our own words.

The second step is meditating. The contemplative inquiry method described by Arthur Zajonc (2007) can be used to internalize and ‘digest’ these important ideas. Kiersch (1995) suggests that many of the polarities presented by Steiner (e.g., blood-nerve, sympathy-antipathy) or examples of metamorphosis can be used as motifs for contemplative meditation. The third step of remembering is a little more difficult to understand, but it is clear from the examples Steiner gives that it refers to situated, intuitive moments of knowing what to do in context. We can imagine that the process of active study and meditative internalization of ‘boundary ideas’ can lead to recognizing the implicit, non-visible meaning of a given pedagogical situation. Elsewhere (Rawson, 2020 a and b) I have linked this process to the formation of dispositions that enable the teacher to ‘read’ pedagogical situations, or, to change metaphor, through deep listening we can understand what the situation/person is saying. This whole process needs to be complemented by critical reflection, because not all intuitions are true or appropriate.

The third aspect is most clearly explained by Steiner in Ilkley in August 1923 (2007, GA307), when he said that the teachers’ conferences in the Waldorf school are an ongoing living university in which the teachers bring the fruits of their reflections and work and share them with their colleagues. The word *Hochschule* means university, and the main functions of universities are research and teaching. I argued that what Steiner was proposing would today be called practitioner research. He also made it clear that the development of curriculum and education depended on the ongoing evaluation and review of practice based on Waldorf principles.

8. Anthroposophy is not limited to what Steiner said or wrote

There is a view that anthroposophy is not limited to what Steiner said or wrote, and that it is a manifestation of a perennial philosophy, the underlying common core of wisdom linking most major religions, mystical traditions and philosophies, a kind of neo Neo-Platonism, as promoted in the Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1999) and his pupil Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), in the 19th Century by Transcendentalists and in the 20th Century by Aldous Huxley, Idris Shah, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ken Wilber. In other words, anthroposophy is one (recent) version of a wisdom that has been expressed across many traditions.

Comment

It may be helpful to move away from the kind of anthroposophical exceptionalism that suggests that Steiner’s anthroposophy is the culmination of world cultural development and the final word (to date) on spiritual truth, by recognizing that there are many valid cosmologies, philosophies, spiritual paths and sources of wisdom. It may even be fruitful to make comparisons between the major world religions and philosophies, in the way scholars such as Julian Baggini (2018) have done, or the way the French scholar Francois Julien (2019) has done comparing Western and Chinese thinking and put anthroposophy in this context.

There is another aspect of this point that needs mentioning. There is a tendency for some people to present their personal interpretation (or that of a specific group) of Steiner as anthroposophy. This is more common than might be supposed. People adopt, perhaps colonize would be a better word, ideas from anthroposophy that they strongly identify with and speak of these in shorthand, saying anthroposophy

stands for this or that, without citing and contextualizing Steiner, as if it were taken-for-granted that this is what anthroposophy is, when in fact they actually mean is, “this is what I/we think anthroposophy is”. They usually do this in an un-reflected way, implying, “as we know... anthroposophy sees this or stands for that”. This may sound authoritative but can justifiably be termed “colonized anthroposophy”.

9. Anthroposophy as a basis for Waldorf education

Finally, we come to possible Waldorf perspectives on the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy. Contrary to what some critics, such as Prange, Ullrich and Zander claim, and quite a few anthroposophists believe, Waldorf education is not a medium for promoting anthroposophy. As Schieren has suggested,

Anthroposophy has a purely methodological function in Waldorf education. It is not an end in itself, but merely a means to an end. It is intended to help to better understand the children and adolescents in their development through its consideration of the nature of the human being. Epistemology, anthropology and psychology are the central features of Waldorf education. In addition, there is the individual (by all means also esoteric) training path of the teacher, which makes educational qualification possible in the first place in Steiner’s view. (Schieren, 2022).

This view has earned Schieren criticism, notably from those who see this position as a significant dilution of the anthroposophical contribution to Waldorf education, for example Zdrazil (2023). No one disputes that anthroposophical insights into the nature of the developing human being should inform the way teachers teach. However, I do think it is realistic for Waldorf education to claim the whole of anthroposophy as its basis. Rather, I would take a parsimonious view of describing a necessary minimum for the official, institutional basis for the education, and leaving the rest a matter for individual judgement. There is no maximum, but certainly a minimum of texts as orientation.

What would that minimum consist of? I believe Waldorf education needs and can justify its reliance on Steiner’s theory of knowledge (including its later development in *Riddles of the Soul*), his pedagogical anthropology (First Teachers’ Course) and the pedagogical lectures. Steiner’s pedagogical anthropology has its roots in earlier works (such as *Theosophy, A Psychology of Body, Soul and Spirit: Anthroposophy, Psychosophy and Pneumatosophy – GA115, Anthroposophy – A fragment*), and teacher educators should be aware of the genesis of such ideas such as Steiner’s theory of the senses. They should also be aware of the subtle but important differences in Steiner’s references, for example to language, in pedagogical and non-pedagogical contexts. The role of teacher educators is to ‘translate’ the ideas of anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology into a working set of generative principles that new teachers can use to develop and evaluate their practice. Over the years they can deepen their knowledge of Steiner’s original works in whatever way seems of interest to them.

My view is that anthroposophy is a practice, a way of relating to the world, rather than a fixed system, a body of knowledge or a science. It only exists when we do it. It can certainly inspire people to develop ideas in various fields of life, but these ideas have to be framed in a way that gains the necessary acceptance in those fields. The role of the Anthroposophical Society is nurture and develop anthroposophical practices. The role of Waldorf education (or medicine or biodynamic agriculture) is to contribute as much as possible to the educational life of the maximum number of children and young people as possible. This means applying (and where necessary justifying) the generative principles of Waldorf education wherever this can be done. This won’t always be in classical Waldorf schools, or even be called Waldorf (or Steiner) nor will it always be done by anthroposophists, but they do need to understand the principles of Waldorf education. It always has to be adapted to the situation. It also means that there are aspects of Steiner’s work that we simply don’t need or accept.

This would be my minimal selection from the whole canon of anthroposophical literature by Steiner. Indirectly, his contributions to the development of Eurythmy, speech formation and drama, painting, sculpture and medicine and therapy are also relevant in specific fields of education. This may seem too little but given the wealth of ideas in Steiner’s specifically educational works, this is more than enough for

practicing Waldorf teachers. This is a minimum not a maximum. There is no limit to what we can think, as Steiner told us.

Conclusions

There is an urgent need for good, effective ideas in the world and anthroposophy could be part of the answer to the polycrisis, and Waldorf education can contribute to the solution to the crisis in the field of education. Both can contribute through their practice and through the way they are represented in a way that is accessible to the academic world. The way anthroposophy is treated by some academics and journalists verges on discrimination, which is always irrational, and Waldorf voices should say so publicly. The way anthroposophy is treated by some anthroposophists verges on the religious. I argue that when it comes to presenting or representing Waldorf education in public, Waldorf practitioners should treat Steiner texts like any others that can be read and interpreted, for example, like the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky or Paulo Freire. The Waldorf movement should be studied as a historical, sociological and pedagogical phenomenon, like the Reform Pedagogy movement, Montessori or Regio Emilia. Anthroposophy should be referred to as a cultural phenomenon, rather than as a science or as a body of knowledge that claims to be true, and thus studied using the full range of appropriate interpretive scientific methods. This means that Steiner texts, art works and artefacts and the products of the anthroposophical movement need to be hermeneutically studied, contextualized, and analyzed, like any other historical movement.

This, however, says nothing about Waldorf or anthroposophical practice. This is the most important point for readers to remember. What we do and how we do it, is not a discourse but a reality for which we take responsibility.

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Clases optativas en el campus online de secundaria

Proyecto piloto: Enfoques contextuales del átomo

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RESUMEN. Nuestro objetivo es demostrar cómo un campus de secundaria en línea puede abrir nuevas vías prácticas dentro de la educación Waldorf en respuesta a los retos sociales actuales y a las cuestiones científicas fundamentales. Nos centramos en el ejemplo de un curso optativo híbrido de 11.º curso que hemos desarrollado y probado, y que ofrece enfoques basados en el contexto para comprender el átomo en las asignaturas de física y química. Describimos las experiencias que hemos tenido con el curso y concluimos con algunas consideraciones para su futuro desarrollo.

Palabras clave. Campus de secundaria en línea, enseñanza híbrida, átomo, basado en el contexto, plan de estudios de la escuela Waldorf

Introducción

A principios de 2022, la revista +3 del *Süddeutsche Zeitung* preguntó a sus lectores qué mejoras necesitaban las escuelas. Invitados a esbozar sus visiones, se incluyó el siguiente artículo en el debate en línea del número 84 del 25 de febrero de 2022 (Sommer 2022):

«**Lo mejor para todos**»

La escuela del mañana necesita una nueva Ilustración. Los jóvenes se desarrollan allí aprendiendo a valorar su patrimonio cultural, así como su multifacética conexión con la naturaleza. Tienen el valor de usar su mente de forma dialógica. Se experimentan a sí mismos como un sujeto encarnado que es naturaleza, así como un ser rodeado de naturaleza. Se enfrentan a lo nuevo con una mirada empática y analítica.

Para una nueva Ilustración, la escuela del mañana necesita tiempo para expediciones, diseñadas y dirigidas por profesores excelentes. Las universidades o los think tanks les proporcionan la libertad para desarrollar prototipos pioneros. Despliegan sus nuevas perspectivas una vez a la semana, en directo, pero en línea; después del coronavirus, cuentan con las habilidades necesarias. Los estudiantes se unen según sus intereses, conectándose desde una amplia variedad de escuelas y ciudades. Sus profesores los acompañan mientras trabajan y dan seguimiento a los estímulos compartidos. Las preguntas se reflejan y se retoman la semana siguiente.

¿Por qué todo este esfuerzo? Los adultos del mañana necesitan hoy nuevos contextos a través de los cuales puedan enriquecer y complementar los materiales escolares y de examen probados y comprobados:

¿Cómo se entrelazan la existencia y la vida? ¿Son los átomos los componentes básicos de la naturaleza o elementos de una descripción? ¿Es concebible el realismo pluralista? ¿Cómo es ser humano y qué significa?

Un primer proyecto piloto

La visión aquí esbozada —no es un texto científico, sino una contribución al debate— se formula con contornos nítidos y se presenta con un estilo seguro. Nos hicimos cargo de la visión durante el año escolar 2023/2024 y desarrollamos e implementamos un programa piloto basado en ella. El enfoque temático fue la cuestión de si los átomos son los componentes básicos de la naturaleza o elementos de una descripción. Para el plan de estudios de ciencias de las escuelas Waldorf, esto representa tanto un desafío como una oportunidad.

A continuación, especificaremos la tarea elegida en el contexto del plan de estudios de secundaria superior, presentaremos nuestra primera implementación de un campus online de secundaria superior, discutiremos las experiencias que hemos tenido con él y terminaremos con una visión general de nuestras ideas actuales sobre cómo se puede desarrollar aún más el proyecto.

Tensión curricular en relación con el átomo

Los enfoques fenomenológicos desempeñan un papel central en las clases de ciencias de las escuelas Waldorf. Esto se aplica tanto a los enfoques pedagógicos fenomenológicos de la enseñanza de las materias principales (Rohde 2003; Sommer 2023) como al enfoque fenomenológico en la adquisición de conocimientos científicos (Østergaard, Dahlin y Hugo 2008).

En las escuelas Waldorf alemanas, el átomo es uno de los temas centrales de química y física en el 11.º curso (es posible que ya se haya mencionado como concepto en cursos anteriores). En los últimos años, el plan de estudios de ciencias de las escuelas Waldorf se ha desarrollado y diferenciado aún más a través de numerosas tesis doctorales y proyectos de investigación. Sin embargo, para muchos profesores, el enfoque pedagógico para comprender el átomo sigue siendo insatisfactorio.

Por un lado, existe el enfoque fenomenológico, que domina las clases principales como enfoque no reduccionista y que, por ejemplo, en Austria ha resultado especialmente motivador para los alumnos (Wallner-Paschon 2009; Salchegger, Wallner-Paschon y Bertsch 2021).

Por otro lado, en muchos lugares el átomo se introduce de forma pragmática y breve en la preparación de exámenes y se trata de forma puramente reduccionista. Este enfoque se ha debatido varias veces en los últimos años en las reuniones anuales de profesores de química Waldorf de habla alemana. La experiencia ha demostrado que los alumnos inicialmente encuentran el enfoque abstracto, pero pronto lo aprecian por su poder explicativo.

Estos dos enfoques estaban, y siguen estando, a menudo desconectados. Las propuestas para cerrar esta brecha comenzaron muy pronto. Incluso durante la vida de Steiner, existió la llamada «controversia del atomismo» y el intento de Kolisko de desarrollar una química libre de hipótesis. Rozumek (2012) ofrece una visión general completa de esto. Aunque surgió un puente didáctico para conectar los enfoques fenomenológicos de la electricidad con el átomo a través del electrón (Kühl 2018; Sommer 2020), la tensión se mantuvo en muchos lugares. Simplemente no se disponía del tiempo lectivo necesario para atravesar el puente.

Por lo tanto, hemos intentado resolver la tensión ofreciendo una asignatura optativa en el 11.º curso (Sommer 2025; Rohde 2025). En un proyecto piloto, probamos un formato híbrido de enseñanza-aprendizaje que puede ofrecerse en todas las escuelas en un campus de secundaria superior en línea. Los cursos se diseñaron como una oferta científica y epistemológica centrada en temas comunes de examen. En ellos, el átomo se abordó inicialmente como un elemento de descripción y no directamente como un ejemplo de explicación.

Hubo varias razones detrás de la decisión de ofrecer clases optativas en el 11.º grado, que deben tenerse en cuenta al transferir nuestro proyecto piloto a otros países. En Alemania, los alumnos Waldorf completan la educación secundaria superior con el examen «Abitur» al final del 13.º año. Por lo tanto, tienen un año más que en la mayoría de los demás países. Deben completar tres exigentes exámenes escritos establecidos por el Estado sobre materias que pueden elegir. Tomando como ejemplo la asignatura de biología, se ha demostrado que los alumnos Waldorf superan los retos e es asociados sin ningún problema especial (Rohde 2022). Además, hay exámenes orales internos en otras asignaturas elegidas por los alumnos. Esto significa que los exámenes finales de física y química no son obligatorios. Estas asignaturas tampoco se eligen como asignaturas de examen con frecuencia. E incluso si fuera así, el contenido del 11.º curso, aunque constituye la base para el examen de Abitur, tiene poca relevancia directa para este. Por lo tanto, en Alemania existe una gran libertad en cuanto al contenido de estas dos asignaturas en el 11.º curso.

Las clases optativas tienen la ventaja de que los alumnos cumplen así un requisito del plan de estudios prescrito por la escuela. Esto significa que no asisten a estas clases de forma totalmente voluntaria. Al mismo tiempo, pueden elegir entre varias asignaturas, ninguna de las cuales es obligatoria para los exámenes del Abitur. Esto les permite seguir más de cerca sus inclinaciones personales. En nuestro curso sobre átomos, observamos que los alumnos que se habían matriculado eran básicamente aquellos que estaban interesados en la materia.

A continuación, presentaremos tanto el concepto del curso optativo como nuestras primeras experiencias.

Campus de secundaria en línea

Organización

El curso «Enfoques contextuales del átomo» se impartió durante medio año (dos trimestres) a razón de dos clases dobles por semana. Las clases de física se impartieron durante el primer trimestre bajo la dirección de Wilfried Sommer en la Freie Waldorfschule Kassel. Se retransmitieron a Marburgo, donde fueron supervisadas por un profesor de física. Durante la fase de planificación, se previó la transmisión simultánea a una tercera ubicación. Sin embargo, el profesor supervisor no estuvo disponible con poca antelación.

En el segundo trimestre, los participantes de la Freie Waldorfschule Marburg asistieron a las clases de química en persona bajo la dirección de Dirk Rohde y los participantes de Kassel lo hicieron en línea. En Kassel, fueron supervisados in situ por Wilfried Sommer.

Tanto en Marburgo como en Kassel se utilizaron cámaras con ajustes preprogramados: enfocadas en particular a la pizarra, el rotafolio y la pantalla del aula, pero también a posiciones seleccionadas de las mesas de experimentos. Ambos profesores coordinaron su preparación con los ajustes de la cámara.

Un micrófono de alta calidad garantizó que las aportaciones y preguntas de los participantes se entendieran claramente no solo en el aula, sino también en el lugar de la retransmisión.

Otra cámara se dirigió a los grupos de aprendizaje tanto en Marburgo como en Kassel, de modo que los alumnos de un lugar pudieran hacerse una idea de la situación en el otro.

Estructura de los cursos

A grandes rasgos, los cursos alternaban entre tres fases:

- la presentación de contenidos (clases magistrales del profesor, acompañadas de notas en la pizarra o con referencia a una presentación; experimentos de demostración),
- las fases de debate (respuesta a preguntas; debate y desarrollo de contenidos) y
- las fases de trabajo independiente (hojas de trabajo; redacción del libro de lecciones principales).

Dependiendo del contenido, las fases individuales duraban desde unos minutos hasta media hora. La

mayoría de las veces, se sucedían varios de estos ciclos. La secuencia de las fases no era un concepto rígido y se adaptaba de forma flexible al contenido.

Durante las fases de trabajo independiente, se apagaban los micrófonos en ambos lugares. Esto permitía a los alumnos pedir ayuda directamente al profesor in situ y en un entorno protegido y, en particular, aclarar aspectos que querían comprender mejor en una conversación directa.

Por el contrario, las intervenciones durante las fases de debate eran audibles para todos los participantes. En casos concretos, los profesores in situ tuvieron que recordar a los participantes que articularan claramente en dirección al micrófono. En numerosos segmentos de debate, los alumnos demostraron su capacidad para referirse directamente a argumentos que solo habían escuchado a través de la retransmisión. En particular, los alumnos de ambos lugares se acostumbraron rápidamente a una sesión de práctica de lenguaje técnico, en forma de una breve secuencia de preguntas y respuestas al comienzo de la clase de física.

La presentación de los contenidos tenía el carácter de una conferencia. Resultó muy útil registrar lo que se presentaba en la pizarra y decidir en clase, en función del contenido, si los alumnos debían tomar notas directamente o solo hacer sus propias notas basándose en las notas de la pizarra durante la fase de trabajo independiente.

Uno de los participantes era inmigrante y, al principio, tenía pocos conocimientos de alemán, pero muy buenos conocimientos de inglés. Tras consultar con ambos grupos de alumnos, se decidió utilizar el inglés como idioma para las presentaciones durante un tiempo, pero los alumnos podían decidir por sí mismos si querían hacer preguntas en alemán o en inglés. La mayoría eligió el inglés.

Las clases en Kassel y Marburgo no se solapaban completamente; los miércoles se disponía de un total de 70 minutos como tiempo común y no de 90 minutos como era habitual. Los viernes, Marburgo solo pudo organizar una clase solapada de la doble clase prevista, por lo que ese día en Kassel, la segunda parte de la doble clase incluía un trabajo individual más largo, que se dejó a los alumnos de Marburgo como tarea.

En general, el objetivo era organizar las fases de trabajo independiente de tal manera que los alumnos tuvieran que hacer pocos o ningún deber, lo que no se pudo realizar plenamente en Marburgo por la razón mencionada anteriormente.

Interconexión con las clases principales

En física, la asignatura optativa requería conocimientos previos tanto de electrostática como de electrodinámica. El contenido se acordó entre Kassel y Marburgo.

Dado que las clases de física de 11.º curso se imparten en bloques en ambas escuelas, los bloques de física tuvieron lugar antes del inicio de las clases optativas.

En química, no fue posible programar las clases principales de química antes del inicio de las clases en bloques para todos los participantes. Para algunos alumnos, algunos contenidos representaban una repetición o un nuevo énfasis, mientras que otros se encontraban con contenidos nuevos. Esto tuvo que tenerse en cuenta a la hora de diseñar los cursos.

Naturalmente, el tema «Enfoques contextuales del átomo» atrajo especialmente a los interesados en las ciencias. Sin embargo, las escuelas Waldorf de Kassel y Marburgo no formularon ningún requisito que estipulara un talento especial o logros especiales como condición para participar. Como resultado, el nivel de rendimiento de los participantes se distribuyó dentro del rango habitual.

En Kassel, los alumnos pudieron mejorar, pero no empeorar, su nota en física gracias a los resultados obtenidos en las clases optativas. El grupo de aprendizaje de Marburgo no fue calificado. Dado que se trataba de un proyecto piloto, que en principio también podía fracasar, esto descartaba cualquier riesgo para los participantes.

Primeras experiencias con el formato híbrido de enseñanza-aprendizaje

Durante la presentación del contenido, los profesores se enfrentaron al reto de vigilar dos grupos de aprendizaje, los «roomies» y los «zoomies» (Heitmann, Michel 2022, p. 24 y ss.). Esto resultó mucho más fácil gracias a un monitor que solo mostraba el grupo de aprendizaje de la otra ubicación a través de un acceso independiente a Zoom; de este modo, los «zoomies» cobraron mayor importancia.

Si se utilizaban hojas de trabajo en las fases de trabajo independiente, coordinadas en detalle con las presentaciones y sus notas en la pizarra, los alumnos podían trabajar de forma autónoma. Los formatos de trabajo libres o abiertos, por ejemplo, redactar el material presentado basándose en sus propias notas, no tuvieron éxito, ya que suponían una exigencia excesiva en términos de contenido y motivación para muchos participantes.

Se valoró especialmente, por ejemplo, que el profesor supervisor de Kassel tomara notas él mismo, en un rotafolio situado a la izquierda de la pantalla en la que se transmitía la conferencia desde Marburgo. De este modo, los alumnos pudieron experimentar cómo redactar una transcripción directamente a partir de una presentación, lo que pone de relieve no solo el contenido, sino también su estructura.

Esta formación, que con el tiempo se fue convirtiendo cada vez más en una anticipación de los cursos universitarios, demostró su utilidad. La mayoría de los estudiantes no tomaron las notas directamente del rotafolio, sino que las utilizaron como apoyo para su propio trabajo en los cuadernos.

El «sesgo de proximidad» típico de los entornos híbridos —preferimos a las personas que están cerca de nosotros (Heitmann, Michel 2022, p. 33 y ss.)— fue así más fácil de manejar, ya que los profesores estaban activos en ambos lugares y se posicionaban con empatía en su respectivo formato de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

La preocupación inicial de que los diferentes conocimientos previos de los alumnos pudieran influir significativamente en el desarrollo de las clases resultó ser en gran medida infundada. En las fases de presentación del formato híbrido de enseñanza-aprendizaje utilizado, incluso los contenidos familiares deben activarse cuidadosamente a nivel cognitivo o vincularse a un ejemplo, ya que algunos de los participantes no tienen la impresión personal directa que permitiría y legitimaría una mayor acción situacional.

Durante las fases de debate, a veces ocurría que los profesores tenían que repetir y aclarar la contribución de un alumno para no perder al grupo de aprendizaje en línea. Esta forma de «eco del profesor» está mal vista en la enseñanza presencial, ya que hace que los alumnos no se escuchen entre sí y no se relacionen entre ellos, sino que solo interactúen con el profesor. Los efectos negativos de la retroalimentación del profesor en las clases presenciales estaban en gran medida ausentes. Sin embargo, en general, se utilizó en raras ocasiones gracias a los buenos micrófonos y a la clara articulación de la mayoría de los alumnos.

Elisabeth Feigl (2022, p. 176) sugiere utilizar el modelo SAMR para reflexionar sobre si «lo digital no se utiliza de forma aditiva, sino integradora». «De este modo, se puede reconocer si los medios analógicos pueden ser simplemente sustituidos por medios digitales (sustitución - S), si se puede lograr una expansión funcional moderada (aumento - A) o si se puede alcanzar el objetivo real: que se puedan lograr niveles de modificación (M) y redefinición (R)».

Como se ha explicado anteriormente, tenemos la impresión de que se añade una modificación específica y útil a la sustitución de los «Zoomies» cuando el profesor supervisor escribe sus notas en el rotafolio junto a la pantalla y/o ayuda de otro modo a su grupo de aprendizaje. Dado que el contenido de aprendizaje también se transmite de dos maneras a través del doble apoyo de ambos grupos de aprendizaje (simultáneamente digital y analógico por parte de un profesor en cada caso), también se puede denominar aumento en cierta medida, ya que esto aumenta las oportunidades de comprensión de los alumnos.

A diferencia de Axel Krommer y Philippe Wampfler (2021, p. 8 y ss.), tampoco partimos de la pregunta fundamental de cómo deben estructurarse el aprendizaje y la enseñanza en una cultura de la digitalidad. El formato híbrido de enseñanza-aprendizaje que hemos probado está pensado como una herramienta, mientras que Krommer y Wampfler sostienen que «los medios no son herramientas, sino que dan forma a las percepciones, las comunidades y la acción social» y, por lo tanto, «la cuestión del valor añadido no puede

plantearse de manera significativa»: «Quienes se preguntan qué mejoran los medios digitales parten de la comprensión del aprendizaje y el conocimiento de la cultura de la imprenta y no comparan culturas, sino herramientas».

Nuestras explicaciones posteriores dejarán claro que queremos desarrollar el formato de enseñanza-aprendizaje descrito como una herramienta para el aprendizaje global.

Decisiones curriculares

Acerca del leitmotiv

La pregunta de si los átomos son bloques de construcción de la naturaleza o elementos de una descripción no puede responderse con un sí o un no. Se trata de una cuestión fundamental de la filosofía natural en la que los conceptos de sustancia, causalidad e interacción desempeñan un papel central. Kant los consideraba «conceptos a priori» fundamentales y, siguiendo a Aristóteles, se refería a ellos como «categorías» (Willaschek 2024, p. 303). Este aspecto por sí solo trasciende rápidamente las dimensiones de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje escolares.

La pregunta de qué es la materia también está directamente relacionada con el átomo. Otra cuestión importante es hasta qué punto el concepto de átomo está vinculado a la comprensión del ser humano como individuo. Y, por último, pero no por ello menos importante, el papel de los modelos en las ciencias naturales desempeña un papel central. Todos estos temas son extremadamente complejos y solo algunos aspectos pueden tratarse adecuadamente en un curso optativo.

En consecuencia, elegimos el título «Enfoques contextuales del átomo». Partimos de contextos que, tras nuestra deconstrucción y reconstrucción didácticas, consideramos adecuados para tratar cuestiones de filosofía natural con los alumnos. Nuestros esfuerzos didácticos se centraron en integrar posiciones reduccionistas sobre el átomo en contextos que no son puramente reduccionistas.

Con este enfoque, esperamos contribuir al debate sobre lo que actualmente se denomina una «nueva Ilustración». Esta demanda también representa una cuestión tan amplia que solo queremos mencionarla aquí como marco para nuestras propias motivaciones, pero no como programa científico para nuestro propio trabajo.

Aspectos físicos

El curso de instrucción en la materia de física se expone en una publicación separada (Sommer 2025) y no se detallará aquí.

En resumen: los cursos comenzaron con contextos mecánicos, luego abordaron contextos electrostáticos (estados de campo como estados de forma del espacio sin materia, cargas como anclajes de estos estados de forma a la materia) y luego tendieron un puente hacia contextos electrodinámicos. El resultado final fue el electrón localizado como objeto en contextos electrostáticos y electrodinámicos.

Las descripciones de los contextos individuales se basaron en fenómenos físicos concretos, que se desarrollaron en series de experimentos siempre que fue posible. El objetivo era entonces iluminarlos a través del pensamiento, desde diferentes direcciones. De esta manera, los alumnos fueron cada vez más capaces de combinar la visión concreta de los fenómenos físicos con formas simbólicas.

En este proceso de aprendizaje, rápidamente quedó claro hasta qué punto de formalización los participantes eran capaces de expresar formas simbólicas y qué nivel matemático era alcanzable.

Al final, obtuvimos formulaciones lingüísticamente condensadas, dos de las cuales se reproducen aquí como ejemplos para ilustrar el carácter del enfoque descriptivo que elegimos.

- El concepto del átomo integra los posibles procesos de interacción con el entorno en un enfoque de descripción local, que se sitúa en un contexto aditivo. Para ello, se combinan las perspectivas electrodinámica y electrostática.
- El átomo es un concepto y una forma de materia en la que las energías de enlace de los electrones indican numéricamente el potencial de interacción con el entorno. Al mismo tiempo, los posibles procesos de interacción están vinculados a un enfoque descriptivo aditivo-espacial.

Los alumnos describieron a menudo estas formulaciones como «realmente fundamentales» o «realmente filosóficas» y, por lo tanto, las distinguieron de los enfoques «populares» que habían encontrado en otros lugares.

Aspectos químicos

En la asignatura de química, el progreso de los cursos también se registra en una publicación separada (Rohde 2025) y, por lo tanto, no se presenta en detalle aquí.

Al principio se repartió una cita de Hans Primas (véase más abajo), con el anuncio de que se debatiría al final sobre la base de lo que se había tratado en la sección de química. A continuación, se resumieron brevemente las diferencias entre el enfoque químico y el físico de la materia. Como primer requisito previo del concepto atómico, se determinó mediante experimentos la importancia de examinar el agua con la ayuda de balanzas de precisión y de utilizar mediciones estandarizadas y normalizadas. Se hizo hincapié en el concepto de los elementos químicos y sus reacciones en proporciones constantes y múltiples. A continuación, se discutió la relación entre la masa y el volumen. A esto le siguieron las reacciones en la serie redox de los metales, las diferencias de tensión eléctrica resultantes y su uso en experimentos electrolíticos.

La discusión del teorema de Avogadro, la introducción a los métodos para determinar el número de Avogadro y el recurso al hidrógeno condujeron al protón localizado en el contexto de la formación del agua. El electrón como carga elemental negativa, el experimento de la lámina de oro de Rutherford y los modelos orbitales actuales mostraron las intersecciones con la física.

Al final, se debatió la cita de Primas mencionada anteriormente: «No es correcto decir que el mundo material está compuesto por electrones, protones, átomos y moléculas. Pero sí es correcto decir: los aspectos moleculares del mundo material pueden describirse muy bien con los términos electrón, protón, átomo y molécula» (Primas 2004, p. 13). Una pregunta clave era qué significaba para el pensamiento de los alumnos si, a diferencia de Primas, asumían que la materia estaba compuesta por bloques de construcción mínimos. Otra pregunta clave era qué conexión veían entre el concepto de átomo y su imagen de sí mismos como individuos, ya que ambas palabras, átomo e individuo, se refieren a una entidad indivisible. Según los alumnos, estos debates fueron fructíferos y muy estimulantes.

Perspectivas

Revisión con los participantes

Los comentarios de los participantes se referían tanto a aspectos organizativos como a aspectos relacionados con el contenido del curso en sí. Muchos de los aspectos organizativos se han incorporado a la lista de verificación que se encuentra en el apéndice de este documento.

En cuanto al contenido del curso, los alumnos hicieron hincapié en que era necesario disponer de material complementario para poder suplir las lagunas causadas por las ausencias. El carácter filosófico natural del curso requiere bibliografía específica. Aprovecharemos esta oportunidad para crear bibliografía bilingüe adecuada (alemán e inglés) (Rohde 2025; Sommer 2025).

Nos hemos decantado por una versión bilingüe con el fin de mantener abierta la posibilidad de ofrecer en el futuro un curso equivalente en inglés en un campus de secundaria superior en línea más allá de las fronteras nacionales. A juzgar por las reacciones de nuestros alumnos, esto sin duda tendría una acogida

positiva debido al carácter internacional de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en la escuela. Nos parece realista un curso que se imparta una vez a la semana, en parte para facilitar los solapamientos necesarios en los horarios de las escuelas participantes.

Además, la versión bilingüe de un libro que acompañe al curso sería una oferta atractiva para los alumnos superdotados, ya que podrían ampliar sus conocimientos lingüísticos al mismo tiempo. Para nosotros, también sería concebible añadir otros elementos, como los propuestos por Klaus Oehmann y Patrick Blumschein (2020, p. 200 y ss.) para el aprendizaje y la enseñanza híbridos y debatidos desde la década de 2000 bajo el término «aprendizaje mixto».

Por último, los participantes acogieron con especial satisfacción el hecho de que, tras semanas de reuniones digitales, la última unidad didáctica para todos los participantes se llevara a cabo de forma presencial. Esto permitió que todos se vieran en persona al menos una vez. Esto podría suponer un reto interesante para un proyecto transnacional, ya que daría lugar a viajes más largos, lo que a su vez sería adecuado para realizar interesantes actividades de seguimiento.

El formato híbrido de enseñanza-aprendizaje sirvió así como puerta de entrada a una forma específica de aprendizaje global.

Interés compartido entre profesores y alumnos

Como se ha mencionado anteriormente, las clases de química en Marburgo se impartieron de forma presencial y en Kassel de forma online. El profesor supervisor en Kassel, Wilfried Sommer, tenía formación en física y conocimientos sólidos, aunque no profundos, de química. Tomó notas en una pizarra situada a la izquierda de la pantalla en la que se retransmitía el curso desde Marburgo.

Al observar cómo estas notas estructuradas de «su» profesor coincidían con la presentación de Dirk Rohde, el profesor de Marburgo, los alumnos de Kassel no solo tenían ante sí un ejemplo de aprendizaje universitario, sino que también experimentaban cómo «su» profesor encontraba junto a ellos una forma de acceder al contenido químico y, por lo tanto, lo aprendía él mismo. Fue este interés compartido tanto por el profesor como por los alumnos lo que constituyó el núcleo del aprendizaje en el aula y configuró el ambiente de aprendizaje.

Consideramos que este interés compartido es una perspectiva importante a la hora de pensar en el diseño futuro de un campus de secundaria superior en línea: ¿no podrían profesores y alumnos trabajar juntos en clases optativas para desarrollar puntos de vista que sitúen los contenidos escolares en nuevos contextos? ¿En contextos que estimulen perspectivas para una «nueva Ilustración» o para procesos de transformación socioecológica en el sentido más amplio? Esto también sería una forma innovadora de formación continua para los profesores.

¿Deberíamos compartir intereses una vez a la semana en clases optativas orientadas al futuro? ¿Y en un momento del día en el que los participantes de varias zonas horarias puedan reunirse al mismo tiempo?

Consideramos que el plan de estudios de la escuela Waldorf tiene el potencial de integrar enfoques puramente reduccionistas, que dominan muchos formatos de examen, en contextos que no se abordan de forma puramente reduccionista. De esta manera, esperamos trabajar para formar juicios de forma dialógica.

Nos parece ilusorio cambiar los formatos de los exámenes a corto plazo. Por otro lado, nos parece realista ofrecer contextos que amplíen la perspectiva a través de clases optativas. Para las clases sobre el átomo, también es concebible acortar ligeramente las clases principales de química y física en el 11.º curso y ofrecer una clase principal interdisciplinaria sobre el átomo en la o las dos semanas ganadas como resultado. Como clase híbrida, este periodo sobre el átomo tendría lugar idealmente antes de las vacaciones de Navidad, que comienzan al mismo tiempo en todas partes, garantizando así la necesaria coincidencia de los horarios de clase. Para nosotros, estos son los primeros pasos adicionales que nos gustaría dar. Si está interesado, póngase en contacto con nosotros, ¡estaremos encantados de compartir nuestras experiencias!

Apéndice: Lista de verificación organizativa

- Todos los profesores que participen de alguna manera en el proyecto deben ser informados con suficiente antelación de todas las consecuencias organizativas, que deben ser discutidas a fondo con ellos.
- Los horarios de enseñanza superpuestos entre las escuelas participantes deben determinarse con antelación y con precisión.
- Las ausencias previsibles a las clases, por ejemplo, debido a proyectos escolares, deben comunicarse con la mayor antelación posible y deben identificarse y planificarse soluciones alternativas.
- Cada grupo de alumnos debe ser supervisado por un profesional competente. Deben garantizarse las sustituciones por enfermedad.
- Se recomienda encarecidamente impartir clases optativas que cumplan los requisitos del curso, ya que la carga lectiva obligatoria en el nivel secundario superior es demasiado elevada para impartir clases totalmente voluntarias. El contenido y el nivel de exigencia, incluidos los conocimientos previos necesarios, deben describirse detalladamente con antelación a los interesados, para que puedan evaluar si el curso es adecuado para ellos.
- Los requisitos del curso y la calificación deben determinarse con antelación con todos los profesores responsables y comunicarse a los alumnos.
- Debe preverse tiempo suficiente para todos los aspectos técnicos de la enseñanza híbrida. La organización de las aulas, los materiales y los requisitos técnicos necesarios requiere mucho tiempo en muchos aspectos. Además de los experimentos de demostración, también deben preverse oportunidades para que los alumnos realicen experimentos.

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Mapping Themes and Gaps in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Research: A Scoping Review Using Text Mining

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Mapping Themes and Gaps in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Research: A Scoping Review Using Text Mining

ABSTRACT. This study presents a scoping review of Waldorf early childhood education, using text mining to identify key themes and gaps in the existing literature. Established by Rudolf Steiner, Waldorf education prioritizes holistic development through an arts-integrated, child-centered pedagogy. The research systematically analyzes 21 articles, revealing significant trends in Waldorf early childhood education. It identifies three primary clusters: Learning and Development Context, which emphasizes sensory exploration and imaginative play; Assessment and Comparative Approaches, which focus on evaluation methods and comparisons with other educational philosophies; and Creativity in Early Childhood Education, which highlights the importance of creative expression in fostering emotional and social growth. This review enhances understanding of Waldorf education's relevance in contemporary settings while underscoring the necessity of play-based learning and qualitative assessment methods. The findings advocate for ongoing exploration of how Waldorf principles can be integrated into mainstream educational practices, ensuring that holistic child development remains a central focus.

Keywords: Waldorf education, early childhood education, holistic development, alternative education, text mining

Introduction

Early childhood education has witnessed diverse pedagogical approaches throughout its evolution, among which Waldorf education stands as a distinctive paradigm. Established by Rudolf Steiner in 1919, this educational philosophy has emerged as a significant alternative pedagogical framework, characterized by its arts-integrated curriculum and nature-based, child-centered approach that emphasizes holistic development (Steiner, 1996; Taplin, 2024; Uhrmacher, 1995). The pedagogical movement, which originated in Stuttgart, Germany, has demonstrated remarkable global expansion, currently encompassing more than 1,000 Waldorf schools and approximately 2,000 Waldorf kindergartens worldwide.

Grounded in anthroposophy, Steiner's philosophical framework, Waldorf education conceptualizes child development through a holistic lens that integrates physical, emotional, social, and cognitive domains. This comprehensive approach has garnered increasing attention from educational researchers and practitioners, as empirical evidence continues to emerge supporting its effectiveness in fostering multifaceted child

development. The pedagogical framework's adaptability across diverse cultural contexts while maintaining its fundamental principles has contributed to its sustained relevance in contemporary educational discourse.

The synthesis of theoretical foundations and practical applications in Waldorf education presents a rich area for academic inquiry, particularly in understanding its contributions to early childhood development. This pedagogical approach's emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices aligns with current educational research on optimal learning environments for young children, warranting systematic investigation into its theoretical underpinnings and practical implications.

Anthroposophy as the Philosophical Foundation

The educational philosophy of Waldorf education stems from Anthroposophy, Steiner's spiritual-scientific worldview that recognizes the interconnection between physical and spiritual realms. The term "Anthroposophy," derived from "Anthropos" (man) and "Sophia" (wisdom), reflects Steiner's comprehensive understanding of human development and education (Taplin, 2024). This philosophical foundation shapes three distinctive aspects of Waldorf education: its holistic approach to child development, the integration of arts throughout the curriculum, and its unique understanding of developmental stages (Taplin, 2024; Uhrmacher, 1995).

Development Stages Through an Anthroposophical Lens

Steiner's developmental theory divides childhood into three distinct seven-year phases, each characterized by specific developmental needs and appropriate pedagogical approaches. The first phase, from birth to age seven, is viewed as a critical phase characterized by sensory exploration, imaginative play, and learning through direct experience rather than formal instruction (Attfield, 2022; Uhrmacher, 1995). This phase focuses on physical development and learning through imitation, where children primarily learn through movement and sensory experiences (Dahlin, 2017). During this period, educators emphasize creating a nurturing environment that supports natural exploration and play-based learning (Steiner, 1996).

The second phase (7-14 years) corresponds with the development of the "feeling life" and rhythmic system. During this period, education focuses on artistic activities, storytelling, and rhythmic learning experiences that engage children's imagination and emotional capacities (Uhrmacher, 1995). Teachers serve as authority figures who guide children through pictorial and imaginative learning experiences (Steiner, 1996; Uhrmacher, 1995; Wilson, 2014).

The third phase (14-21 years) marks the development of independent thinking and judgment. During this period, education emphasizes abstract thinking and the development of critical reasoning skills, allowing students to form their own opinions and judgments about the world (Steiner, 1996; Uhrmacher, 1995).

This segmentation mirrors contemporary developmental theories that emphasize the importance of age-appropriate pedagogical strategies. For example, research indicates that Waldorf education fosters an environment conducive to holistic development, integrating cognitive, emotional, and artistic dimensions, which is consistent with findings in modern educational psychology (Aljabreen, 2020; Hallam et al., 2016). The emphasis on sensory experiences and art in early childhood education aligns with contemporary views that advocate for experiential learning as a means to enhance cognitive and social skills (Machado & Stoltz, 2016; Aljabreen, 2020).

Contemporary Research Landscape

Contemporary research on Waldorf education has demonstrated the effectiveness of its distinctive pedagogical approach, particularly in early childhood settings. Studies have highlighted positive outcomes in children's holistic development, including enhanced creativity, social competence, and emotional well-being (Rose

& Jolley, 2020). The integration of arts throughout the curriculum has been recognized as a key factor in fostering aesthetic sensitivity and supporting comprehensive child development (Chou, 2014). This aligns with some contemporary research in the mainstream educational context regarding the special role of art in early childhood (e.g., Cutcher & Boyd, 2016; Machado & Stoltz, 2016).

Comparative research has positioned Waldorf education within the broader landscape of alternative pedagogies. While sharing some commonalities with approaches like Montessori and Reggio Emilia in their emphasis on practical activities and respect for natural development, Waldorf education distinguishes itself through its unique focus on artistic expression and imaginative play (Aljabreen, 2020). These comparative studies have examined philosophical foundations, pedagogical practices, and practical implementations across different educational approaches (e.g. Aljabreen, 2020; Goldshmidt, 2021; Edwards, 2020).

The adaptability of Waldorf education has been particularly noteworthy, as evidenced by its successful implementation across diverse cultural contexts. Recent developments show increasing integration of Waldorf methods into public education systems, demonstrating the approach's potential for broader application (e.g., Rose & Jolley, 2016; Shank, 2016; Wylie & Hagan, 2003). Contemporary research also addresses emerging challenges, such as the integration of technology and cultural responsiveness in Waldorf settings (Neumann, 2024; Wilson, 2022).

Research has also explored the outcomes of Waldorf education compared to mainstream educational approaches. These studies have contributed to discussions about the potential applications of alternative educational methods in conventional settings, particularly regarding holistic development and creative expression (Rose & Jolley, 2016). The growing body of research suggests that while maintaining its core principles, Waldorf education continues to evolve and adapt to contemporary educational needs while preserving its fundamental commitment to nurturing the whole child.

Although there are already some reviews on Waldorf education (e.g., Böhle & Peters 2010, 2011; Peters, 2020; Tyson, 2023, 2024), research on Waldorf education remains relatively understudied compared to the extensive literature available on other alternative approaches like Montessori education in early childhood settings (Guerrero et al., 2024; Mavrellos & Daradoumis, 2020) as well as mainstream education systems, particularly in early childhood education. As Tyson (2024) notes in his comprehensive empirical survey by searching on not only Research on Steiner Education (RoSE) journal, but also those published on recognized science publishers and peer-reviewed journals, while approximately 250 studies on Waldorf education exist, there is significantly less research specifically focused on early childhood education (i.e. 0-7 years old) compared to research on Waldorf schools generally. This gap is particularly noteworthy given that there are numerically more Waldorf preschools than schools (Tyson, 2024). Besides, several studies regarding the review of research studies on Waldorf education (e.g., Böhle & Peters, 2010, 2011; Peters, 2020) were written in German, which has its limitations in accessibility for a non-German-speaking audience.

The movement's emphasis on holistic development, arts integration, and child-centered learning offers valuable insights for contemporary education, with its survival and growth suggesting the enduring relevance of its core principles across diverse cultural contexts (Taplin, 2024). While both Peters (2020) and Tyson (2023, 2024) surveys document substantial research activity, the limited research specifically on Waldorf early childhood education presents three significant challenges. First, insufficient empirical evidence makes it difficult to fully understand how Waldorf principles translate into contemporary educational settings. Second, the lack of systematic analysis impedes the identification of best practices and areas requiring improvement. Third, the absence of comprehensive research hinders the potential integration of successful Waldorf practices into mainstream education systems. These challenges underscore the need for more rigorous research to understand and potentially leverage Waldorf education's unique contributions to early childhood education. Notably, Tyson's reviews (2023, 2024) identify divergent sets of studies with respect to both theoretical and empirical aspects. While drawing attention to those pertaining to early childhood education, the level of analysis is largely descriptive and lacks deeper synthesis, signaling an area for future analytical development.

The Current Study

The current study aims to build upon existing literature by employing text mining techniques to analyze key themes within research on Waldorf early childhood education. By systematically reviewing articles related to this educational philosophy, this study seeks to identify prominent trends and gaps in literature. The research goals include:

Goal #1: To identify major themes related to Waldorf early childhood education through text mining analysis.

Goal #2: To explore how recent research aligns with or diverges from traditional Waldorf principles.

Goal #3: To highlight areas within the literature that require further investigation or exploration.

Goal #4: To offer insights for educators and researchers interested in implementing or studying Waldorf education more deeply.

By addressing these goals, this study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of early childhood education while reinforcing the relevance of Waldorf principles in contemporary educational contexts. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature using innovative methodologies like text mining, this research will provide a clearer understanding of how Waldorf education can continue to evolve while remaining true to its foundational ideals.

Method

A scoping review methodology was selected as the most appropriate approach to explore the current research landscape of Waldorf early childhood education. This methodology enables researchers to systematically map key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research related to a defined area, making it particularly suitable for investigating relatively under-explored topics (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Chiarello et al., 2023; Munn et al., 2018). To enhance the analytical rigor of this review, text mining techniques were employed, complemented by cluster analysis. This combined approach offers several distinct advantages that align closely with the objectives of this review.

Text mining facilitates the systematic extraction and analysis of meaningful patterns from large volumes of textual data, based on natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (Berry & Castellanos, 2004; Ferreira-Mello et al., 2019; Tan, 1999). Unlike traditional qualitative methods, which rely on manual coding and are prone to subjective biases, text mining provides an objective and scalable means to uncover latent themes and relationships within literature. This is particularly valuable and helpful in understanding research landscape in fields like Waldorf education, where research is relatively limited and dispersed across various disciplines.

The following sections detail the systematic process of literature search, screening, and analysis that was undertaken.

Literature Search

A comprehensive literature search was conducted on November 18, 2024, utilizing three prominent electronic databases: Web of Science (WOS) Core Collection, Scopus, and EBSCO. These databases were selected for their established authority and widespread use in educational research reviews (e.g., Su & Yang, 2022). In each database, a search string was employed in the advanced search function: ("Waldorf" OR "Waldorf Steiner" OR "Steiner" OR "Waldorf Education" OR "Steiner Education") AND (Kindergarten* OR Preschool* OR Child* OR Young Child* OR Early Year* OR Early Childhood Education OR Childhood). The search string was developed through a dual approach, drawing from the researcher's knowledge and understandings in Waldorf (Steiner) education and consulting search strategies employed in comparable previous studies (e.g. Guerrero et al., 2024; Mavrelos & Daradoumis, 2020).

The search include peer-reviewed academic articles published in English only, with no date restrictions applied. This systematic approach yielded an initial corpus of 325 articles across the three databases, including duplicate entries. The entire search procedure followed the updated 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), and was systematically documented and visualized in a PRISMA flow diagram, ensuring transparency of the review process. This rigorous approach to literature identification established a solid foundation for the subsequent phases of screening and analysis.

Inclusion and Extension Criteria

This review focused on articles examining Waldorf education in early childhood contexts. In this review, Waldorf education was defined as educational approaches, pedagogies, or curricula that incorporate Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy or Anthroposophy, including education delivered in Waldorf or Steiner schools.

The age parameter was specifically set from birth to seven years, aligning with Steiner's developmental stages theory, which identifies this period as the pre-formal schooling phase (Steiner, 1996). Due to the relatively limited research in this field, the review incorporated a broad spectrum of study types, encompassing curriculum analyses, developmental outcome studies, comparative analyses between Waldorf and other educational approaches, and studies examining stakeholder perceptions. Both empirical and theoretical papers were considered eligible for inclusion. Studies were excluded from the review if they met any of the following criteria: (1) failed to specify a target age group; (2) focused on age groups extending beyond or partially outside the birth-to-seven range; (3) did not primarily focus on Waldorf (Steiner) education or only mentioned it peripherally. A comprehensive overview of these inclusion and exclusion criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Educational Context	Education approaches/curricula based on Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy or Anthroposophy	Educational approaches not related to Waldorf/Steiner philosophy
Focus	Primary focus on Waldorf (Steiner) education in early childhood context	Waldorf (Steiner) education mentioned only peripherally or not the main focus of study
Age Group	Studies targeting children from birth to seven years old	Studies that do not specify age group or focus on ages beyond/partially outside birth-to-seven range

Screening Processes

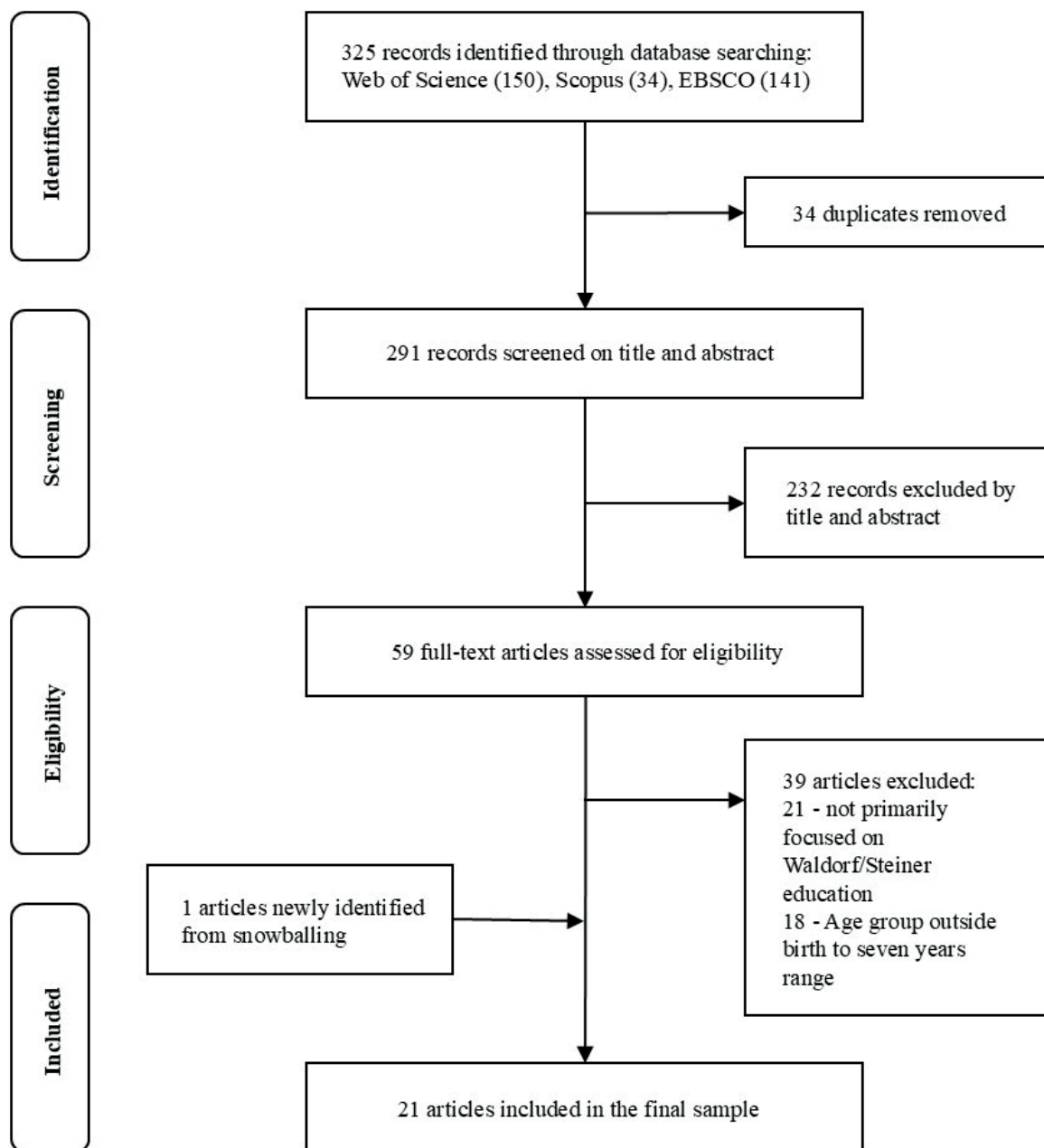
The initial database search yielded 325 articles, from which 34 duplicates were removed, leaving 291 articles for screening.

The screening process was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved reviewing titles and abstracts against predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in the identification of 59 potentially relevant articles. After that, a full-text screening was performed on these papers to ensure consistency with

the inclusion criteria, leading to the exclusion of 39 articles that did not meet the established criteria. This process resulted in 20 articles being retained for analysis.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature, the snowballing method (Wohlin, 2014) was employed to examine the reference lists of the included articles. This additional step, conducted using the same eligibility criteria, identified one additional relevant article, bringing the final sample to 21 articles for analysis (see Appendix A for article summaries). The screening process and its outcomes are illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the number of papers included and excluded at each stage of the review process.

Figure 1
PRISMA diagram of included articles in the scoping review



Data Analysis

Text mining techniques were employed to identify major research themes in Waldorf early childhood education. Text mining involves the use of various techniques from natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Chiarello et al., 2023; Munn et al., 2018). This method enables researchers to analyze vast amounts of textual data. All analyses were conducted using R software (R Core Team, 2023).

Step 1: Data Processing

The data preprocessing involved systematic steps to prepare the 21 articles for analysis. The process utilized several R packages, including *tm* (Feinerer & Hornik, 2024) for text mining operations and *SnowballC* (Bouchet-Valat, 2023) for word stemming.

First, a manual review was conducted to remove:

- Formatting elements (graphs, tables, figures, footnotes)
- Section headers (abstract, introduction, method, data analysis, results, summary)
- Table and figure identifiers (table, fig)
- Peripheral content (headers, footers, titles, abstracts, keywords, references, author information, funding statements)

After manual cleaning, the content was then processed using the *tm* package (Feinerer & Hornik, 2024). First, all text was converted to lowercase and all punctuations were removed, followed by the elimination of numbers. Extra whitespace was stripped as well. After basic cleaning, stop words and common terms with limited analytical value were removed. These included research-related terms like “study” and “research,” common verbs such as “can” and “use,” and other frequently occurring words that provided little analytical insight. The final preprocessing step involved word stemming using the *SnowballC* package (Bouchet-Valat, 2023), which reduced words to their root form by removing suffixes such as “-s,” “-ed,” and “-ing.” This systematic approach to text preprocessing ensured that the resulting corpus was clean and standardized for subsequent analysis while maintaining the integrity of meaningful content.

Step 2: Term Frequency analysis

A document-term matrix (DTM) was created to analyze word frequencies across the corpus. Initial analysis identified the 50 most frequent terms. After removing noise words (e.g., “time,” “year,” “make,” “howev,”), 37 key terms remained for further analysis. The frequency distribution was visualized through bar plots and word clouds using the *ggplot2* (Wickham et al., 2024) and *wordcloud* (Fellows, 2018) packages.

Step 3: tf-idf Analysis

Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) analysis was performed using the *weightTfIdf* function from the *tm* package (Feinerer & Hornik, 2024). This analysis weighted the frequency of terms in individual documents against their frequency across the entire corpus, helping identify terms that were particularly significant to specific documents while accounting for their overall prevalence in the collection.

Step 4: Clustering analysis

Hierarchical clustering was performed on the term co-occurrence matrix using Ward's method (*ward.D2*). To determine the optimal number of clusters, three validation metrics were employed:

- The elbow method, examining the within-cluster sum of squares

- The silhouette score, measuring cluster cohesion and separation
- The Davies-Bouldin index, evaluating cluster compactness

The selection of the final number of clusters was based on both quantitative metrics and qualitative assessment of cluster interpretability.

Results

Both Figure 2 and Figure 3 illustrate the frequent words in the selected articles, after removing the noise words. The most frequently occurring term was “child” with 2,773 occurrences, almost three times of the second frequent appeared word “educ” (957). It emphasized the child-centered nature of Waldorf early childhood education. Educational terminology formed the next frequency tier, with “play” (821) and “Waldorf” (781) being prominent.

Figure 2
*Frequency Distribution of Frequent Terms in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Literature
(After Noise Word Removal)*

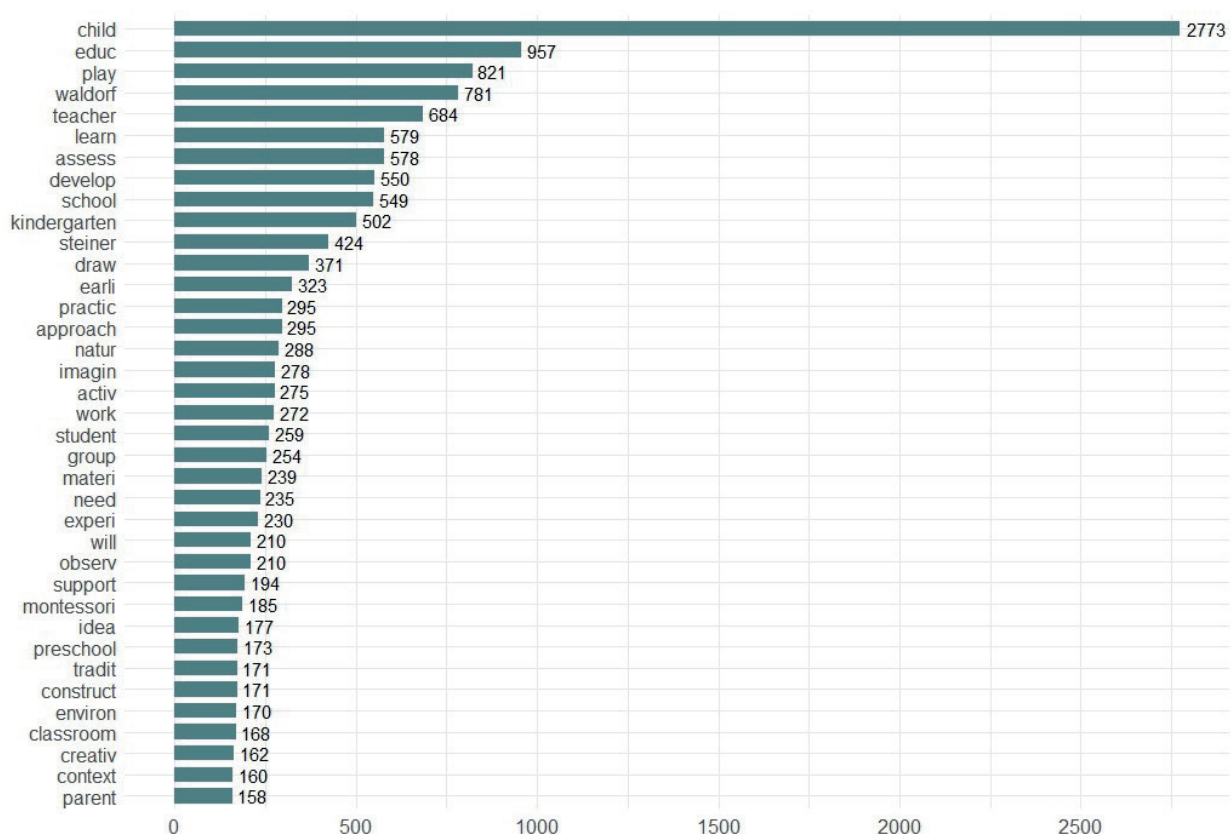
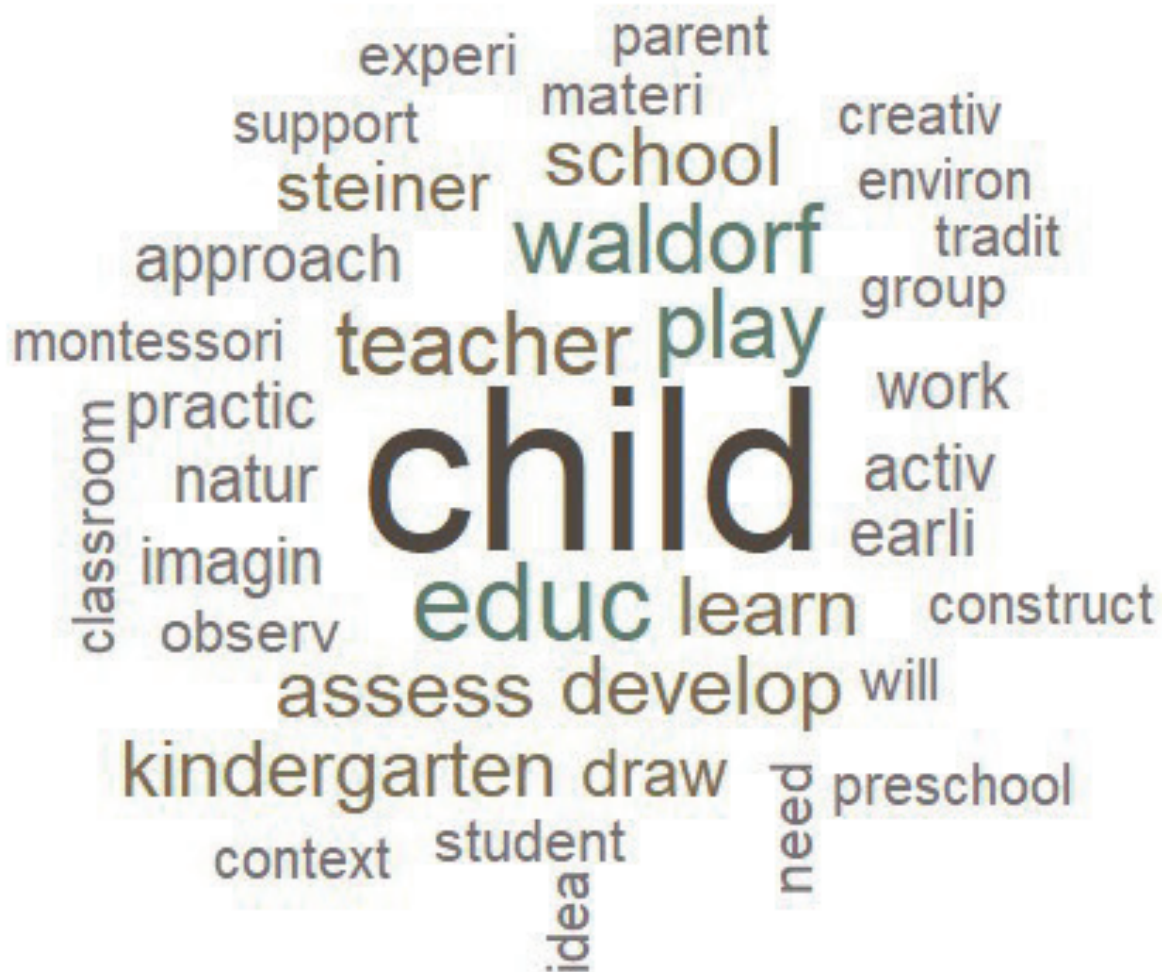


Figure 3
 Wordcloud of Frequent Terms in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Literature (After Noise Word Removal)



Key pedagogical terms emerged in the mid-frequency range, including “teacher” (684), “learn” (579), and “assess” (578), reflecting the educational focus of the literature. Terms related to educational settings and approaches were also notable, such as “kindergarten” (502), “steiner” (424), and “Montessori” (185). The analysis also identified terms related to educational practices and environments, including “draw” (371), “practice” (295), “natur” (288), and “imagin” (278). Terms representing social and structural aspects of education appeared with moderate frequency, such as “group” (254), “classroom” (168), and “parent” (158).

It is important to note that both quantitative (metric-based) and qualitative (interpretation by the researcher) evaluations were employed in determining the appropriate number of clusters (e.g., Kim et al., 2024). Figure 4 illustrates the results of the three clustering validation metrics: elbow method, silhouette score, and Davies-Bouldin index. The clustering analysis indicated a substantial decrease in the within-cluster sum of squares up to three clusters, after which the rate of decrease slowed significantly. The silhouette score, which measures cluster cohesion and separation, peaked at two clusters, while the Davies-Bouldin index, which assesses cluster compactness, indicated optimal values at both two and ten clusters. The solutions for two clusters, three clusters, and ten clusters are displayed in Table 3.

Figure 4
Clustering Validation Metrics for Term Analysis in Waldorf Early Childhood Education Literature

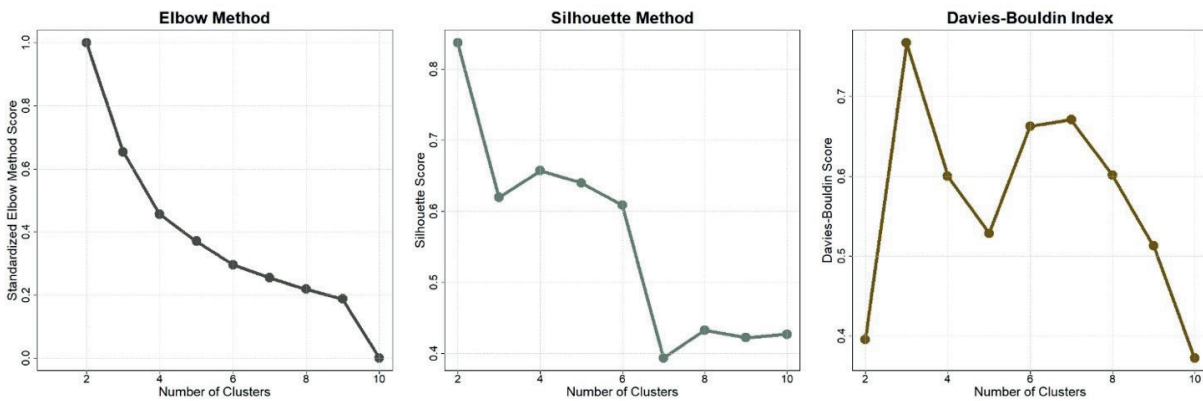


Table 3
Cluster Solutions for 10-Cluster, 3-Cluster, and 2-Cluster

Cluster Number	Number of Clusters		
	10 Clusters	3 Clusters	2 Clusters
Cluster 1	activ, approach, child, context, develop, educ, experi, group, natur, need, observ, steiner, support, will, work	activ, approach, child, classroom, construct, context, develop, draw, earli, educ, environ, experi, group, idea, imagin, learn, materi, natur, need, observ, parent, play, practic, school, steiner, support, teacher, waldorf, will, work	activ, approach, child, classroom, construct, context, creativ, develop, draw, earli, educ, environ, experi, group, idea, magin, kindergarten, learn, materi, natur, need,observ, parent, play, practic, preschool, school, steiner, student, support, teacher, tradit, waldorf, will, work
Cluster 2	assess	assess, montessori	assess, montessori
Cluster 3	classroom, earli, environ, idea, learn, materi, parent, play, practic, school, teacher, waldorf	creativ, kindergarten, preschool, student, tradit	
Cluster 4	construct		
Cluster 5	creativ		
Cluster 6	draw		
Cluster 7	imagin		
Cluster 8	kindergarten, student, tradit		
Cluster 9	montessori		
Cluster 10	preschool		

At the phase of qualitative evaluation, the ten-cluster solution was excluded due to its introduction of unnecessary complexity, which hindered meaningful interpretation of the clusters. The smaller cluster solutions provided clearer thematic distinctions that aligned more closely with the primary topics discussed in the literature. In comparison to the two-cluster solution, the additional cluster in the three-cluster solution enhanced thematic richness and interpretability. This was also more beneficial for practitioners and

researchers in the field, as it delineated specific areas for further investigation or application. The resulting clusters are characterized in the following subsections.

Discussion

The present study reviewed the literature on Waldorf early childhood education through the application of text mining techniques. The analysis resulted in the identification of three distinct clusters that encapsulate the main themes within the existing research on this topic. These clusters provide insights into how Waldorf education aligns with Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy and pedagogical principles.

The results of the clustering analysis provide valuable insights into the thematic structure of the literature on Waldorf early childhood education. The three distinct clusters identified: Learning and Development Context, Assessment and Comparative Approaches, and Creativity in Early Childhood Education. This highlights the multifaceted nature of this educational philosophy and its application in various contexts.

Cluster #1: Learning and Developmental Context

This largest cluster, containing terms like “approach,” “child,” “classroom,” “natur” and “environ,” reflects Steiner's fundamental understanding of child development as a gradual unfolding of physical, emotional, and spiritual capacities. The prominence of terms such as “natur,” “play,” and “imagin” aligns with Steiner's emphasis on creating nurturing environments that support natural exploration and play-based learning. These themes align with Waldorf education's core principles of supporting holistic development and individualized learning experiences (e.g., Attfield, 2022; Chou, 2014; Frödén & Rosell, 2019; Goldshmidt, 2020; Guilbaud, 2019; Knight, 2024; Kodsí, 2022; Nome, 2024; O'Connor & Angus, 2014; Sobo, 2014; Taplin, 2024; Waite & Rees, 2014; Wilson, 2022).

However, critical perspectives within this cluster reveal important tensions in Waldorf education's approach to naturalism and child-centeredness. Knight (2024) critically examines how colonial legacies influence Waldorf educators' understanding of childhood, revealing that assumptions about children being “close to nature” are not culturally neutral and can perpetuate racism and ableism. This challenges the seemingly benign association of terms like “natur” and “play” in the literature, highlighting how these concepts may reinforce Western, middle-class conceptions of childhood rather than genuinely embracing diverse cultural perspectives on child development. Wilson's (2022) work contributes to a growing body of critical scholarship that challenges the universalist claims of Waldorf education. By arguing that its methods may impose norms rather than foster freedom, Wilson's analysis aligns with broader critiques that identify Waldorf as a culturally specific, and often exclusionary, practice rooted in Eurocentric ideals.

This cluster strongly reflects Steiner's understanding of child development, particularly his emphasis on the first seven-year phase characterized by sensory exploration and imaginative play (Steiner, 1996; Uhrmacher, 1995). The prominence of terms like “natur” and “play” in this cluster aligns with Steiner's belief in creating nurturing environments that support natural exploration and play-based learning (Steiner, 1996). Furthermore, the inclusion of terms such as “will” and “imagin” echoes Steiner's ideas about the development of the child's etheric body during this stage, emphasizing the importance of fostering imagination and willpower through appropriate pedagogical approaches (Steiner, 1996; Taplin, 2024).

Cluster #2: Assessment and Comparative Approaches

The second cluster, comprising “assess” and “montessori,” reflects research focused on evaluation methods and comparative educational philosophies. Several studies have explored assessment strategies within Waldorf education (Arslan & Kartal, 2022; Becker et al., 2023; Deluca et al., 2019), while others have conducted comparative analyses between Waldorf and Montessori pedagogical approaches (Aljabreen, 2020; Kvintova

et al., 2022). This clustering highlights the scholarly interest in understanding how different educational frameworks evaluate child development and learning outcomes.

The presence of “assess” suggests an increasing focus on how Waldorf schools evaluate children’s progress in alignment with Steiner’s emphasis on holistic development over standardized assessment (Steiner, 1996). Recent research indicates that while Waldorf schools traditionally employ qualitative observational assessments that prioritize individual growth, there is also a need to understand how these methods compare to mainstream practices (Becker et al., 2023). This comparative perspective is crucial as it reflects broader educational trends toward comprehensive assessment approaches that consider the whole child rather than just academic achievement.

Moreover, examining assessment practices across different alternative educational approaches provides insights into children’s outcomes. By comparing Waldorf education with Montessori or Reggio Emilia methodologies, researchers can better understand how these non-mainstream educational philosophies address early childhood development within their unique frameworks (e.g., Aljabreen, 2020; Kvintova et al., 2022). This comparison not only enriches our understanding of alternative pedagogies but also informs discussions about their potential integration into mainstream educational systems.

Cluster #3: Creativity in Early Childhood Education

The third cluster contains terms such as “creativ,” “kindergarten,” “preschool,” “student,” and “tradit.” This cluster underscores the central importance of creativity and innovation in Waldorf philosophy. It highlights themes related to early childhood education settings, creativity, and traditional practices. Articles related to this cluster emphasize creativity and demonstrate a commitment to nurturing individual expression and imaginative play among students (e.g., Rose & Jolley, 2020; Taplin, 2024).

Creativity is one of the cornerstone of Waldorf education, which integrates artistic activities throughout all aspects of the curriculum rather than treating them as isolated subjects. This integration fosters children’s innate creativity while developing essential skills like fine motor control and focused attention (Steiner, 1996; Taplin, 2024). The emphasis on imagination aligns with Steiner’s belief that artistic expression is vital for healthy child development during early years. The presence of terms related to creativity suggests that educators recognize its significance not only for individual expression but also for fostering social skills and emotional resilience among young learners.

Reflections on the Methodology and Findings

Given the relative novelty of text mining as a methodology in educational research, it is crucial to reflect on its application and the contributions it has made to the current study’s findings. It is important to acknowledge that this scoping review’s text mining approach, while systematic and comprehensive, inherently prioritizes thematic identification over a deep, qualitative analysis of power relations, contradictions, and problematic aspects within the literature. The methodology’s focus on frequency-based clustering may inadvertently obscure contentious issues that appear less frequently but are theoretically significant, such as the colonial legacies identified by Knight (2024) or the control mechanisms revealed by Wilson (2022). This limitation is particularly relevant given that critical studies often appear as outliers in a field where much research takes a more descriptive or supportive stance toward Waldorf education.

The apparent consensus revealed through clustering analysis should therefore be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect a publication bias toward supportive research rather than a genuine absence of problems within Waldorf early childhood education. The critical perspectives identified, though numerically limited, raise fundamental questions about the assumptions underlying Waldorf pedagogical practices and their cultural implications that merit serious consideration.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this scoping review and text mining analysis of Waldorf early childhood education literature reveal several important implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The identification of three distinct clusters provides a structured framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of Waldorf education and its alignment with Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy.

The implications of the findings of Cluster #1 suggest that educators should continue to focus on creating environments that foster sensory exploration and imaginative play. By aligning teaching practices with Steiner's developmental stages, educators can better support the individual needs of children during this critical period of growth. Future research could further investigate how specific environmental factors influence children's learning experiences in Waldorf settings. For instance, studies could explore the impact of natural materials versus synthetic ones on children's engagement and creativity. Additionally, the emphasis on play within this cluster highlights the need for ongoing advocacy for play-based learning in early childhood education more broadly. As educational systems increasingly prioritize standardized testing and academic achievement, it is essential to reinforce the value of play as a legitimate form of learning that contributes to children's overall development (Goldshmidt, 2020; Nome, 2024; Taplin, 2024). This advocacy can help bridge the gap between Waldorf education principles and mainstream educational practices.

The emphasis on assessment methods within Cluster #2 suggests a critical area for further exploration. This cluster suggests that further research is needed to explore how qualitative assessment practices can effectively measure children's development in ways that align with their individual learning trajectories. Comparative studies can illuminate best practices for evaluating children's progress while respecting their developmental needs. For example, research could examine how Waldorf's observational assessment methods differ from standardized assessments used in mainstream education. Understanding these differences may provide insights into how alternative educational philosophies can inform more comprehensive assessment approaches across various educational contexts.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of creativity in early childhood education as represented in Cluster #3. Future research could examine how creativity is fostered within Waldorf classrooms and its effects on various aspects of child development, including cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Investigating the role of creative activities in promoting engagement and motivation among young learners would provide valuable data for educators seeking to enhance their teaching practices.

Moreover, there is an opportunity to explore the integration of technology within Waldorf education. As digital tools become increasingly prevalent in educational settings, understanding how these tools can be harmoniously integrated into Waldorf practices without compromising the philosophy's core principles will be essential (e.g., Neumann, 2024). Research could focus on developing guidelines for effectively using technology to support creative expression and collaborative learning while maintaining a child-centered approach.

Limitations

While this scoping review provides valuable insights into the literature on Waldorf early childhood education, it is not without limitations. Addressing these challenges will enhance future research efforts and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this unique educational philosophy.

One significant limitation is related to the selection of articles included in the analysis. The review was restricted to articles published in English, which may have excluded relevant research published in other languages. This limitation could result in an incomplete understanding of global perspectives on Waldorf education and its practices.

Another limitation pertains to the text mining methodology itself. While text mining techniques are powerful tools for analyzing large volumes of text data, they may overlook contextual meanings and subtleties within language that qualitative analyses can better capture. The automated processes used in text mining

can sometimes lead to oversimplification or misinterpretation of complex concepts, which may affect the validity of findings.

Finally, this study primarily focused on identifying themes rather than establishing causal relationships or measuring outcomes associated with Waldorf educational practices. Future research should aim to address these gaps by employing mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative metrics with qualitative insights to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Waldorf education influences child development.

Conclusion

This scoping review employed text mining techniques to analyze the literature surrounding Waldorf early childhood education, revealing key themes and insights into the educational philosophy's implementation and impact. The analysis identified three distinct clusters: Learning Environment and Practice, Assessment and Comparative Approaches, and Creativity in Early Childhood Education. Each cluster reflects critical aspects of Waldorf education, emphasizing the holistic, child-centered approach that is foundational to this pedagogical model. The findings highlight the interconnectedness of various aspects of Waldorf philosophy, offering valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers interested in early childhood education.

Future research should build upon these findings by exploring how these themes interact in practice, examining the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies, and investigating innovative assessment methods that align with Waldorf principles. By addressing these areas, researchers can further enrich the discourse surrounding Waldorf education and contribute to its ongoing evolution in contemporary educational contexts.

Overall, this scoping review serves as a foundational step toward a more comprehensive understanding of Waldorf early childhood education. It highlights both the strengths of this educational approach and the areas where further inquiry is needed, ultimately supporting efforts to enhance educational practices for young learners.

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Appendix A

Table A1
Research aims and main findings of the included articles

Studies	Research Aims	Main Finding
Taplin (2024)	To explore significant themes in the Waldorf approach to early childhood education, emphasizing the alignment of its foundational principles with contemporary child development research.	The main findings highlight the prioritization of social and emotional development, the creation of a sensory-friendly environment, the promotion of nature connections, the need to protect child-initiated play from academic pressures, and the importance of practitioners' inner development. This article concludes by identifying three future areas of focus for Waldorf early childhood practitioners.
Nome (2024)	To explore how child-initiated play in Waldorf kindergartens fosters the development of democratic skills through negotiations about play scripts, using participatory observations and recordings.	Findings indicate that resistance in play negotiations arises from the play materials, previous scripts, and play partners, with open-ended materials contributing greater complexity to these interactions compared to processed toys. This complexity increases the risk of negotiation failure, highlighting the unique dynamics of play in Waldorf settings.

Table 2 (continued)

Studies	Research Aims	Main Finding
Knight (2024)	To examine how North American Waldorf educators navigate colonial legacies in their understanding of childhood and the assumptions that inform the pedagogical space of Waldorf kindergartens.	The main findings reveal that these assumptions, rooted in colonial narratives about children being close to nature and home, are not neutral and perpetuate racism and ableism, impacting how educators engage with dominant Western views of childhood. This study highlights the need for awareness among educators regarding the historical contexts shaping their pedagogical practices.
Becker et al. (2023)	To explore how alternative education systems—Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and Waldorf—approach early childhood assessment in a developmentally appropriate manner.	The main findings indicate that these systems prioritize understanding each child's unique learning through engagement-focused assessments, aligning with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) recommendations. Effective assessment practices include individualized techniques like observation and the use of artifacts, ensuring that assessments reflect children's interactive learning experiences.
Wilson (2022)	To critically analyze the cultural meanings of child-centeredness in US early childhood education, focusing on Waldorf education as an alternative that seeks to "protect childhood" from modern societal dangers.	The main finds indicate that, despite its child-centered claims, Waldorf education often reinforces a Western, middle-class conception of childhood and can impose adult-sanctioned norms on children rather than liberating them. The author suggests a shift towards discourses and practices that genuinely promote child liberation instead of merely maintaining regulatory frameworks.

Studies	Research Aims	Main Finding
Kvintova et al. (2022)	To evaluate the impact of various preschool education systems in the Czech Republic on psychological variables related to children's outcomes, by comparing traditional preschool programs with alternative types, including Montessori, Waldorf, and religious schools.	The findings indicated that the type of kindergarten significantly affects children's school performance motivation, attitudes toward school, and executive functions, with notable differences observed among the different educational approaches.
Kodsi (2022)	To investigate constructive play within Waldorf and normative kindergartens in Israel, focusing on children's construction outputs through problem-solving and technological thinking.	The findings reveal that 86% of construction activities in Waldorf preschools are directed towards socio-dramatic play, significantly higher than the 35% observed in normative preschools. This indicates that constructive play is a central element in Waldorf education and supports various forms of play.
Attfield (2022)	To explore the philosophy and practices of early childhood Waldorf education in the US and UK, focusing on its child-centered and inclusive principles.	The findings reveal contrasting interpretations among kindergarten teachers regarding the education of diverse learners, highlighting situational differences between US and UK contexts while maintaining a shared educational ethos rooted in anthroposophy. The study recommends enhancing transnational networks within Waldorf early childhood studies and connecting with broader educational discussions on inclusion.
Arslan & Kartal (2022)	To evaluate the impact of Waldorf approach activities, supported by cooperative methods, on early number assessment skills in children aged 48-60 months.	The findings revealed that the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant improvements in their early number skills compared to the control group, which showed only minor increases.
Rose & Jolley (2020)	To investigate the creative intentions behind drawing among pupils from mainstream and Steiner schools.	The research found that while both groups drew from similar sources for their ideas, such as immediate surroundings and memory, Steiner pupils expressed a greater focus on expressive ideas, highlighting that children utilize diverse sources for drawing inspiration influenced by their educational environments.
Goldshmidt (2020)	To evaluate the appropriateness of practicing meditative techniques with children in school settings, particularly through a philosophical and moral lens, by comparing mindfulness practices with Waldorf education.	The findings suggest that while meditative techniques can offer significant benefits for children's emotional and cognitive development, their appropriateness in school settings remains contentious, necessitating a careful balance between direct spiritual practices and the preservation of childhood innocence.
Aljabreen (2020)	To analyze the Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia educational models, focusing on their historical development, philosophical frameworks, benefits, and challenges within the context of evolving early childhood education.	The main findings highlight that these alternative approaches prioritize children's educational freedom and holistic development while also addressing the need for educators to adapt these models to local cultural contexts amidst increasing academic pressures.
Guilbaud (2019)	To explore the influence of Waldorf principles on parenting practices and the intergenerational transmission of early childhood experiences.	The main findings indicate that the practice of Waldorf education fosters a nurturing environment that emphasizes emotional development, sensory engagement, and a connection to nature, which may shape future parenting styles and mothering inclinations.

Studies	Research Aims	Main Finding
Deluca et al. (2019)	To examine and synthesize research across Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, and Montessori kindergarten traditions to develop key assessment tenets that can inform public education policy and practice.	The study identified three core priorities for kindergarten assessment: child-centered and developmentally appropriate teaching, continuous embedded formative assessment, and use of multiple assessment methods, along with four iterative processes that facilitate assessment practices including participation in teaching/learning, reconstruction of teaching/learning, assessment dialogues, and feedback integration.
Frödén & Rosell (2019)	To investigate how the relationship between children, toys, and the Waldorf preschool educational environment influences children's imagination development.	Three key factors were identified as influencing children's imaginative development: the form of the toys, their placement, and the teachers' pedagogical intentions and interactions with children.
Wilson (2014)	To critically examine Waldorf education through ethnographic research and discourse analysis, focusing on how its pedagogical practices relate to adult control and conceptions of childhood.	The study revealed that despite its reputation for educational freedom, Waldorf education operates through strict routines and adult control over children's activities, bodies, and language, with teachers' discourse patterns reinforcing their authority and deficit-based views of child development.
Waite & Rees (2014)	To examine how empathy and imagination are nurtured in Steiner kindergartens through a collaborative study between Steiner practitioners and mainstream UK educators, while exploring how these practices might benefit other early years settings.	The study revealed that imaginative play in Steiner kindergartens provides effective practice in empathy development and prosocial behavior, demonstrating potential long-term benefits for children's ethical development and fulfilling lives.
Sobo (2013)	To examine Waldorf education's unique approach to play and its underlying cultural model of child development by analyzing how teachers orchestrate play in pre-k/kindergarten classrooms.	While this approach offers insights for implementing play in non-Waldorf settings, the study reveals that Waldorf education still contends with the work-play dichotomy prevalent in US education, using play's pedagogical benefits as a marketing advantage.
O'Connor and Angus (2014)	To examine Steiner Waldorf's perspective on school readiness and apply it to Ireland's educational context, while analyzing the case for delayed school entry.	The study supports a later school start age as beneficial for children's long-term learning capacity and enthusiasm, with evidence suggesting that delaying formal education aligns with child-centered developmental principles.
Chou (2014)	To investigate how parents-support creative play affects aesthetic sensibility and creativity among Waldorf preschool children in Taiwan.	The study demonstrated that parent-supported creative play positively influenced children's aesthetic sensibility (specifically in exploration, awareness, expression, and creation) and enhanced their creative originality, while qualitative observations showed increased willingness for creative expression in colorful imagery and storytelling through drawings.
Burkitt et al. (2005)	To investigate whether children from different educational backgrounds (Steiner vs. mainstream schools) demonstrate different patterns in their use of size and color when drawing figures with varying emotional characteristics.	While mainstream school children drew larger figures overall, both groups showed similar scaling patterns in response to emotional characteristics, but differed specifically in their color choices for negatively characterized figures.

From Resistance to Compromise

The encounter between Steiner pedagogy and an educational reform

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the tensions that arise between educational reforms and established pedagogical traditions. The case is the Norwegian Steiner Schools' encounter with the national educational reform known as Reform 97, which included lowering the school starting age from seven to six. Reform 97 affected both the values and the practices of Steiner education. The article traces developments from the late 1980s, when the reform process began, to contemporary practice. It is a narrative of resistance, internal tensions, and the gradual movement toward compromise. The findings highlight the significant role that value orientations play in both the preservation and the further development of educational practice – a theme that carries broader relevance beyond this specific context.

Keywords: Steinerpedagogy, Education values, Education reform, pedagogy for first graders.

ABSTRACT. Dieser Artikel untersucht Herausforderungen im Zusammenhang mit den Spannungen zwischen Bildungsreformen und pädagogischer Praxis. Ein Beispiel hierfür ist die Auseinandersetzung der norwegischen Waldorfschule mit der Bildungsreform „Reform 97“. Ein zentrales Element dieser Reform war die Herabsetzung des Schuleintrittsalters von sieben auf sechs Jahre. Die Reform 97 beeinflusste das bestehende Bildungssystem der Waldorfschulen, seine Werte und seine Praxis. Der Artikel beschreibt den Prozess von Ende der 1980er Jahre, als der Reformprozess begann, bis zur heutigen Praxis. Es ist eine Geschichte von Widerstand, interne Spannungen und den Weg zu einem Kompromiss. Die Ergebnisse beleuchten die Bedeutung von Werten als Grundlage für die Erhaltung und Weiterentwicklung der Bildungspraxis. Ein Thema, das auch im weiteren Bildungskontext relevant ist.

Keywords: Steinerpädagogik, Werte, Bildungsreform, Pädagogik 6 Jahre alt.

Introduction

School reforms and educational change processes are often marked by tensions between, on the one hand, political intentions and bureaucratic implementation and, on the other, value based pedagogical traditions

(Roos & Trippstad, 2015). This was also the case in 1997, when Reform 97 was introduced in Norway, lowering the school starting age from seven to six and extending primary schooling to a ten-year programme (Haug, 2015; Slagstad, 2017; Bjørnstad et al., 2024).

Reluctance to enrolling six year olds as school pupils was central to the resistance against Reform 97. Critics feared that this age group's specific needs were at stake within the school framework and practices, especially that opportunities for free play, both indoors and outdoors, would diminish (Bjørnstad et al., 2024, p. 38). The Steiner pedagogical community was a prominent voice in this resistance. The encounter between the value base of Steiner education and the political justifications for restructuring early education in Reform 97 exemplifies the tensions between differing value systems in reform processes.

This article investigates which values the Norwegian Steiner pedagogical community¹ sought to safeguard in response to Reform 97, how these values were communicated in the struggle against the reform, and the extent to which they have been preserved in Steiner educational practice in first grade since 1997. These issues are explored through three research questions, which also reflect the study's historical perspective:

- How did the Steiner pedagogical community work and argue in its opposition to lowering the school starting age?
- How did the community work internally to implement Reform 97, and what challenges arose during this process?
- How can the Steiner schools' approach to challenging Reform 97 contribute to a broader understanding of tensions between different actors involved in the implementation of educational reforms?

As the third question suggests, this study has relevance beyond the Steiner educational context. All educational practices are value based, and these values frequently come into conflict with the political ambitions behind educational reforms. The Steiner school movement serves as a useful case because Steiner education tends to maintain a relatively homogeneous set of values across educational contexts - such as kindergartens and schools - and across historical periods. While mainstream educational institutions also operate with strong values, these are often more heterogeneous both historically and institutionally. Our assumption is that Steiner education's internally consistent value base provided the movement with a unified voice in the debate on Reform 97, thereby strengthening the analytical clarity of this study.

The purpose of the article is not to defend Steiner pedagogical positions or to claim that they are superior to others. Rather, the aim is to examine how these value positions were mobilized by Steiner educators during different phases of the Reform 97 process. Accordingly, the Steiner pedagogical foundations presented here reflect the views of those who participated in the resistance and do not necessarily represent contemporary Waldorf-Steiner educational thinking, which in many areas has become more nuanced and research based (Dahlin, 2017; Schieren, 2023; Tyson, 2025).

The following sections outline the theoretical perspectives employed including a brief presentation of key values and principles in Waldorf Steiner education regarding school starting age, and a description of the methodological approach. This is followed by the main analysis, addressing the first two research questions through three phases of Reform 97. Finally, the third research question is discussed, and suggestions for further research are offered.

Theoretical perspectives and research context

To analyse how the process leading up to Reform 97 triggered resistance and protest within the Norwegian Steiner movement, we draw on the theory of *Orders of Worth* developed by French sociologists Laurent Thévenot and Luc Boltanski (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Their framework, situated within French pragmatic sociology and the sociology of engagement, sheds light on how value systems are articulated in

1. In this article the terms Steiner pedagogy and Steiner schools and kindergarten are used when the Norwegian context is described. In other contexts, the terms Waldorf or Waldorf-Steiner are used.

reform processes and how tensions between them arise. In *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, Thévenot and Boltanski challenge perspectives grounded in the reproduction of power structures, such as those advanced by Bourdieu and Foucault (Kvamme, 2024, p. 84). Emphasizing an actor oriented approach, they identify justification regimes in which “actions must be justified in terms of the common good” (Kvamme, 2024, p. 95) for criticism, compromise, or agreement to occur (Kvamme, 2024, p. 107).

Thévenot and Boltanski describe six orders of worth within these justification regimes: the inspirational, domestic, civil, market, public opinion, and industrial orders. Each order is characterized by its own criteria for justification—for example, modes of evaluation, forms of relevant information, types of relationships, and forms of human qualification (Hansen, 2016).

Although the theory is more complex than the aspects presented here, these elements provide a fruitful lens for analysing the tensions between Steiner pedagogy and Reform 97. They also help illuminate how actors, depending on contextual and structural conditions, draw on different orders of worth in their arguments. While Thévenot has argued that individuals cannot act within multiple regimes simultaneously, actors in practice may nonetheless draw on several orders of worth (Haugseth, 2019).

We interpret the educational policy rationales behind Reform 97 primarily as expressions of what Thévenot and Boltanski term the *industrial* order of worth, in which productivity, efficiency, measurable criteria, and statistical indicators are central. Relationships are framed as functional, and qualification is tied to expertise and professional competence. Reform 97 was also influenced by the *civil* order of worth, reflecting concerns for the common good and ideals of equality. Policymakers argued that the reform would contribute to full kindergarten coverage, offering younger children access to stimulating developmental environments and enabling greater participation of women in the labour market. However, as we show later, it was the industrial order of worth that was emphasized and challenged within Steiner pedagogical discourse, arguably to sharpen the perceived dichotomy between the reform’s political logic and the value base of the school movement.

The Steiner community’s struggle against lowering the school starting age and the values articulated in this process can be understood as expressions of the *inspirational* order of worth, rooted in the ideals of Steiner education. Practical experiences arising from the pedagogical tradition may also be interpreted through the *domestic* order of worth. Central assessment criteria in the inspirational order include anti conformism and creativity; relevant information is conveyed emotionally, and qualification is tied to creativity and ingenuity. In the domestic order of worth, esteem and reputation function as key evaluative criteria, information is transmitted orally and anecdotally, relationships are based on trust, and qualification rests on authority (Kvamme, 2024).

Recently, the concept of *orders of worth* has been applied in educational research. Ingunn Vines Kvamme uses the concept to show how increased state control and values associated with the industrial order have placed pressure on the kindergarten’s fundamental worths (Kvamme, 2024, p. 18). Ove Skarpenes and Kari Mette Walmann Hidle apply the same framework to examine how pupils in Norwegian compulsory schools are exposed to conflicting orders of worth. While content and pedagogical methods aim to promote individualization—legitimized by an inspirational order—assessment schemes are grounded in standardization and thus reflect an industrial order. These tensions are experienced as challenging by pupils (Skarpenes & Hidle, 2024).

The ideological and historical background of Steiner pedagogy

Rudolf Steiner’s booklet *The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy* (first published in 1907) constitutes the earliest formulation of Steiner’s educational ideas (Steiner, 2006). Here, Steiner outlines his understanding of child development during both kindergarten and school age and discusses corresponding didactic implications. He describes development in seven year phases: the first covering early childhood and the second the primary school years. The transition between these two periods marks, in Steiner’s view, a profound shift in the child’s way of perceiving and being in the world, necessitating distinct pedagogical

approaches.

Following the establishment of the first Waldorf Steiner school in 1919, Steiner further elaborated on the relationship between pedagogy and child development (Steiner, 2008; Steiner, 2011). In the first seven year period, children engage with the world primarily through physical and sensory experience, making the physical environment and the educator's presence as a role model central to healthy development. In the second seven year period, encompassing early school years, children relate to the world emotionally through the soul. Educators are therefore expected to present the world through imaginative, emotionally rich stories as a basis for cognitive engagement.

One of Steiner's most distinctive claims is that the life forces children invest in physically engaging with the world during the first seven years are the same forces later needed for cognitive work in school. If academic demands are introduced before the child has completed this embodied developmental work, Steiner warns of potential weaknesses in later development. Consequently, in Steiner education, lowering the school starting age has long been seen as problematic because it disrupts what is considered a natural developmental sequence and may hinder healthy maturation, both physically and spiritually (Steiner, 2006; Steiner, 2008).

In the past decade, Steiner's model of strict seven year stages—particularly his views on school readiness—has been increasingly questioned. Scholars such as Christian Rittelmeyer, Peter Loebell, and Walter Riethmüller have re-examined Waldorf Steiner developmental theory in light of contemporary psychological and educational research (Rittelmeyer, 2023; Loebell, 2023; Riethmüller, 2023). They argue that rigid stage based understandings risk overlooking individual, cultural, and social variation. Further research and discussion in this field are essential for the ongoing development and legitimation of Waldorf Steiner pedagogy and the curricula for the schools.

During the new millennium, many Waldorf-Steiner teacher education institutions have undergone academisation, leading to an increase in research activity (Schieren, ed., 2023; Tyson, 2025). However, there is still a lack in research-based studies on how the Waldorf-Steiner educational community have responded to educational reforms in general and in particular on Steiner pedagogical practices for first graders brought about by Reform 97 in Norway (Stabel, Østergaard, Stabel & Nome, 2025).

Methods

This study is situated within a hermeneutic research tradition and employs qualitative content analysis of texts (Nilssen, 2014). By alternating between broad, exploratory reading and close reading of selected documents, the study gains both breadth and depth. Quotations were selected with the aim of highlighting key perspectives on how the Steiner educational community responded to proposals to lower the school starting age and to the implementation and subsequent development of Reform 97.

The authors hold insider positions, and the preconceptions associated with such positions form part of the methodological reflection (Kjelstadli, 2007; Knutsen, 2009; Holmes, 2020). Proximity to the field brings both advantages and challenges: it offers access and contextual insight but also requires heightened reflexivity when analysing material from a field to which one is emotionally and professionally connected. Through critical reflection, transparency, and accountability, these challenges have been addressed.

Through systematic analysis, a narrative—one version of the story of the Steiner educational community's encounter with Reform 97—has been constructed. While the intention is to present a truthful account, other narratives are always possible (Kjelstadli, 2007). The presentation follows the research questions and thus has a chronological structure.

Written sources include published texts and archival material from the Steiner School Association and the Steiner Kindergarten Association. Newspaper articles have also been used. Texts conveying experiences

from practice are drawn from both internal and public journals and books. The report *Frameworks, Space and Time* (Rammer, rom og organisering av tiden i Steinerskolens førsteklasse²) based on two surveys among Steiner school principals and first grade teachers, is also included (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023).

As part of the study's introductory phase, five semi structured qualitative research interviews were conducted. They were transcribed using Autotekst, and all informants have been anonymised. The study is approved by SIKT (<https://sikt.no/tjenester/personverntjenester-forskning/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-personopplysninger>). The five informants were selected because they worked with six year old children both before and after the introduction of Reform 97. The interviews focused on how the pedagogues experienced the plans to lower the school starting age and how they and their colleagues perceived the challenges posed to Steiner educational values. The semi structured interview guide allowed for unplanned follow up questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), providing deeper insights into the pedagogues' perspectives. These personal accounts complement the written material and offer valuable knowledge about practitioners' experiences. Due to space limitations, only selected examples are included in this study.

The background of Reform 97

The background of Reform 97 is complex, but it was primarily legitimized through socio economic priorities and values (Engelsen, 2003; Karlsen, 2006), which can be interpreted as reflecting an industrial order of worth (Haugseth, 2019, p. 443). Among the most influential factors were the OECD's evaluations of the Norwegian and other Western education systems in the late 1980s. The conclusion that educational institutions needed to become more efficient formed a fundamental premise of education policy throughout the decade. This view appears clearly in an official report whose introduction states: "The challenge for Norwegian knowledge policy is that the country does not obtain sufficient competence from the talents of its population" (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1988, p. 7).

Plans to lower the school starting age and extend compulsory schooling from nine to ten years were also tied to broader societal goals of increasing productivity and profitability. Higher employment, particularly among women, was a key objective. If both parents were expected to work, greater kindergarten capacity was needed for children under the age of three. By moving six year olds from kindergarten into the school system, these aims could be met. Defenders of Reform 97 also argued that lowering the school starting age would promote equal opportunities, a perspective that can be associated with a civil order of worth.

Although many agreed that six year olds needed an educational provision prior to formal schooling and several organizational models had already been tested (Haug, 1994), there was widespread concern that including this age group within the school framework would lead to overly school like content and forms of work (Bjørnstad et al., 2024, pp. 34–35; Grødem, 1994).

Before the reform was passed in Parliament, opposition parties negotiated a compromise: they would support Reform 97 on the condition that the content of first grade be based on preschool pedagogy (Haug, 1994; Bjørnstad et al., 2024). This premise was incorporated into the final proposal voted on in Parliament, resulting in broad approval of the reform even among those initially opposed.

Nine years later, the reform Knowledge Promotion 2006 (Kunnskapsløftet 06) was introduced (Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 2006), further strengthening a results oriented education policy through the formulation of explicit learning objectives from first grade onward. After this reform, first grade became even more school like than originally intended (Bjørnstad et al., 2024).

The Steiner schools' resistance against Reform 97

The Association of Steiner Schools in Norway (Forbundet Steinerskolene i Norge) is the umbrella organization for all Norwegian Steiner schools. In autumn 1988, it received a letter from the Ministry of Church and

2. Citations from texts and titles in Norwegian, have been translated to English by the authors, Norwegian titles are put in brackets.

Education outlining plans to lower the school starting age from seven to six. Based on the available sources, this was the first official indication given to Steiner schools about the proposed change. The letter caused considerable concern within the Steiner educational community.

On behalf of the Association, child psychiatrist and school doctor Stein Schage responded. He argued that the values underpinning the reform did not sufficiently consider children's educational and social needs. Although acknowledging that schools must adapt to societal changes, he wrote: "When it comes to educational measures required for today's children, we have reached conclusions that contradict the Ministry's ideas" (Schage, 1988, p. 1). Schage contended that the Ministry's proposal, based on increasing "stimulation and teaching" for six year olds, would not help achieve the goal of making full use of schooling. He questioned whether the Ministry believed that children and schools could be compared "with a system where increased input results in increased output."

Schage referred to the Steiner educational tradition, in which play is considered the central mode of learning during early childhood, and where formal instruction in letters and numbers is deliberately postponed until after age seven. Instead, learning should occur "through imagination and movement" (Schage, 1988, p. 1). His argument drew on the long standing tradition of Steiner practice and on the school's authority as a state approved alternative (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet, 1985). The tone of the letter was sober and non emotional; Schage relied on professional expertise and practical experience rather than Steiner's underlying conceptual framework. The letter is an early example of tensions between the values underpinning the reform and the values behind Steiner pedagogy.

Early in the resistance efforts, the Association established a working group, later named the Working Group for Six Year Olds, comprising representatives from Steiner kindergartens and schools (Sundt, 1991). The group coordinated internal and external initiatives, including mapping existing provision for first graders (Heilevang & Sundt, 1993). A part time position was created to support the work (Sundt & Nome, 1992).

In spring 1992, the group organized a major public conference in Oslo attended by many, including several members of the Parliamentary Church and Education Committee. A newspaper covered the event (Haugstad & Rødland, 1992). The aim was to present a broad spectrum of arguments showing why six year olds should not start school and to demonstrate potential harm. Arguments from neuropsychology suggested that early school entry could impede brain development (Bergstrøm, 1992). Values associated with inspirational and domestic orders of worth were also mobilized at the meeting.

The anthology *Amputated childhood. About starting school for 6-year-olds* (Amputert barndom. Om skolestart for 6 åringene), compiled by Steiner school teacher Marianne Sevåg Vestly in 1992, collected contributions from different professions drawing on varied orders of worth (Vestly, 1992). Titles such as "Respect Childhood" (Bjørkvold, 1992), "In Defence of Childhood" (Mathisen, 1992), and "Children – Do We Have Time and Space for Them?" (Svarstad Haugland, 1992) express emotional engagement and highlight what was at stake. These can be read as reflecting an inspirational order of worth (Kvamme, 2024, p. 95).

Contributors such as James K. Uphoff and June Gilmore warned that premature school entry placed children at risk of academic failure (Uphoff & Gilmore, 1992). Neuroscientist Matti Bergstrøm similarly warned that early schooling could impair brain development (Bergstrøm, 1992). These contributions drew on professional expertise and thus reflect an industrial order of worth.

The volume also contained arguments grounded in Steiner pedagogy. Freya Jaffke appealed directly to Steiner's authority (Jaffke, 1992), while Inger Brochmann drew on pedagogical experience and used rhetorical and emotional appeals (Brochmann, 1992). Her argumentation, emphasizing trust in long standing practice, reflects a domestic order of worth.

In a white paper to the Parliament in 1993 (Stortingsmelding No. 40 (1992–93)), a formal proposal to lowering the school starting age in Norway was put on the table. The Steiner School Association issued a detailed statement outlining its critique against the proposal. It argued that the concept of school readiness had not been addressed, that the Ministry conflated maturation and habituation, and that evidence

from psychology, neuroscience, and experimental preschool programs contradicted the reform's premises (Steinerskolene i Norge, 1994). The Association predicted an increase in learning difficulties, need for special education, school fatigue, and reduced creativity, and expressed particular concern for boys' development. These arguments relied on professional expertise and could be seen as an expression of an industrial order of worth. The statement more or less accepted the reform's main objective and the political intentions behind it but strongly challenged the means of achieving the objective.

Despite extensive efforts, the resistance failed and the reform was passed in the Parliament. However, some compromises were reached. The proposal that was adopted stated that kindergarten educational practice and free play should be a core content in first grade. The Steiner schools shifted focus from opposing the change to securing approval for a distinct provision in first grade. A new framework plan (Heilevang, 1995), was approved by the ministry shortly before implementation (Det kongelige Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, 1997). The plan clearly reflects a preschool educational approach grounded in inspirational and domestic orders of worth, drawing primarily on long standing pedagogical practice. The most important feature was an intention to locate first grade in Steiner kindergartens, in age mixed groups.

From common struggle to internal tensions

A united Steiner educational movement (kindergarten and school) had secured the possibility of locating first grade in kindergarten. In the first years after the introduction of Reform 97, this was the most common practice. Twenty-eight years later, only two Steiner schools still have first graders in kindergarten (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2025). This shift has been challenging in many respects and has also generated internal tensions.

One reason was linked to the broad, outward-facing consensus communicated by the Steiner educational community ahead of the reform: the ideal solution was said to keep first-graders within the frame of the kindergartens, both pedagogical and practical. But even before the introduction of Reform 97, some Steiner schools already enrolled six-year-olds in age-homogeneous preschool groups (Informants No. 1, 3, 4). This was not communicated publicly during the struggle against the reform, perhaps since the intention was to appear outwardly united.

One informant recalls the difficulty of raising experiences from those working with age-homogeneous groups in internal seminars:

"I just remember the first time I was at a meeting like that ... we thought, oh no, we've sinned, but we weren't aware of it... I was almost a bit stunned, because it was very polarized" (Informant No. 1, p. 9, p. 4).

The informant adds that the lack of interest in this approach was interpreted as implying that those who had done so "were not fully up to date, anthroposophically. A little bit like that... to put it gently, right—you don't really know what you're doing" (Informant No. 1, p. 9). These statements reflect internal tensions between what might be called ideological hardliners and those who appeared more pragmatic. It seems obvious that argumentation based on an inspirational and a domestic order of worth could in some cases appear authoritarian and judgmental. Those who organised their work different from the ideal, experienced them self as sinners.

Gradually more Steiner schools began organizing first-graders in age-homogeneous groups. The main driver was often financial. It was more expensive for schools to pay kindergartens for locating first grade pupils, than to establish their own first grade groups on the school premises. Some schools also experienced declining enrolment, perhaps because parents grew uncertain about sending their first graders to kindergarten. This threatened to weaken the school's economic situation (Nome, 2000; Nome, 2001). These changes could be interpreted as grounded more in an industrial order of worth than in traditional educational values. From the perspective of an industrial order of worth, what a united Steiner educational movement had fought for, now appeared inappropriate.

As more schools chose to establish age-homogeneous groups located on the school premises, many

expressed concerns about the content in first grade. They feared that the content would be shaped by the school's way of working and thinking (Nome, 1997; Hovland & Sand, undated). The campaign against Reform 97 showed that teachers in Steiner schools and pedagogues in Steiner kindergartens shared the basic pedagogical ideas and "had a common tradition and history and spoke the same educational language" (Nome, 2001, p. 39). When the reform was implemented however, clear differences between the Steiner kindergarten tradition and the Steiner school tradition was displayed. There were differences in content, methods, and the educator's role across the first and second seven-year periods. In addition, the structures and the physical environment in the two institutions differed. The link between the physical environment and the possibility for children's healthy growth and development are often pointed out by Steiner (Steiner, 1919; Steiner, 2006). From a Steiner kindergarten perspective, the new first grade did not belong within the school structure and how to work with children in the first seven-year period was unknown territory to many schoolteachers. As one informant put it:

"...we felt it was important for them to experience that there were qualities that changed along the way. That this is worthy of imitation that the awareness of how you talk and move and handle tools and everything like that was very important with the youngest children, and then it changes upwards" (Informant No. 4, p. 7).

For understandable reasons, those familiar with kindergarten practice was a minority in school staff meetings, and it could be difficult to find time and space to raise questions about the specific needs of the youngest pupils. To avoid tensions caused by this potential lack of visibility, close cooperation between the first-grade teachers and the school leadership was important (Informants No. 1, 3, 4). The potential lack of visibility also raised questions about where first grade teachers should be organizationally located. The Steiner Kindergarten Association argued that those working with first graders in the schools should be members of the Kindergarten Association, and be given access to support, internal meetings and seminars along with the other Steiner kindergarten pedagogues (Hofstad, 2005). This is still current practice. Consequently, first grade teachers had a professional affiliation in two contexts, both as members of the staff in the schools, and as members of the kindergarten association. This is explainable within Steiner educational thinking, yet it also created potential for tensions between professions in day-to-day work.

In 2001, four years after the introduction of Reform 97, some of these issues were articulated in an internal memo to a meeting of the Steiner pedagogical community:

- "Do schools devalue the importance of educational work with young children?"
- "Are kindergartens too poorly trained in administration and financial management?"
- "Are the schools ideologically unclear, too pragmatic and financially driven?"
- "Are kindergartens too dogmatic in their thinking and inflexible in relation to the wishes and needs of families in our time?" (Nome, 2001, p. 39).

In the early 2000s, the need for better collaboration between schools and kindergartens regarding first-graders occurred repeatedly in minutes from internal meetings. It took time for the professional community to find solutions, both organizationally and pedagogically. Ten years after Reform 97, there remained a need to clarify the distinctiveness of Steiner education and to improve internal collaboration. In an article, Steiner kindergarten pedagogue Astrid Sundt describes the struggle against lowering the school entrance age and the situation in 2007, where both defeats and problems are evident. Sundt criticizes the internal work, but also outlines the way forward, referring, among other things, to the development of an educational platform for first graders as a necessary and important measure (Sundt, 2007).

The sources show that the Steiner Kindergarten Association employed a mixture of inspirational and domestic orders of worth in its arguments against the schools. Many statements can be interpreted as emotionally defending a tradition that reaches back to Steiner himself. The schools' actions were, by the Kindergarten Association, interpreted as expressions of an industrial order of worth, dominated by economic arguments and the need for efficient management, according to many kindergarten professionals. What had earlier been a joint value-based struggle against an external adversary had moved into the Steiner pedagogical community. It would take time to resolve these tensions.

Compromise

Against the background of the challenges, ambiguities, and internal tensions highlighted by Nome, Sundt, and others, the Steiner School Association and the Steiner Kindergarten Association intensified efforts to formulate joint guidelines for work with first grade. These were completed and published in 2008 (Lobben Røed, Alsos, & Nome, 2008) and constitute a concrete example of how the Steiner educational community sought to meet the requirements of the educational authorities while ensuring the quality and distinctiveness of provision for six-year-olds. The work can be interpreted as a compromise between the previously promoted ideal solution and what was possible within the new framework.

The guidelines aimed to clarify the distribution of responsibilities between school administrations and early childhood educators working with first graders to reduce the potential for problems and ambiguity (Lobben Røed, Alsos, & Nome, 2008). The document describes the legal basis for first grade services; collaborative routines if first grade is located in kindergarten and if it's organized as age-homogeneous groups; staffing requirements; and practical arrangements for indoor and outdoor spaces. A key motivation was concern that provision for first graders varied too much across schools and was not sufficiently clear as an educational alternative (Lobben Røed, Alsos, & Nome, 2008, p. 1). There is a clear intention to "set a minimum standard for how first grade should be organized in our schools" (p. 1). First grade should not adopt established school didactics: "the second grade's learning objectives and working methods should not be moved down." Preferably, first grade should have its own rooms and outdoor areas (Lobben Røed, Alsos, & Nome, 2008, p. 3). The guidelines also establish clear routines for collaboration on pedagogy, finance, and administration between the first-grade teacher and the school's principal and board. Although different organizational frameworks are made possible, the guidelines convey clear Steiner pedagogical values, norms, and intentions for the new first grade program.

The Steiner Kindergarten Association initiated internal work to strengthen knowledge of Steiner pedagogy's conceptual basis and values, especially the child's development prior to school entry. This is reflected in minutes from internal meetings and in articles in the Steiner kindergarten educators' magazine, *The Seasonal Letter* (Årstidsbrevet) (Lobben Røed, 2005; Sundt, 2009; Howard, 2009; Barkved, 2009). *The booklet The Six-Year-Old and Steiner Pedagogy in Practice* (Seksåringen og Steinerpedagogikk i praksis) contains many suggestions for shaping the program in accordance with key Steiner educational values (Lobben Røed, 2013). This indicates that it was necessary to clarify the profile and content of first grade.

Over time, the educational field appears to have gradually accepted the opponent's industrial order of worth, primarily in relation to the administrative and legal framework as a necessity if practice were to continue. Within the limits of this framework, Steiner pedagogical practice for six-year-olds was further developed and articulated. This process can be seen as a compromise between different orders of worth: both industrial-, inspirational- and domestic values.

In 2022, two surveys were conducted aimed to map both administrative aspects and the content of the educational program in first grade in Norwegian Steiner schools. The responses were summarized in a research report (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023) and show that the program for six-year-olds has a clear profile. In most Steiner schools, first graders are organized in age-homogeneous groups. A few schools still offer first grade integrated in age mixed groups in kindergartens. Regardless of location, the schools are financially and legally responsible. The teachers working with these groups have backgrounds in early childhood education. The groups are typically located on school grounds but are generally sheltered from the indoor and outdoor spaces used by the other classes. The areas are designed in line with kindergarten educational principles, as is the organization of the day. In most cases, a pedagogue is responsible for this year only and thus becomes a kind of specialist in pedagogy for this age, unlike the rest of the school where most teachers remain with a class for several years. In a few cases, the first grade teacher follows the group into primary school.

Free play is central: on average, just over an hour is set aside each day for indoor play and almost an hour and a half for outdoor play. A wide range of regular activities is used, such as eurythmy, hiking, wood crafts, weaving, felting, and painting. In addition, children participate in tasks with adults, including cooking, maintenance, gardening, and animal care. The program includes a daily assembly where children

and adults talk and reflect on current events. Storytelling is a regular feature, as are singing and music. There is no formal teaching of reading, writing, or arithmetic; numeracy and language development are nurtured through other activities. Digital toys or tools are not part of the first-grade program. At several schools, first graders participate in some whole-school activities, especially in the spring semester, which helps them become accustomed to being with the older pupils (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023; Stabel, 2024).

The report shows that the Steiner program for first graders has adapted to important requirements from Reform 97, primarily in organizational terms, though pedagogical changes are also visible. The first year in Steiner schools now appears to be a transitional year between kindergarten and school (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023, p. 16). The first year at school is clearly part of the school curriculum; the children are called pupils, and the pedagogue is called a teacher (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). Despite these changes, it remains a significant educational alternative in which central values from the Steiner tradition have been preserved.

Final discussion

How can the way the Steiner school movement challenged Reform 97 contribute to understanding how different actors operate when educational reforms are developed and implemented? Our findings confirm what other researchers have shown (Roos & Trippstad, 2015; Haug, 2015; Slagstad, 2017; Bjørnstad et al., 2024): that tensions exist between the political field and the field of educational practice. Viewed through the analytical lenses of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006; see also Hansen, 2016), the reason appears to be that the two fields are governed by different orders of worth, and the development of an educational reform may be interpreted as a clash of values.

We found that the political field primarily acted on the basis of industrial and civil orders of worth. The industrial order of worth highlights the need for effectiveness and economic sustainability, while the civil order of worth emphasizes equality and fair distribution of goods (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Hansen, 2016). With respect to Reform 97, the industrial order of worth emphasized more effective learning outcomes by starting formal education one year earlier and, additionally, provided access to kindergarten for thousands of children under three years of age at low cost. The civil order of worth emphasized how increased kindergarten provision could reduce social inequality, both because more children, regardless of family background, were given better opportunities for learning and development, and because more women gained opportunities to enter the labour market.

The field of educational practice, in our case the Steiner school movement, seemed to interpret the political field as dominated by industrial values and consequently adopted a contrary set of values in challenging the reform. The arguments were based on inspirational and domestic orders of worth. These implied emotionally and idealistically driven statements about a good childhood and the value of free, unregulated play on the one hand, and, on the other, statements expressing trust in traditions and authorities that did not seem to be acknowledged by the political field.

The Steiner school movement may place greater emphasis on domestic values than other educational practices, given the confidence derived from a century-long history (Jaffke, 1992; Brochmann, 1992). However, we find similarities in the way representatives of the kindergarten movement sometimes invoke authorities and traditions reaching back to Fröbel when arguing against reforms perceived as driven mainly by industrial values (Leirpoll, 2025). Arguing on the basis of a domestic order of worth is thus not solely a Steiner educational phenomenon, which strengthens the general relevance of this study.

We find that the field of practice tended to ignore the possibility that the reform was driven by the civil order of worth, likely to sharpen the dichotomy between the two fields. We also find that some arguments from the field of practice could be interpreted as an acceptance of the industrial value of effectiveness, for instance, when neuroscience was used by Steiner school representatives to demonstrate free play as an effective mode of learning (Steinerskolene i Norge, 1994). It seems that the field of practice, over time, to some extent accepted the reform's main objective and the political intentions behind it, while still actively challenging its content, that is, the means of achieving the objective.

Such acknowledgement perhaps made compromises possible and contributed to establishing kindergarten educational practice as core content in first grade when Reform 97 was implemented. For the Steiner school movement, the compromise was permission to locate first grade in Steiner kindergartens.

However, the initial dichotomy, the clash of values, appeared to move within the field of practice once the reform was adopted. The united front against the political field fragmented during implementation. Within Steiner education, the kindergarten movement seemed to interpret the school movement and school administrators as driven solely by cold industrial values as first class was brought into the schools, partly for economic reasons. Kindergarten representatives consequently positioned themselves in opposition, driven more by ideals and, in their view, being more faithful to tradition.

As with Reform 97 overall, the internal dispute ended in compromise. The kindergarten movement acknowledged the need for administratively and economically sustainable practice, and the school movement acknowledged that the content of first grade should continue to be dominated by free play and kindergarten traditions.

We assume that our findings indicate a pattern in how politically driven educational reforms are challenged. The dispute tends to create clear, dichotomous value positions between the political initiative and the field of practice, where each highlights the other's most contrary values. When reforms are adopted and implemented, the united front within the field of practice tends to fragment, and the clash of values reappears among different actors within practice. Nevertheless, compromises are possible in both phases. They can be reached if the two fields acknowledge each other's main objectives and shift from disputing the objectives to disputing the best means of achieving them.

Our assumption has been that the seemingly homogeneous set of values within the Steiner educational movement made it possible to display these processes clearly. However, more research on educational reforms involving other actors is needed to confirm our findings.

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When school starts at age six – a study on how first-grade teachers work with preschool-like time organization within the school's time structure

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for the playtime in everyday school life. I use the first-grade of Norwegian Waldorf schools as a case because, even after the school entry age was lowered from seven years to six in Norway in 1997, a play-based school day without formal reading and writing instruction was maintained in the first grades of Waldorf schools. This prioritization is in line with the original goals of the nationwide *Six-Year Reform* from 1997. The three qualities of chronological time (Chronos), cyclic time (Aion) and critical points in time (Kairos) are used in the analysis of interviews with five first-grade teachers in Waldorf schools in Norway. While school time is largely structured according to Chronos time, in preschool Aion time and Kairos time prevail. The study shows that especially cyclic time forms the basis for the pedagogical work in first-grade at Waldorf schools with playtime at the center, that time is organized rhythmically, and characterized by polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. To practice cyclic time in first-grade within the school's time structure is not self-evident but is possible under certain conditions: Firstly, there must be a fundamental acceptance of a school-independent daily rhythm, in which Aion time and Kairos time are safeguarded. Secondly, the transition to Chronos time must happen gradually throughout the whole first school year, and thirdly, playtime must be prioritized over academic skills.

Keywords: Rhythm; Play; Chronos; Kairos; Aion.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Dieser Artikel untersucht die Voraussetzungen für eine vorschulähnliche Zeitgestaltung in der ersten Klasse innerhalb einer schulischen Zeitstruktur, und welche Bedeutung diese für das Freispiel im Schulalltag hat. Als Fallstudie verwende ich die erste Klasse an norwegischen Waldorfschulen, da diese auch nach der Herabsetzung des Schuleintrittsalters von sieben auf sechs Jahre in Norwegen im Jahr 1997 einen freispielbasierten Schultag ohne formalen Lese- und Schreibunterricht in der ersten Klasse beibehalten haben. Diese Priorisierung entspricht den ursprünglichen Intensionen der landesweiten *Sechsjahresreform* von 1997. Die drei Qualitäten der chronologischen Zeit (Chronos), der zyklischen Zeit (Aion) und der Zeitpunkte günstiger Augenblicke (Kairos) werden in der Analyse von Interviews mit fünf Erstklassenlehrern an norwegischen Waldorfschulen verwendet. Während die Schul-Zeit weitgehend nach der Chronos-Zeit strukturiert ist, herrschen im Kindergarten die Aion- und die Kairos-Zeit vor. Die Studie zeigt, dass besonders die zyklische Zeit die Grundlage für die pädagogische Arbeit in der ersten Klasse an Waldorfschulen mit Freispiel im Zentrum bildet, dass die Zeit rhythmisch organisiert wird, und durch den Gebrauch von Polaritäten, Sequenzen, Ritualen und Timing gekennzeichnet ist. Eine zyklische Zeitgestaltung in der ersten Klasse innerhalb einer schulischen

Zeitstruktur ist keine Selbstverständlichkeit, jedoch unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen möglich: Erstens muss die grundsätzliche Akzeptanz eines schulunabhängigen Tagesrhythmus gegeben sein, in dem Aion- und Kairos-Zeit gewahrt bleiben. Zweitens muss der Übergang zur Chronos-Zeit schrittweise über das gesamte erste Schuljahr erfolgen, und drittens muss die Zeit für Freispiel höher priorisiert werden als die Zeit für Arbeit an Schulfächern.

Schlüsselwörter: Rhythmus; Spiel; Chronos; Kairos; Aion.

Introduction

While school time is controlled by the clock, organized into lessons and recesses, preschool¹ time is more flexible, organized around free play and open to individual adaptations. When the school entrance age in Norway was lowered from seven years to six in 1997², the original intention of the so-called *Six-Year Reform* was that the new “transitional pedagogy [...] should combine the best from preschool and the best from school [and that] six-year-olds should not have an ordinary school offer, but a preschool offer characterized by free and natural play” (Haug, 2015, p. 407)³. However, the reform was controversial from the beginning. Very few people outside the political arena spoke in favor of the reform or recognized the need for it. Almost no one believed that preschool was unsuitable for six-year-olds and there were no evidence-based arguments either.

Ultimately, however, as Haug (2015) points out, the debate was won by those who argued that this public school system also existed in other European countries, that there were unused classrooms in schools, that preschool places would be made available, and that children would be motivated to learn more at school. The Waldorf schools, however, succeeded in keeping their autonomy and were authorized to continue working with Waldorf preschool pedagogy in first-grade (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). 25 years later, the evaluation of the *Six-Year Reform* in public schools shows that the flexible time organization that characterizes preschool pedagogy has deteriorated in the first-grades. Play has been given lower priority, while the focus on subjects and literacy learning has increased considerably (Bjørnstad et al., 2024). This development is confirmed by several researchers. Olsson (2024) documents that today there are fewer opportunities for play in primary school than in preschool. Play has come under increasing pressure (Sirevåg, 2024), and it has caused concern that an increasing number of first-year students perceive the school’s academic requirements as stressful (Lunde & Brodal, 2022).

In this article, I explore the conditions necessary for first-grade teachers to work with preschool-like time and rhythm within the school’s time structure. A suitable place to explore this is the first-grade of Waldorf schools, which over the years have maintained a preschool-like time structure with long daily periods of play, indoors and outdoors, and without formal reading and writing instruction (Stabel & Østergaard, 2023). At Waldorf schools, the organization of time into daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms is of crucial importance for the educational work. Despite the long tradition of Waldorf education, however, there is still little scientifically based knowledge about it (Stabel & Holm, 2019). There is recent research on the use of time and rhythm in Waldorf preschools, for example Aerts (2019) and Aanstad (2025), and in Waldorf schools, for example Selsfors (2024), but there is no specific research on the use of time and rhythm in the Waldorf school’s first-grade where preschool practice and school practice meet. There is little research on the difference between preschool time and school time, but there is some, for example Goble (2020) and Matthews et al. (2016). Thus, a study of time organization in first-grade could provide research-based insights into the significance of time as an educational resource and its potential for working with six-year-

1. The term *preschool* refers to educational institutions for children aged three to five years.

2. In Norway the school year starts in August and ends in June. Since 1997, all children who turn six during the calendar year get enrolled in school. This means that there can be age differences of up to 12 months in a first-grade class, where the oldest children are six years and eight months, the youngest five years and eight months old.

3. All quotations that are not originally in English have been translated by me. This also applies to quotations from my interviews.

olds. On this basis, I will explore the following research question: *What are the prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what does this mean for playtime in everyday school life?* The study is based on interviews with five first-grade teachers in Norwegian Waldorf schools. As an analytical tool I use the three qualities of chronological time (Chronos), cyclic time (Aion) and critical points in time (Kairos), with particular emphasis on how time is organized as rhythms. As I will discuss in this article, these qualities of time are particularly relevant because their differences can also be found in children's experience of time in the first and second seven-year-period of their lives.

First-grade pedagogy in Waldorf schools

Waldorf pedagogy is based on a methodological approach rooted in the idea of holistic development, which takes place through interaction between children's personal development and their environment (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). «A key concept in the Waldorf school curriculum is that the content and form of teaching should be in harmony with children's learning processes and the stages of human development in childhood and adolescence» (Ullrich, 2015, p. 15). The basic idea is that children develop in seven-year rhythms, with each seven-year period having age-specific characteristics and learning styles. While children in the first seven-year period learn best through free imitation, sensory perception, movement, and play, children in the second seven-year period are most receptive to learning through emotional involvement and narratives from the teacher that appeal to their inner imagination. In the third seven-year period, learning is best achieved through cognitive understanding and independent judgment. The Waldorf educational understanding of children's development assumes that development does not take place linearly, but as a metamorphosis, which means a transformation through phases where each phase needs its own distinctive conditions and maturation time for building the foundation for the next phase. If development is forced, it weakens the subsequent phase of life instead of strengthening it (McKeen, 2011). It can be compared to the metamorphosis of a butterfly, which goes through various phases during its development, from egg to caterpillar to pupa, before transforming into a butterfly (Barz, 1990). Based on this developmental idea, time as an educational resource is used differently in each seven-year period.

Six-year-old children, who are in the transition from the first to the second seven-year period, form a category of their own. Although this transition varies from child to child, it follows specific patterns. A characteristic feature of this transition is that the children move away from spontaneous imitation of their surroundings to "new learning and thinking abilities (...); in particular, the possibility now arises to actively recall one's own memories" (McKeen, 2011, p. 69). In terms of the experience of time, this means the transition from a strong experience of the moment to the ability to distinguish between the past, present, and future (Lindholm, 2021).

In Norway, six-year-olds are school students, but to meet the great need of six-year-olds for play, movement, and motor development, Waldorf schools «use and deepen key values and working methods of Waldorf preschool education in first-grade» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45). This practice, which largely corresponds to the original intention of the Six-Year Reform (Bjørnstad et al., 2024), was incorporated into the Waldorf school's curriculum in 1997. Another intention of Waldorf pedagogy is to enable children to live in close connection with nature and the cycle of the seasons. Great importance is attached to the connection between the rhythms of nature and those of human beings, with the school year closely linked to the changing seasons. In general, the great emphasis of rhythms for educational work can be regarded as a distinctive feature of the Waldorf pedagogy (Gelitz, 2025).

Time and rhythm in education

According to Goble (2020), children experience time in a radically different way than adults. While adults primarily experience time as past, present, and future, young children primarily experience time as the «living now» (p. 181). Greek mythology distinguishes between three different characteristics of time and

personifies them as gods, each with their own distinctive features. Chronos, the creator of time itself, is the god of linear, chronological time, which flows continuously from the future through the present into the past (Hermsen, 2023). Chronos is portrayed standing in front of a sundial, holding an hourglass, an image of measurable time. Kairos is the god of opportunity, portrayed with wings on his back and heels, a bald spot on the back of his head, and a lock of hair on the front. Kairos moments are *critical points in time* that seize the opportunity when it arises. Kairos moments occur unannounced, are perceived as eternal, and cannot be planned, measured, or reversed (Tremel & Weigel, 2004). Closely connected to Kairos is Aion, the god of *cyclic time*, who is portrayed standing in the circle of the twelve astrological signs of the zodiac. The essence of cyclic time lies in the infinite cycle without beginning or end, as found, for example, in inhaling and exhaling, in the seasons, or in the tides. Cyclic time is characterized by a rhythmic flow that creates continuity and can have a regulating effect. In contrast to a rigid time measure without flexibility, rhythm has the ability to adapt elastically (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002). Thus, the cyclic time of Aion is closely related to the quality of rhythm. Hoerner (2006) understands rhythm as a solid framework that lends people stability. Rhythms, he underlines, are found in all life processes and are characterized by «polarity and balance, continuous renewal, and elastic adaptation» (p. 24). Steiner (1982, 2009) particularly emphasized the importance of rhythmic life processes for healthy human development. To prevent children from getting exhausted at school, Steiner recommends structuring the school day in a lively and dynamic way (Steiner, 2009; Mathisen, 2015). According to Steiner (1982), harmonizing the relationship between the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects strengthens the child's physical and mental foundation for life. The most important task of the teacher is therefore, to teach children to breathe and to find the right balance between inhaling and exhaling.

Applied to first-grade, chronological time is expressed in the length of the school day or the school year, cyclic time in the cycle of the seasons, and critical moments in time in the timing of the duration of activities throughout the day. The quality of Kairos time holds the potential to preserve the child's presence in the moment. The younger the child, the more it lives in this quality of time. The quality of Aion time holds the potential for regular recurrence and opportunities for practice and repetition. The quality of Chronos time holds the potential for planning and organization. This measurable, linear property of time also has the potential to promote the child's gradually awakening awareness of time as past, present, and future. This awareness goes hand in hand with the ability to connect events with the causes of these events (Lindholm, 2021). Thus, all three qualities of time have a function and a place in education. All three can be found both in preschool and in school. However, whereas Aion time and Kairos time are mainly linked to preschool education, Chronos time is primarily found in school education (Goble, 2020). The question is, thus, how all three time qualities can be expressed and worked with in first-grade without the dominance of Chronos-time.

Method

The case study is based on interviews with five first-grade teachers at four Norwegian Waldorf schools. One of the schools had two parallel first-grade classes, and I interviewed the teachers of both classes. Three of the first-grade teachers were trained teachers whereas two were trained preschool teachers. They all worked exclusively in first-grade, and at the time of the interviews in June 2023, they had respectively one, two, three, five, and ten years of professional experience as first-grade teachers. There is a total of 33 Waldorf schools in Norway spread across the country, about a third of which is located in and around the greater Oslo region (<https://www.steinerskolen.no/vare-skoler/>). Three of the schools I chose were located in and around Oslo and one in Southern Norway; three in rural areas, one in a city. The participants, whom I already knew from before, were informed in advance about the interview topic, the audio recording, and their right of withdrawal. I chose semi-structured interviews, because, in addition to fixed topics and procedures, they allow for unplanned follow-up questions that can reveal nuances and unforeseen aspects (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide covered three topics: 1. How and in which areas first-grade teachers use rhythm in their educational work. 2. How first-grade teachers justify their use of rhythm in their work. 3.

What chances and challenges first-grade teachers experience in their work with rhythm as an educational tool.

Nilssen (2014) points out that researchers who work with qualitative methods need to be aware of their own prejudices, subjectivity, and personal biases. As an employee in preschool teacher training at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, with 16 years of practice visits in preschools and first-grade classes my preunderstanding has both weaknesses and strengths. The weaknesses lie in the danger of having too strong opinions and not keeping enough personal distance to the content of the conversation. The strengths lie in the fact that I have specialist knowledge and can ask relevant follow-up questions, which «can maximize the potential for gathering and producing meaningful information» (p. 29). In order to draw valid conclusions from the data, the basis for one's own analyses and interpretations must be made transparent to the reader in the text (Postholm & Jakobsen, 2021). I have attempted to achieve transparency through a thematic analysis of the empirical material according to Braun and Clarke (2006), who present a six-step method for identifying, analyzing, and presenting patterns and themes in data. The method is suitable for my data material because the analysis steps are concrete and at the same time allow for flexibility.

In the first step, I familiarized myself with the material by transcribing it manually and then reading all the interviews. In the second step, I reread the interviews and created an initial list of ideas about what the data contained and what was interesting about it. This data was then sorted into six categories. In this way, the data material was reduced and summarized into units of analysis. In the third step, based on the research question and theory, I developed, out of the six categories, rhythm practice as the one main theme with the following four subthemes: polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. The fourth step involved first examining this theme as the most relevant and determining whether subthemes needed to be combined or split or new subthemes added. Then, validity was assessed, whether there was consistency between the main theme, the subthemes and the dataset. In the fifth step, to avoid overlaps, I determined which aspect of the data was covered by each subtheme. The sixth step consisted of summarizing and discussing the results, as presented in the following chapters.

Interviewing first-grade teachers without observation of their practices means that the results do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about the actual use of time and rhythm, but only about what they say about this use. However, it is valuable to gain an insight into what the teachers themselves say and emphasize about their work with time and rhythm.

Four methodical features of the organization of time and rhythm

The findings show that time and rhythm is a core pedagogical resource in the daily work of all five first-grade teachers. The interviews show a remarkable degree of consensus in the teacher's description of their work with time and rhythm. Their descriptions reveal four methodical features: polarity, sequence, rituals and timing.

Polarity

All first-grade teachers report that throughout the school year they maintain a rhythmic alternation between everyday routines and special events such as the school's seasonal celebrations. They also all report that the seasons of the year form the overall rhythm on which all other rhythms are based. The daily rhythm is organized like a pendulum between adult-directed and child-directed activities, or as the teachers call it, inhaling and exhaling. This implies that «the children have phases where they sit quietly and phases where they are active, and some things are directed by me [the teacher] and others by them (2.1)⁴». Also within children's play time the teachers can observe a rhythm:

I think that free play largely consists of inhaling and exhaling. When children play freely, there are times when they sit quietly and play that they are eating or pretend to eat or just sit and listen to someone else. And then

4. Read: *Interview 2, page 1*. This comment applies to all subsequent quotations from the interviews.

there are other times when they move around and maybe run after each other or roll on the floor (...). So during this time, there is a lot of breathing in and out, I think. (...) Sometimes there are quite a lot of loud voices and a lot of activity, and then it calms down a bit, only to pick up again (2.3).

The concepts of inhalation and exhalation can be interpreted as an expression of the methodological idea in Waldorf pedagogy that the rhythmic alternation between polarities has an energizing power that prevents children from getting exhausted (Steiner, 1982). In first-grade, the rhythm of alternation is different from in the rest of the school. All first-grade teachers report having a preschool-like daily rhythm that is independent of the school and not divided into lessons and recesses:

Recess doesn't work for them [because] they spend a lot of time planning their play first, and if the bell would ring half an hour later, they would never get to play what they had planned (5.2-3).

All first-grade teachers experience the independence of the school's time structure as positive because it allows them to organize time according to the children's needs. However, this independence can also cause challenges when it conflicts with the school's schedule. One teacher mentions outdoor playtime: «Sometimes we go to a place where we can be on our own if I see that it is getting too rough (...) because the older school children can be a little scary» (2.9-10). Another teacher emphasizes on the other hand the advantages of everyone knowing each other:

The fact that we meet each other during the day helps them [first-graders] get to know each other and feel secure. (...) So the fact that I am also familiar with the older children and have a good relationship with my colleagues helps to make the first-graders feel secure (4.1-2).

Another challenge can be that first-grade teachers may feel a bit isolated, for example during the monthly assemblies, which first-graders often do not participate in. These assemblies are events that mark the student's academic progress, «where the whole school comes together to share glimpses of their daily work» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 170). One first-grade teacher describes the experience like this:

We can participate a little bit (...) inside the main hall, for example at Christmas. But we have not been to the regular monthly assemblies for the older children yet, (...) though I would like to see some more monthly assemblies. (...) Yet, they [the students] are not even actively participating in the first half of second grade, so it's not natural for first-graders to be actively participating either (1.3).

The fact that these monthly assemblies are not yet suitable for first-graders is described by one of the first-grade teachers as «a bit of a sore point» (1.3). Others decide not to participate, or to participate only as an audience.

All first-grade teachers report that about half of the school day is set aside for free play, with about an hour indoors in the morning and one to two hours outdoors in the afternoon. In addition, there is at least one outdoor day trip per week, which also mainly consists of free play. According to the teachers, this amount of free play is necessary to balance the adult-directed activities.

Sequence

In the daily rhythm, it is precisely the maintenance of the same, steady sequence of activities that characterizes the rhythmic pattern:

We don't follow the clock; it's more the sequence of the activities that creates a rhythm, rather than it taking a certain amount of time. (...) You must stick to the rhythm. You can't just come in and do things on impulse. (...) That doesn't mean you can't freshen up the rhythm and take little breaks; they [the breaks] help to awaken a little bit, but you must be true to the rhythm (4.17-18).

The weekly rhythm also ensures that the order of activities and meals is always the same on the same day of the week. The fact that baking always takes place on Thursdays, for example, can increase some children's sense of security. Conversely, changing the order, especially in the daily rhythm, can easily create uncertainty:

I notice very clearly that if it's a day that's going to be a little different, the children get very confused, and some of the children who may already be a little restless become even more restless. (...) Then they might ask, 'Aren't

you going to tell a fairytale today?' – 'Of course, but today we told the fairytale at the beginning of the day'. They had already forgotten because they expected the fairytale to come as part of the regular rhythm (2.1).

All first-grade classes have a daily work period directed by adults. However, within certain limits, children can choose how much they want to participate in the activity. On painting day, for example, «everyone sits down at the same time and paints, but they can choose whether they want to paint more than one picture» (1.5-6), because «in parallel with all the set activities, there is free play» (1.8). All teachers say that they do not work with academic progression, but that everything they do is a preparation for what is to come. One first-grade teacher says «it is all about the process and the joy of creating, not the result» (4.8-9). Another teacher points out that...

...we are more concerned with the development of each individual child. That I can compare you with yourself before and now, rather than comparing you with a general 'this is what children your age should be able to do' (5.6-7).

Rituals

All first-grade teachers agree that rituals help create a rhythm, a framework. Among many examples, here is one:

When we have finished tidying up, we go into the fairytale room and I lit the candle, sing the fairytale song, and then tell the fairytale. And then we have the same song to end the fairytale (...) It's not like I ring a bell and say 'now it's time to gather' or anything like that. It's through being suggestive, through little rituals, that the children know what's coming next (4.5).

Rituals are cultural acts that are characterized by being stable over time, repeated regularly, and having a sensuous dimension (Wicklund, 2005). The goal is not to get it done as quickly as possible; on the contrary, those who perform the ritual are «concerned with completing the ritual, at a familiar pace and rhythm, while making sure that the details are included» (p. 48).

Attention is on the sensory experiences of colors, smells, sounds, and people's movements in the present moment. One first-grade teacher says that «we are vibe workers» (4.18) and continues: «The most important thing besides rhythm is what the adults transmit» (4.18). Teachers have an important task in carrying out the rituals in such a way that they appear as clear, atmosphere-creating markers when working with time and rhythms.

Only one teacher mentions a disadvantage to rhythmic work: «As an adult, you can perhaps slip into a kind of dormancy, where you lose awareness of what you are doing» (4.14). Apart from that, all teachers express that they experience significant advantages with a steady rhythm in their educational work: «The rhythm is the foundation; it enfolds everything else» (4.11-12) and: «rhythm creates predictability and security» (1.7-8), which the teachers emphasize as a prerequisite for good relationships and learning. Another advantage mentioned is that as an adult, «you save energy and know what to do at any time» (5.1).

Timing

Rhythmic work in first-grade is all about timing, about doing the right things at the right time. The ability to time things correctly is necessary in various situations. One type is related to the start or end of an activity:

Around 10 o'clock it's tidy-up time, but if I see that they're playing really well, then we wait a little longer (...) I might put it off for 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour because I can see that they need to play longer today. Or if I see that they're just running around and have actually finished playing, then we tidy up earlier. I can't have a rhythm that's completely rigid to the minute. I feel that the rhythm must follow the child (2.6).

Another first-grade teacher describes working with timing in this way:

Then it's tidy-up time, and we have lunch at half past ten. (...) If I had said that it was tidy-up time now, there would have been protests. But when I say there are 10 minutes left [until tidy-up time], they feel like they have

all the time in the world, and then it's up to them. And then it's also a thing that after a while, they start to understand what 10 minutes are (1.8-9).

Another type of situation is linked to long-term projects that can last throughout the entire school year, such as making hobby horses. In such long-term projects, timing becomes more flexible and gives children the opportunity to work at their own pace:

We started finger knitting reins [for the hobby horse] back in November, and some children had finished theirs by December (...) but the last one to finish the finger knitting for the reins finished two weeks ago [in June]. That option existed the whole time, though. The balls of wool and the works [reins] were in a basket, and we took them out once a week. Some children want to finger knit 10 or 20 rounds, while others almost throw up at the thought of doing two. (...) But then they can do just two, because we have plenty of time! If they do two a week, we'll get it done. And we have. It worked out really well for everyone (5.9-10).

A third type of situation where timing is required, is related to the different stages of development within the group of first-graders:

There is such a big difference between these first-graders; some are very into play and the world of fantasy, while others have started to let go a little and want something real. We have some who could have listened to the same fairytale for weeks and who almost enter a state of meditation when I tell it. Others are starting to become a little more alert and want to move on and ask questions, so there is a wide range. So having a very schematic idea that we should get this far by this time, that... I can have an idea, a thought about the path we should take, but then I have to take individual considerations into account (4.7).

While the facilitation of polarities, sequences, and rituals can be planned in Chronos time, timing has the quality of Kairos-time and cannot be planned in advance. The skill of timing requires the adult to be able to read the children individually and as a group (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). Timing requires a watchful eye, good judgement and decisiveness, as well as experience and intuition. According to Steiner (2009), «teachers must have an artistic sense in their soul» (p. 39) because they also deal with things that cannot be weighed or measured, but which are nevertheless of importance.

To judge whether the timing works or not, one teacher says that «it's like music, you notice if something is out of rhythm, if [for example] the children become restless and are unable to play» (4.12-13). Another first-grade teacher puts it this way:

I guess it's just that I have to watch the children, observe them, and I think I notice a certain uneasiness if things take too long or if they never finish things. So then you have to see, ok, where can I make a change so that they can finish? (5.12)

To get the timing right, it is crucial to use the rhythm's ability to adapt elastically (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002; Hoerner, 2006) to create a balanced rhythm between inhalation and exhalation throughout the day. In their daily work, first-grade teachers navigate between the improvised and the structured and stand out as «rhythm artists» (Mathisen & Birkeland, 2017, p.1). While they are present in Kairos time together with the children and follow the rhythm of the group, they also remain conscious of the daily rhythm of Chronos time.

Time and rhythm in the light of Chronos, Kairos and Aion

In order to answer the research question about the prerequisites for preschool-like use of time in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for the position of play in everyday school life, I will discuss some key differences between time use in preschool and school in light of the time qualities in Chronos, Kairos, and Aion, based on the data material.

Free play or recess

Waldorf pedagogy strongly emphasizes free play for children. For the potential of play to unfold, children need both regular opportunities and sufficient time to play. While school time is structured in the precise

alternation between lesson and recess, preschool time consists of more flexible, longer periods of free play and only shorter, adults-directed work sessions. Goble (2020) claims that school pedagogy is characterized by Chronos time, while preschool pedagogy is characterized by Kairos time. The first-grade teachers' statement, that recess does not work for first-graders, can be interpreted as their appreciation and approval of the intrinsic value of play. The long, daily periods of free play in first-grade are one of the areas that clearly distinguish it from the rest of the school's time structure. According to Goble (2020), children's experience of Kairos time is facilitated precisely by giving them plenty of Chronos time. According to the Waldorf school's curriculum (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021), generous time for children's free play should be emphasized, «because it gives them the opportunity to achieve deep concentration and experience the joy of creation» (p. 46).

The fact that play is given such high priority in Waldorf schools' first-grade is unique (Gelitz, 2024). This becomes particularly clear when compared to for example so-called «learning station activities» (Olsson, 2024, p. 37), which are often used in Norwegian public schools. In such arrangements, children switch every 15 minutes between different activities in different places in the classroom, one of which is often called play. Based on what the first-grade teachers expressed in my study, such 15 minutes of playtime would be insufficient to engage children in deep play. The relatively short, limited duration of Chronos time seems to make it difficult to experience Kairos time and leaves little room for a rhythmic flow of inhalation and exhalation. In the first-grade of Waldorf schools, as data show, teachers use observation of inhalation and exhalation processes during playtime as a guideline for determining the right time to start and end playtime.

This illustrates how rhythm as inhalation and exhalation processes can be actively used in daily educational work to promote optimal conditions for play.

The first-grade teachers see the long, daily periods of free play, both indoors and outdoors, in the morning and in the afternoon, as a prerequisite for engaging in deep play. Given that «the practical aspect is strong in first-grade» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45), it can be argued that the time devoted to children's free play reflects the Waldorf pedagogical philosophy that play is considered the most important area of learning for first-graders. Play thus meets the needs of six-year-olds in the here and now and is at the same time essential as a foundation for later academic learning.

Although the high priority given to play in first-grade guarantees children plenty of playtime, this priority, however, can also create a certain distance to the rest of the school. Precisely because first-graders follow their own daily rhythm, they have fewer opportunities to play with other children at school who are not in the same age group. This can be considered a disadvantage. For play to reach its full potential, it is therefore crucial to think about the framework created for playtime and the play-opportunities that this framework provides.

Seasonal festivals or monthly assemblies

At the seasonal festivals, which are a central part of Waldorf schools, the seasons and the associated Christian holidays are celebrated each year. In this rhythmic recurrence of celebrations, the cyclic quality of the Aion time becomes particularly apparent. Seasonal festivals are held in both preschool and school. Thus, first-graders can recognize the festivals from preschool and at the same time experience a sense of belonging to the social community of the rest of the school. In this way, the reliable and familiar cycle of seasonal festivals forms an important bridge between preschool and school. Precisely because first-graders follow a daily rhythm that is independent of the school's timetable, the seasonal festivals celebrated together with the entire school are important to develop a sense of belonging and strengthening the social community at school.

Also the monthly assemblies are held in a recurring cycle, but unlike the seasonal festivals that follow the rhythms of nature, the monthly festivals are «an event at Waldorf schools where students, teachers, and often parents come together to participate and gain insight into what is being worked on in the various subjects and at the different grade levels» (Stene, 2019, p. 259). A key element of monthly assemblies is the academic progress of the students. The measurable, linear quality of Chronos time is clearly evident here.

The educational value of such academic presentations is considered «to strengthen the cohesion between each individual class and the school as a whole» (Stabel & Jørgensen, 2019, p. 63), while giving students a perspective on their personal development path. First-graders who are not yet working on academic progression cannot actively participate in such events; they can only attend as audience. Several first-grade teachers therefore consider participation in the monthly assemblies to be premature and would like to save this experience for the next school year. This means that first-graders face a fundamental limitation in one of the most important tasks of the school, namely working on academic progression. In this sense, the monthly assemblies highlight that the first-grade transitional pedagogy, where «the best of preschool and school [should] characterize the content and working methods», (Haug, 2015) stands as an independent but also somewhat isolated element between preschool and school. Looking at the prerequisites for preschool pedagogy within the school structure, it can be argued that the Chronos-like monthly assemblies that mark academic progression are at odds with preschool-like pedagogy. On the other hand, seasonal festivals that mark recurring celebrations in the annual cycle help to strengthen Aion-like preschool education in first-grade and at the same time create a sense of unity between first-grade and the rest of the school.

Voluntary or mandatory participation

A special feature of the adult-directed activities in the first-grade of Waldorf schools is that the children are given plenty of time and space to work individually on an activity. This is expressed, for example, in long-term projects such as crafting hobby horses. When the basket with the balls of wool for the hobby horse reins is brought out once a week, some children will finger knit ten or more rounds, while others barely manage two. Although it is mandatory for all children to complete their projects during the school year, the large timeframe for this work gives children a choice and allows them considerable control over the process and their own progress. Some six-year-olds are more advanced in their development than others. The procedure shows how teachers can take into account the significant developmental differences among first graders within a class when carrying out projects. This way of working is characteristic of Waldorf preschool pedagogy, where adults do not demand children to participate in activities, but only encourage participation by performing the activity themselves (Ullrich, 2015). In such an open setting, Aion time plays a central role. Taking out the basket with the balls of wool every week throughout the entire school year creates a rhythm that provides predictability and reassurance that there will always recur new opportunities to continue the work and complete it. The predictability of the activities in the weekly rhythm ensures continuity and regularity, in addition to preventing the feeling of engaging in «singular events along a timeline, disconnected from the eternal cycle of time» (Lindholm, 2021, p. 78). However, leaving the pace of work and progression largely up to the children themselves makes it difficult to map their learning progress in Chronos time. The fact that Waldorf school first-grade teaching is more process-oriented than results-oriented (Steinerskoleforbundet 2021, p. 45) can be seen as a weakness, since progress and learning outcome are not immediately measurable. At the same time, it can be seen as a strength, since progress and learning outcome can grow out of the child's inner motivation and thus be more in line with the child's natural experience of Kairos time. A crucial prerequisite for such a volunteer-based way of working is that the time frame for an activity is sufficiently long so that the activity is not primarily governed by chronological time, but rather by the cyclic rhythm of Aion time.

The weekly painting day is another example of giving children plenty of time and freedom in connection with an activity. On painting day, «everyone sits down at the same time and paints, but they can choose whether they want to paint more than one picture» because «in parallel with all the organized activities, there is free play». The painting activity thus begins with a mandatory part, which can be seen as having Chronos time quality because all children are expected to do the same thing at the same time. After the mandatory part, however, the children are free to decide whether they want to continue with painting or not, based on their own motivation. This part of the activity opens for Kairos moments in which children who want to continue painting can do so, engage with the activity, and immerse themselves completely in painting. Children who no longer want to paint can end the activity and go and play. The combination of Chronos and Kairos time in one and the same activity can be described as a characteristic feature of transitional

pedagogy in first-grade, as it considers both the school time structure and the flexible schedule of preschool.

A third example of an activity involving voluntary and mandatory elements is tidying up after free play. The difference between Kairos and Chronos time is particularly clear here: the first-grade teacher is focused on the clock and wants to start the meal on time. The children, on the other hand, are absorbed in their play, in what Goble calls the «living now» (2020, p. 181). The first-grade teacher expects that «if I had said it was time to tidy up, there would have been protests». She therefore tells the children that they can continue playing for 10 minutes before they have to stop. This gives the children a period of time during which they can, but also must, control themselves. By setting a time limit for the transition from play to tidying up, the teacher shows respect for the children's play and avoids protests and unrest in the group. At the same time, the warning serves as a reminder not to start anything that cannot be completed within the next 10 minutes. The first-grade teacher has introduced the children to the logic of Chronos time; it is mandatory that the children finish playing within 10 minutes. At the same time, there is an element of voluntariness in that the children themselves can choose how they want to spend these last 10 minutes of playtime. In this situation, the cyclic quality of Aion time is central. Through the daily reminder, the first-grade teacher gives the first-graders a feel for the quality of Chronos time, which, according to the first-grade teacher, will ultimately lead to an understanding of this quality of time. On the one hand, it can be argued that the logic of Chronos time creeps into the preschool-like time organization of first-grade. On the other hand, the introduction of Chronos time can be seen as a characteristic of transitional pedagogy, where «first-graders should practice good work habits and share new learning experiences and insights with their peers» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021, p. 45). Another crucial fact is that the situation in which children encounter Chronos time occurs in an everyday, natural context.

As the discussion shows, Chronos time is linked to mandatory participation in an activity, while Kairos and Aion time are more linked to a voluntary participation. Nevertheless, all three qualities of time in Chronos, Kairos and Aion have a function in the everyday school life of first-graders. They do not need to be mutually exclusive, but can complement each other, given that Chronos time does not dominate, but occur in combination with Kairos and Aion time.

Prerequisites for preschool-like time organization in first-grade

The first-grade teachers in this study consistently demonstrate active and highly conscious use of time and rhythm as a pedagogical resource. The study of the conditions for preschool-like use of time in first-grade within the school's time structure, and what this means for play-time in everyday school life, has led to several findings: When working with first-graders, it is crucial to organize time rhythmically, which is characterized by the use of polarity, sequence, rituals, and timing. Working with time as rhythm based on these four principles helps to ensure and maintain a preschool-like use of time characterized by the qualities of Aion and Kairos time within the school's Chronos-based time structure.

First-grade teachers find it very enriching to work with time and rhythm similar to that of preschool. They do not experience any profound challenges regarding the school's time structure inside the classroom but can do so outside the classroom. This is most evident when first-grade teachers must decide whether six-year-olds should participate in the monthly assemblies, an event that marks academic progress, something that six-year-olds in Waldorf schools are not yet working on. On the one hand, this shows that first-graders are not involved in one of the school's most central concerns, namely academic progress. On the other hand, it also shows that the school accepts the first-grade teachers' choice whether or not to attend the monthly assemblies. The fundamental acceptance of a school-independent daily rhythm, underlying the freedom of choice regarding the participation in school-related events, is a basic prerequisite that must be met in order to enable a preschool-like time organization within the school's time structure. In other words, instead of responding to the school bell, first-grade teachers must have the freedom to respond to the specific needs of each group of children. This freedom allows for a balanced shift between what they call inhalation and exhalation, like the polarity between adult-directed activities and children's self-directed play. The relationship between rhythm and play lies in the flexible duration of playtime in accordance with

the needs of each group. The duration of an activity should not have to be determined in advance; rather, it should be possible to adapt it to the situation at hand. Regarding the timing, doing the right thing at the right time, first-grade teachers must be independent of a Chronos-time schedule like the one used in schools and instead be able to ensure a flexible time organization based on Aion and Kairos time.

Another central prerequisite for the use of preschool-like time within the school's time structure is that the transition to the school's Chronos time happens gradually. This means that the adaption to Chronos-time must be smooth and flexible throughout the entire first school year. This enables learning processes that are governed by the child's individual interests and not primarily by given competence goals.

Also, time and space for activities must be so large scaled that the children can work at their own pace. For first-grade teachers as well, the time frame must be spacious. In the widest sense, this means that first-grade teachers should not have to work with school related academic progression, but instead with the foundation for later academic progression, as it is anchored in the original intentions of the transitional pedagogy (Haug, 2015; Steinerskoleforbundet, 2021). Both the first-grade teachers, the Waldorf school curriculum, and the original intentions of the Six-Year Reform agree that sufficient playtime in first-grade lays a solid foundation for later learning. This means that playtime must be prioritized over academic skills.

Overall, the discussion of prerequisites for preschool-like use of time and rhythm in first-grade is a question of what is at stake if playtime and a safeguarding of Aion-time and Kairos-time in first-grade do not get better conditions than it has today. Considering the fact that more and more first-graders experience the school's academic requirements as burdensome (Lunde & Brodal, 2022), there must be fostered an understanding that a play-based school day is for the benefit of the children in first-grade. To preserve the unique feature of transitional pedagogy in first-grade, the quality of Aion-time and Kairos-time must be ensured. Especially today, when many areas of life are characterized by a lack of rhythm, maintaining and promoting rhythms in everyday life can have a regulating, stabilizing and health-promoting effect (Goebel & Glöckler, 2002).

There is, however, a need for further research on what role time and rhythm can have in the school's everyday life and how rhythmic work can best be achieved. Especially for Norwegian Waldorf schools, this study has raised questions about what place the first-grade has within the entire Waldorf preschool and school system. In terms of administration, first-graders are school students, but in terms of education, they get an extra year of preschool pedagogy. Considering the transitional pedagogy, which intends to unite the best from preschool and school (Haug, 2015), it appears that the actual situation could also point in a different direction: First-graders are neither affiliated with preschool anymore nor have they become full members of the school yet. The fact that the children get a new teacher after the first year at school can also be perceived as somewhat disharmonious, since such a change of teacher is not in line with the principle of Waldorf pedagogy, according to which a teacher should teach the same class from the first up to the eighth grade (Ullrich, 2015). Considering the importance of working with time and rhythm in Waldorf pedagogy as a whole, the first-grade may seem like a somewhat unrhythmic element in this entity. An important voice that could bring the research further is the one of the six-year-olds themselves. The children's perspective can provide firsthand insights into how first-graders experience their own school life and the opportunities for play within it.

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Values Education in Steiner Schools: Teachers' Perspectives on the Physical Environment as a Pedagogical Resource

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the role of the physical environment in early childhood values education in Steiner schools in Norway, seen from the perspective of teachers. The design of the learning environment in first grade in Norwegian Steiner schools is intentionally aimed at enabling play and hands-on learning, in line with the pedagogical principles of Steiner education, contrasting significantly the learning environment in Norwegian public schools. The study examines how the physical environment functions as a pedagogical resource by enabling play, community building, and encouraging care for the surroundings. The research draws on qualitative data from interviews with six first-grade teachers from four different Steiner schools in Norway, providing insight into their perceptions of the physical space as a tool for fostering shared experiences and ethical reflection. The findings are analysed in relation to Steiner's educational philosophy, Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body in human consciousness, and Dewey's philosophy of experiential learning. This article contributes to a deeper understanding of early childhood values education and emphasizes the significance of the physical environment in shaping pedagogical experiences. The findings will be of interest to educators and researchers in both Steiner schools and public schools.

Keywords: physical environment, values education, Steiner pedagogy, early childhood education.

Introduction

The intentional design of the physical environment in first grade in Norwegian Steiner schools is aimed at facilitating play and practical learning. In many aspects, the design is similar to the one used in Steiner kindergartens (Steinerskoleforbundet/The Steiner School Association 2020, p. 28). This design differs significantly from the physical learning environment in first grade at Norwegian public schools.

After the introduction of the «Six-Year Reform», implemented in 1997, the starting age for compulsory education was lowered from seven to six years in Norway. The intention behind the reform was to create a smoother transition from kindergarten to school, allowing for more play-based learning in the early years of schooling. However, the reform has since been criticized for reducing the emphasis on play, prioritizing learning outcomes and formal schooling (Becher & Høyland, 2021). The term «chairification» (in Norwegian: «*stolifisering*» Becher, 2018) refers to the increasing use of desks and chairs in first grade after the «Six-Year Reform» and indicates a growing emphasis on formal learning (Becher, 2018). In contrast,

Norwegian Steiner schools chose to maintain a kindergarten-like approach in first grade, in line with the principles of Waldorf pedagogy, prioritizing play and social skills, to facilitate a more age-appropriate early childhood education. This is reflected in the design of the physical environment (Stabel, 2023). The contrast between the pedagogical approach in first grade in public schools and Steiner Schools creates an interesting opportunity for an examination into how the environment plays a role as a pedagogical resource in schools.

The pedagogical design of the physical environment in preschools is given great importance in both public and Steiner kindergartens, based on an understanding of early childhood education as rooted in bodily and sensory experiences, as well as the value of free play (Kunnskapsdepartementet/The Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017). However, this perspective seems to hold less significance in a school context (Becher & Høyland, 2021). The school's physical environment easily fades into the background of our attention. The surroundings «are just there», and so we seldom question them. Yet, the specific design of the physical environment plays a crucial role in either allowing or inhibiting certain uses or activities. In this way, the physical environment of the school can inform us about pedagogical values, expectations and attitudes.

In this article, I examine how teachers understand the physical environment as part of values education in first grade in Norwegian Steiner schools by posing the following research questions:

1. What constitutes the values education in first grade in Steiner schools?
2. How does the physical environment serve as a pedagogical resource in the values education?

The term «values education» is used to describe the ethical formation that is part of the subject *Religion and Ethics* at Steiner schools in Norway. One purpose of this subject is to provide practice in exploring existential questions and considering others' perspectives. The subject is intended to support ethical reflection, wonder, and philosophical conversation (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 110).

The term «pedagogical resource» as used in this context aligns with Selander's definition, referring to a collective category of artifacts employed in education to support and enhance the development of pupils (Selander, 2003). Furthermore, the term «physical environment» refers to the physical design of educational spaces, both indoor and outdoor (University of Oslo, 2020).

To address the two-part research question, I will first provide an overview of the fundamental principles of Steiner pedagogy and examine some key aspects of first-grade education in Steiner schools. This discussion will be grounded in the governing documents of Norwegian Steiner schools and interpreted considering Steiner's educational philosophy (Steiner, 1985, 1986, 2010a, 2010b; Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020) as well as Merleau-Ponty's theory on the significance of the body in human consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1994; see also Low, 1994; Løkken, 2018) and Dewey's educational philosophy of experiential learning (1996). In accordance with the first part of the research question, particular emphasis will be placed on values education.

To further explore the research questions, I employ qualitative data from interviews with six first-grade teachers for different Steiner schools in Norway. These interviews provide insight into how educators perceive the physical environment in first grade as a space for play, community building, and care for their surrounding environments, and illustrate how these aspects foster shared experiences and create opportunities for ethical dialogue and reflection. The findings are discussed in relation to Steiner, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey and previous research on early childhood education.

The article presents findings from an interview study that was conducted as part of my master thesis (Stabel, 2023) and later presented in a chapter in the academic book «Early Education in *Religion and Ethics*» (Norwegian title: «Begynneropplæring i KRLE», Rosland, Iversen, & Eriksen, 2024). I have selected the excerpts that are related to the research questions.

Overall, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of values education in early childhood and highlights the physical environment as a potential resource in the educational process.

Early childhood pedagogy in Steiner schools

A key principle of Steiner pedagogy is that thinking, willing and feeling interplay and should be addressed in a balanced manner in education. The development of a child's volitional capacities and emotional connection to their surroundings is considered essential for fostering independent thinking and sound judgment (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020). Learning and development in Steiner education are structured around seven-year periods, each representing a distinct stage in a child's growth. According to Steiner (1985), it is only at the end of the first seven-year period that a child's thinking, willing and feeling become independent of bodily experiences.

Steiner (1986) compares the small child to a sensory organ, because the child experiences the world primarily through sensory perceptions (p. 104). This open and sensory-based mode of being causes children to unconsciously imitate and let themselves be shaped by the environment (Steiner, 2010b).

Steiner's definition of the environment extends beyond the physical surroundings to include everything children perceive through their senses, such as moods, attitudes, and the intentions of the caregivers (Steiner, 2010a). Steiner pedagogy is therefore founded on the idea that children up to the age of seven primarily learn by imitating adults and engaging with the world through play and exploration, rather than through intellectual stimulation (Steiner, 2010a).

An important distinction between first grade pedagogy in Steiner schools and public schools is the absence of formal lessons divided into specific time slots. Instead, the school day offers a wide range of activities that come together as a unified whole. (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 28). Examples of these activities include play, music, outdoor activities, painting, handicrafts, games and practical mathematics, such as measuring and counting in the context of preparing food. Learning activities that require concentration and focus take place within this kindergarten-like pedagogical framework (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 28).

Building on Steiner's description of the young child as a sensory organ, positive sensory experiences are considered crucial for well-being and development in early childhood education. The design of the pedagogical spaces is therefore given great emphasis, including aspects such as lighting, colours, textures, smell and temperatures. The surroundings should provide the children with a sense of safety and vitality (Frödén & von Wright, 2018, p. 1411). Grunelius (1979) describes a «homely atmosphere» as the ideal for the physical environment in early childhood education (p. 18). Dahlin (2017) emphasises the importance of creating a beautiful and well-maintained environment, where children are surrounded by playing materials that stimulate their imagination and invite them to be co-creators (p. 94). Learning through imitation with the educator as a role model is a central pedagogical principle during the first seven years (Steiner, 2010a, p. 15). According to Dahlin (2017), educators should therefore engage in practical work such as cooking and household tasks, as well as creative activities like handicrafts and painting. The work should be carried out with joy and enthusiasm, and the environment should facilitate opportunities for children to imitate the adults and participate according to their own abilities (p. 93). Tending to the surroundings, by repairing broken toys or decorating tables with flowers and candles, is seen as a way of showing respect, both for the environment, for others, and for oneself (Frödén & von Wright, 2018, p. 1412). This pedagogical approach requires well-maintained spaces that allow for both play and practical everyday activities (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 28).

The holistic and embodied approach of Steiner education aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (1994) theory of the body's role in human consciousness. According to Merleau-Ponty, all learning is rooted in bodily interaction with the world; it is through movement and engagement with the environment that we experience meaning and gain access to the world (p. 94). Merleau-Ponty describes how humans are surrounded by occurrences that invite movement and action, and through such interaction, we experience ourselves as subjects in the world. In social encounters, we recognize each other's subjectivity, meaning that personal development occurs in the dynamic relationship between the body and the world (Løkken, 2018)

A similar emphasis on embodied learning is found in Dewey's (1996) experiential learning theory, which describes how learning is rooted in sensory impressions and emotions. Dewey argues that all learning must

be rooted in everyday experiences, since firsthand encounters serve as a crucial foundation for conceptual understanding and further learning. Løndal (2021) refers to this type of learning as «experience that embeds itself in the body» (p. 93). According to Krogstad (2022), this approach is particularly significant in early childhood education, as children's sensory faculties are still developing. Krogstad (2022) emphasises that children's motivation to learn depends on the extent to which new topics build upon their previous experiences. Krogstad cites Hidle, who argues that for children to reach their full learning potential, new subject matter must be meaningfully connected to their own lived experiences (Hidle, 2022, as cited in Krogstad, 2022, p. 29). Krogstad (2022) also emphasises the importance of learning progression in early education. According to Dewey (1996), a central premise for progression is that experiences and theoretical knowledge should be linked through conversation and reflection. Children must have opportunities to acquire rich and varied experiences, while teachers explicitly connect these experiences with theoretical concepts. Unhjem and Frenning (2021) describe these moments as «golden moments» (in Norwegian: «*gylne øyeblikk*»), i.e. moments with a special potential for reflection, grounded in shared experiences (p. 181, 186).

Values education

The teaching of values is a key component of the subject *Religion and Ethics*, which is taught in Steiner schools. The Steiner school curriculum describes *Religion and Ethics* as a subject with strong interdisciplinary qualities. An important purpose of the subject is to «awaken reverence and awe for nature and for human dignity, and respect for the sacredness of life» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 109). The subject aims to cultivate ethical awareness in children, encouraging them to «explore existential questions and learn to understand the perspectives of others » (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 109). Other important elements of the subject include wonder, ethical reflection, and philosophical dialogue (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 110).

Religion and Ethics are not explicitly a part of the first-grade curriculum. However, the curriculum suggests that relevant themes from this subject are integrated in an interdisciplinary and practical manner. For instance, it describes how the children should engage in meaningful tasks that «create opportunities for valuable conversations» (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 31). The children should also share new learning experiences and reflections with peers in conversations where they «practice sharing their feelings and opinions, listening to others, taking turns in conversation, and responding appropriately» (Steinerskoleforbundet 2020, p. 31). The teacher is expected to follow up on the children's initiatives and foster «conversations around what the children wonder about».

Throughout the early school years, storytelling plays a central role in the subject of Religion and Ethics. According to the Steiner curriculum, storytelling contributes to the development of the values education and introduce children to different religions and worldviews (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 110). In the first grade, daily storytelling is considered a foundation for initiating conversations on ethics and morality (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 31). The first graders also participate in the school's seasonal celebrations and religious festivals from different traditions. The spiritual and ethical aspects of seasonal celebrations are not to be explicitly explained to the children but be experienced and felt through participation (Frödén & von Wright, 2018, p. 1411).

Steiner (1922) argues that knowledge is based not only theory, but also on experience, and that concrete experience should be a starting point for educational processes. He stresses the importance of taking children outdoors to experience the beauty of nature as a foundation for knowledge (Steiner, 2000, p. 45). The first-grade curriculum emphasises outdoor activities and experiences in nature to foster care and reverence for the environment (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 31) To summarize, an important principle in Steiner schools is that the teaching of values is not based on theoretical explanations but on the children's experiences, imagination, and emotions in encountering the world (Dahlin, 2017, p. 11). Within this pedagogical framework, values education in first grade seeks to foster values such as respect, empathy, care, and attentiveness to the shared social community.

The importance of play

Free play has a central role in Steiner schools, especially in the first grade. The curriculum describes that through play, the children practice «advanced social interaction». The pedagogues are facilitators and role models through their «attentive and conscious presence». They participate in playing when the children need support and guidance but step out again when their help is no longer needed (Steinerskoleforbundet, 2020, p. 30). Play is considered crucial for developing social skills and empathy, and the pedagogues function as role models. This aligns with Steiner's idea that moral and ethical development cannot be achieved through theoretical insight but only through bodily experiences (Dahlin, 2017, p. 92).

(2008) emphasises the action-oriented aspect of ethical formation, advocating for «ethical individualism», the ability to act based on an inner ethical compass, rather than following external moral rules (p. 187). This resonates with Merleau-Ponty's perspective on ethical insight, as a capacity developed through bodily experiences and perceptual encounters with the world (Low, 1994). This perspective represents an alternative approach to ethics, moving beyond traditional moral rules or adhering to ethical relativism, instead emphasizing individual ethical choices based on experience and perception. Free play can be regarded as an important setting for values education in first grade where children develop ethical insight through interaction and imitation.

Interviews with first grade teachers

When selecting participants for my interview study, I employed a purposeful sampling method (Svenkerud, 2021, p. 98). The aim was to capture the variations among first-grade teachers in different Steiner schools. I considered factors such as class size, group organization, and the location of the school, ensuring representation from both urban and rural schools. The teachers were required to have at least two years of experience from working in first grade, ensuring they had sufficient practical experience to provide insightful descriptions of the physical environment's role in the learning process. I interviewed both male and female educators of varying ages to ensure a diverse range of experiences.

The interviews followed an interview guide but were semi-structured, functioning as conversations between the informants and the interviewer (Svenkerud, 2021, pp. 95–96). The interview guide was organized around three main themes: (1) the physical surroundings and daily routines in first grade, (2) pedagogical intentions and values, and (3) the pedagogical significance of the design of the surroundings. All interviews were conducted in the first-grade learning environments.

I transcribed the interviews and conducted a content analysis (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021), looking for connections between learning activities, pedagogical intentions, and the physical environment. I coded the text based on the following analysis categories which were considered essential to values education by the teachers: caring for the physical environment, community building, and play. These categories were chosen because they closely align with the values that first-grade education seeks to cultivate—namely respect, empathy, care, and attentiveness to the shared social community. Caring for the physical environment allows children to develop respect and care; community building fosters cooperation, empathy, and attentiveness to others; and play provides a context for practicing these values in concrete social interactions.

As an introduction to this section, I provide a characterization of the physical surroundings in the first-grade classrooms based on my own observations and the interviewees' descriptions. I then highlight findings related to the themes of care for the surroundings, community building, and play, showing how these themes are relevant for values education in first grade.

The Physical Environment

The learning environment in the schools I visited had several common characteristics and a rather similar interior design. The following elements were present in all the schools: a cloakroom, a kitchen, a long table,

and an indoor play area equipped with a varied selection of toys made from natural materials, as well as games and books. The toys were organized in shelves and baskets at child height. The walls and furnishings were either natural wood surfaces or painted in soft, warm colours. Furniture and interiors were primarily made of natural materials. The indoor play area offered generous open space. The rooms had a holistic and orderly appearance resembling a kindergarten more than a traditional classroom. The interviewees used words such as «inviting» and «homey» to describe the physical environment in their first-grade groups.

The outdoor areas had plenty of vegetation, climbing elements, and open spaces with grass or gravel and access to vegetable gardens. Two of the schools I visited had farm animals that the children helped take care of. The respondents described the outdoor areas as varied, with good access to natural elements. They highlighted that the outdoor areas should offer the children a rich variety of play opportunities. All first-grade groups went on field trips every week to the local forests. The respondents viewed nature as a particularly important and suitable play arena for six-year-olds, describing it as an extension of the school's outdoor space.

Arena for Values Education

The interviewees emphasise the importance of the physical environment providing opportunities for play, movement, and interaction, experiences that form a natural starting point for conversations and guidance. They give multiple examples of values education, both during group activities, in spontaneous conversations, and during play. They describe their role as guides and role models, rather than conventional teachers. Several of them point out that real-life experiences and activities where the whole class participates together provide opportunities for collaboration and value-building conversations:

The fact that we do something together, we collaborate, we make food, we do handicrafts, then we collaborate [imitates two first-graders working together] 'Now it's my turn to help you and then you help me afterwards.' We have such amazing conversations.

Caring for the Environment

The teachers I interviewed were unanimous in their view that the aesthetic and sensory qualities of the physical environment hold significant pedagogical importance. The physical surroundings were described as a fundamental premise for the pedagogical approach in first grade. According to the respondents, it is largely the physical surroundings, with their invitations to move and play, that form the basis for the children's learning.

The interviewees stated that the physical environment has a direct impact on the child's well-being and development. They emphasised that the surroundings should be inviting and well-maintained. One interviewee explains that a lot of thought has been put into the design of the environment: «Everything from the colour of the walls to the decor, lighting, and play materials» He describes it as a pleasant experience to enter the first-grade classroom because it is so aesthetically appealing, «it smells good and... it looks nice». He emphasises the value of taking good care of the surroundings and keeping them well-maintained in the first-grade classroom. Several of the interviewees express that the environment affects the group of children and influences the overall mood. One of the respondents says:

I think it's important that it's nice in here, that there are nice colours, it smells good, and it's taken care of. If it's messy and dirty and smells stale, then the children will be the same, I think

Several of the interviewees describe the physical surroundings as a manifestation of pedagogical attitudes and intentions. One says: «I believe there is a close connection between intentions and design in the first grade... I think that's unique, that things are so well-kept and well cared for» Another describes it this way:

There is certain reverence here, even for small things. Taking care of things is given a greater meaning. It's not just use-and-throw. If something is broken, we try to repair it. We show respect, both outdoors and indoors, for what is around us. I think that's pedagogically important.

The interviewees highlight that the environment in the first-grade classroom should be «genuine», «alive» and «not institutional». Surroundings that require maintenance are described as pedagogically significant for the teaching of values because they give the children firsthand experiences in exercising care, thereby creating a foundation for ethical reflection. One of them says it is important that the surroundings require continuous care, as it provides opportunities for practical tasks in which the children can participate. He believes that these valuable learning opportunities would be lost if the environment were maintenance-free.

The respondents experience that being mindful in caring for the surroundings impacts the children's relationships both with each other and with the physical environment. One interviewee says:

We take care of the classroom, but we also look after the plants and flowers. We tidy the sandbox every day when we're finished, ensuring all the toys are returned. I believe it's part of the pedagogy, learning to care for things, which in turn teaches you to care for others

As mentioned earlier, all first-grade groups have access to a vegetable garden, and two of the schools have animals that the children assist in taking care of. The respondents experience that taking care of plants and animals helps the children develop empathy. One notes that restless or anxious children who struggle socially benefit greatly from participating in animal care. Another interviewee says that having responsibility for something living helps the children develop compassion and consideration for their surroundings: «When a tree has branches that are too thin, we must wait to climb it, otherwise, it will develop open wounds». One respondent mentions that taking care of the hens is part of the daily tasks and reflects on how this impacts the children:

Taking care of something, and that reverence or respect... Some haven't quite developed it yet; they just come barging in. Then the adults must also be there to show that 'now we are in the hens' house, this is their home, so we must be kind to the hens'... This attitude, I think, is transferable to other things as well.

He points out that learning to behave with respect and care when tending to animals has transferable value to other situations, and he emphasises his role as a model for the children.

Building Community

The interviewees express that they place great importance on value development in first grade. One of them states that everything that happens throughout the day is equally important, whether it's the conversation while getting dressed for outdoor activities, gathering around the meal, or story time at the end of the school day. They place great emphasis on value-building conversations within the group. As one educator explains:

It's not about being the best, or the fastest, or the most skilled child, but that on the day you're sick, we miss you and we sing your name. We send a greeting home that the clouds can carry, and maybe the window to your room is slightly open... And the other children hear us say this, so they know that when they are sick, we will mention their name in the circle.

It's clear that the respondents believe the social education that happens in first grade is of great importance for the children's future school experiences. One says, «The whole purpose of school is to become part of the group... and if they don't manage that, we need to help them» The interviewees experience that many children need to practice this when they start in first grade. The children must experience that «they are part of a whole. [...] Learning to be one of many, I think that is really important».

Play... once more

The interviewees' accounts of the daily rhythm reveal that play is the primary activity in first grade, while teacher-led activities appear as elements that frame and create rhythm in the flow of free play during the school day. Play is described as crucial for developing the children's social competence and building a safe community among the children. As one interviewee states:

If they were in a setting where they weren't allowed to play like they do here, I doubt... these are just my thoughts, but I don't think they would have developed the same sense of community that they have in this group... They really get to know each other well, both on good days and bad, if you know what I mean.

She believes that play strengthens the relationship between the children and helps them become better at interpreting each other's signals: «They develop social antennas, in a way. reading others and understanding how they feel is achieved through play». Another respondent states that play strengthens empathy because «there is so much social development in play». Although the interviewees all emphasise free play, they also stress the necessity of being present as helpers and guides. One of them states:

I'm not saying play should always be completely free. I don't believe that. Some children might handle it, but in other groups, it's required that the grown-ups assist and guide them in terms of inclusion and social interaction.

He describes his role as «a guide into play and into the community» Several interviewees mention that the children need opportunities to practice problem-solving and conflict resolution on their own. One of them shares:

Sometimes, when I hear they're having an argument, I choose not to intervene immediately. I give them some space to work things out on their own. And often, most of the time, they manage it! [Imitates children talking] 'Oh, look, now she's feeling sad!' 'Well, then she can have my building block!' They help each other and have become good at understanding each other's feelings. I think that's because they've been given that space. But at the same time, I've had to guide them to help them reach that point.

The teachers highlight that the physical surroundings are crucial for the quality of play in first grade. As one of them says: «No, seriously! With desks and all that? I don't think it would have been the same. Here, play has a much wider... range». This statement indicates that a vibrant and varied learning environment provides a broader space for creativity and interaction than a traditional classroom. They also note that the environment allows children to explore and to express themselves freely during play without feeling «watched» by the grow-ups, while at the same time having them close by to assist when needed. This suggests that a balance between freedom and support fosters the child's social and ethical development. In addition to a physical environment designed for play and practical tasks, several pedagogues also mention that the absence of academic expectations, allows them to prioritize play and social development: «I think we make time for this in first grade because there are no demands or requirements related to formal subjects» as one respondent puts it. The lack of academic pressure provides a foundation for a more situationally and spontaneous values education.

The findings of this interview study show that values education in first grade is based on the children's play and interactions with the environment. Ethical reflection and discussion are facilitated by the pedagogues drawing on the children's real-life experiences during the school day. A stimulating and well-kept physical environment provide a necessary foundation for this pedagogical approach.

Discussion

The pedagogues in the study describe care and maintenance of the physical environment as an important aspect of their pedagogy, not only because well-maintained and inviting surroundings affect the group positively but also because the children are given the opportunity to practice caregiving by imitating the adults in their daily tasks. Their statements align with Steiner's (1986) view of the importance of sensory experiences in child development and the emphasis on the environment in the first seven years of life.

The interviewees state that if the children learn to take care of the physical environment, it influences the way they behave towards each other. This description resonates with Frödén and von Wright's (2018) assertion that taking care of the environment is an expression of respect for the environment, other people, and oneself. This type of values education can be described as implicit and experience based. The approach aligns with Dahlin's (2017) description of values education in Steiner schools, where the focus is on children's experiences and encounters with the world rather than on theoretical explanations. Play has a central role in first grade and is considered by the interviewees as crucial for developing social competence and a

creating a safe community among the children. Additionally, the interviewees emphasise the importance of practical work and activities that provide opportunities for shared experiences and ethical discussions. A varied and rich physical environment is essential for the quality of play and for providing meaningful tasks. The surroundings, therefore, indirectly play a key role in values education in class one.

The respondents express that children gain ethical insights through action and experience, with adults acting as role models. It appears that the goal of the pedagogue is to foster ethical reflection not as a response to external requirements or theoretical instruction, but as a natural outcome of the children's real-life experiences. This aligns closely with Merleau-Ponty's (1994) description of perceptual encounters with the world as the foundation for ethical formation and Dewey's (1996) experiential learning theory.

The interviewees state that they serve as guides and role models for the children in values education. This aligns with Steiner's (2010a) view of the child in the first seven years as a sensory organ that unconsciously imitates and is formed by the environment. Steiner (2010a) sees the environment as more than just the physical space; the atmosphere in the room and the pedagogues' attitudes and intentions are also part of the environment. Considering this, and based on the findings from the study, the pedagogues' attitudes and actions can be viewed as an integral part of the environment.

Krogstad (2022) argues that a prerequisite for progression in early education is that the experiences children bring with them are repeated and expanded upon, and that new topics are connected to prior experiences. The Steiner schools' approach to values education in first grade is built entirely on the children's growing experiences, thus facilitating progression. Another key premise for progression is that experiences and theoretical knowledge are linked through conversation and reflection (Dewey, 1996). Findings from the study suggest that the first-grade teacher focus on using the «golden moments» (Unhjem & Frenning, 2021, p. 181) that arise during the school day as opportunities for ethical discussion and reflection.

There is a noteworthy alignment between the interviewees' descriptions of the physical environment and values education in first grade and Steiner's pedagogical theories on child development, as outlined in the curriculum and Steiner's own statements. However, the pedagogues rarely reference Steiner's pedagogical theory in their statements. This suggests that they primarily rely on their practical experiences as justification, but it can also be interpreted as a deep internalization of Steiner's pedagogical ideas. The teachers express that the pedagogical approach in first grade is highly successful. The absence of critical remarks raises the question of whether the pedagogues' views and observations are influenced by Steiner's pedagogical ideas, potentially resulting in a lack of critical reflection on their own practices. The fact that they perceive it as particularly effective may also contribute to their reluctance to question their pedagogical methods.

The view of learning as being bodily and emotionally grounded is widely recognized in the field of early childhood education and guides both the methods of work and physical spaces in kindergarten (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). However, this perspective appears to have less prominence in the school context (Becher & Høyland, 2021). Several researchers have pointed out that early childhood education in schools often places limited emphasis on play and bodily learning (Becher et al., 2021, p. 19). The pedagogical approach in first grade of Steiner schools, therefore, appears to stand out as an exception, where early education is grounded in bodily experiences, free play, and emotional engagement, forming the foundation for cognitive understanding.

In summary, the teaching of values in first grade is not based on formal learning situations but rather centred around the children's encounters with their environment. Ethical reflection and conversation are facilitated based on the children's genuine experiences and interactions throughout the school day, during free play, community-building activities, and while maintaining and caring for the physical environment. Rich and well-maintained physical surroundings provide a necessary foundation for this pedagogical approach, as the environment offers children experiences that serve as a basis for ethical reflection and dialogue in their daily activities with the pedagogues serving as role models.

Research on early education in Steiner schools is limited, and this study provides only preliminary insights. It would be valuable to examine first-grade practices in Steiner schools in greater detail, for example, through

observational studies, to uncover aspects that may not emerge through interview-based research. Such an approach would offer a richer, more nuanced understanding of how Steiner's pedagogical ideas are translated into practice. Additionally, it would be interesting to further explore the interviewees' descriptions of the physical environment as a manifestation of pedagogical attitudes, as well as their statements that children's ethical understanding develops through the care and nurturing of their surroundings. This could provide deeper insights into how the relationship between the physical environment and ethical development unfolds in the everyday life of first-grade schooling.

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Rezension / Book review



Marcelo da Veiga

Albert Schmelzer:
Rudolf Steiner im Spannungsfeld von Freiheitsphilosophie und Menschenrechten, Nation und „Rasse“.
Frankfurt/ M.: Info 3 Verlag 2025.

Neben der immer wieder gestellten Frage nach der Wissenschaftlichkeit der Anthroposophie – die im Grunde die Frage nach der Wissenschaftlichkeit spiritueller Lehren überhaupt impliziert – ist das Thema „Rasse“ jenes Feld, das Steiner besonders stark ins öffentliche Rampenlicht rückt. Es ist erheblich stärker aufgeladen als die eher abstrakten erkenntnistheoretischen Diskussionen über Wissenschaftlichkeit und eignet sich in Social Media und Talkshows weit eher dazu, Aufmerksamkeit zu erzeugen.

Angesichts der mit diesem Thema verbundenen Aufgeregtheit ist bereits der Versuch Albert Schmelzers, es unaufgeregt, systematisch und kritisch aufzuarbeiten, ein verdienstvolles Unterfangen. In dem im Titel genannten Buch legt er eine detaillierte und gut lesbare Untersuchung der Frage vor, ob sich in Steiners Werk Indizien für rassistisches Denken finden lassen. Seine Untersuchung orientiert sich an Steiners Lebensgang und analysiert minutiös die unterschiedlichen thematischen Schwerpunkte in dessen Werk mit Blick auf den im Titel genannten leitenden Gesichtspunkt.

Schmelzer geht es dabei nicht nur um das Aufspüren und Benennen problematischer Textpassagen Steiners zum Reizthema „Rasse“, sondern um die Frage, ob sich in Steiners Werk eine mehr oder weniger durchgehende, einheitliche Sichtweise zu diesem Thema erkennen lässt – und

wie einzelne Äußerungen und Exkurse zu gewichten sind.

Ein klares Ergebnis, das der Leser aus Schmelzers Analyse gewinnen kann, sei vorab genannt: Es gibt keine Einheitlichkeit und keine sich durchhaltende Behandlung des Themas „Rasse“ im Werk Steiners. Zudem kommt der Begriff in den von Steiner selbst verfassten Schriften so gut wie nicht vor, sondern vor allem in einigen Mitschriften seiner rund 6000 Vorträge vor spezifischem Publikum. In diesen Mitschriften finden sich allerdings teils markige Äußerungen, die nicht nur neutral über „Rasse“ sprechen, sondern nach heutigen Maßstäben rassistische Wertungen enthalten. Was sich in Steiners Werk hingegen nicht nachweisen lässt, sind politische Agitationen zu diesem Thema.

Aufbau des Buches

Nach einem kurzen Blick auf die einschlägige Literatur und ihre teils kontroversen Sichtweisen stellt Schmelzer seiner Untersuchung von Steiners Werk und Biographie aus gutem Grund ein Kapitel zu den historischen Rahmenbedingungen voran. Dieses Kapitel zeigt die Präsenz des Themas „Rasse“ unabhängig von Steiner – in der Zeit, in der er lebte, und darüber hinaus – sowie die zahlreichen Facetten, in denen es gesellschaftlich wirksam war.

Dieser Einstieg ist wichtig, denn er erlaubt es, Steiners Umgang mit diesem Thema nicht nur an den Maßstäben der heutigen Zeit zu messen, die

durch gravierende politische Ereignisse des 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhunderts erheblich geschärft wurden, sondern auch an den geschichtlichen und gesellschaftlichen Umständen seiner Epoche, also des ausgehenden 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhunderts.

In den sich anschließenden fünfzehn Kapiteln untersucht Schmelzer sein Thema chronologisch entlang der Lebens- und Wirkensetappen Steiners. Leitend sind dabei vier Gesichtspunkte:

1. Steiners Freiheitsphilosophie
2. Steiners gesellschaftspolitische Anschauungen
3. seine Exkurse zu Volk und Nation
4. seine Äußerungen zum Thema „Rasse“

Methode und Fazit

Schmelzers Untersuchung ist detailliert, nüchtern und schonungslos aus der Perspektive eines beobachtenden Historikers geschrieben. Sein Ziel ist es, das Material so zusammenzustellen, dass der Leser in die Lage versetzt wird, eine eigene Bewertung fundiert vornehmen zu können. Zu diesem Zweck

enden die Kapitel jeweils mit Zusammenfassungen. Im abschließenden Fazit erlaubt sich der Autor darüber hinaus eine eigene Einschätzung und Bewertung im Licht der genannten vier Gesichtspunkte. Seine Auswertungen sind differenziert und belegt, indem er auf einschlägige, zuvor behandelte Passagen Bezug nimmt. Sie verschärfen das im Titel genannte Spannungsfeld, lösen es jedoch nicht auf – da dieses Spannungsfeld zum überlieferten Textkorpus Steiners gehört.

Gesamtwürdigung

Schmelzers Buch setzt einen neuen Standard im Umgang mit dem Thema „Rasse“ bei Steiner: Einerseits entfaltet er es biographisch akribisch, benennt und bewertet problematische Passagen klar. Andererseits verortet er das Thema sowohl im Kontext der Zeit als auch innerhalb von Steiners Gesamtwerk. So entsteht für den Leser eine tragfähige Grundlage für ein eigenes Urteil jenseits von Hetze und Beschönigung.

Ein lesenswertes Buch für alle, die ein solch kontroverses Thema nicht scheuen und Differenzierung schnellen Urteilen vorziehen.

Rezension / Book review



Marcelo da Veiga

Albert Schmelzer:
Rudolf Steiner at the Tension Point between a Philosophy of Freedom and Human Rights, Nation and "Race".
Frankfurt/ M.: Info 3 Verlag 2025.

Besides the repeatedly posed question of the scientific status of anthroposophy – which, fundamentally, implies the question of the scientific status of spiritual teachings as such – the topic of “race” is the field that places Steiner most strongly in the public spotlight. It is far more emotionally charged than the rather abstract epistemological debates about scientificity and is much better suited to generating attention on social media and in talk shows.

Given the agitation connected with this topic, Albert Schmelzer’s very attempt to work through it calmly, systematically, and critically is already a meritorious undertaking. In the book named in the title, he presents a detailed and highly readable investigation of the question of whether Steiner’s work contains indications of racist thinking. His inquiry follows Steiner’s life trajectory and meticulously analyzes the different thematic emphases in Steiner’s work with a view to the guiding perspective named in the title.

Schmelzer is concerned not only with tracking down and naming problematic passages in Steiner’s texts on the hot-button issue of “race,” but with the question of whether a more or less continuous, coherent viewpoint on this topic can be discerned in Steiner’s work – and how individual remarks and digressions are to be weighed.

A clear result that the reader can draw from Schmelzer’s analysis should be stated at the outset: there is no uniformity and no sustained treatment of the topic of “race” in Steiner’s work. Moreover, the term occurs hardly at all in Steiner’s own authored writings, but primarily in some transcripts of his roughly 6,000 lectures given to specific audiences. In these transcripts, however, one finds at times pointed statements that do not merely speak neutrally about “race” but, by today’s standards, contain racist value judgments. What cannot be demonstrated at all in Steiner’s work, on the other hand, are political agitations on this topic.

Structure of the book

After a brief look at the relevant literature and its sometimes controversial viewpoints, Schmelzer, for good reason, places before his investigation of Steiner’s work and biography a chapter on the historical framework conditions. This chapter shows the presence of the topic of “race” independently of Steiner – in the time in which he lived, and beyond – as well as the numerous facets through which it was socially effective.

This opening is important, because it allows Steiner’s handling of this topic to be measured not only by today’s standards – which have been significantly sharpened by grave political events of

the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – but also by the historical and social circumstances of his epoch, that is, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the fifteen chapters that follow, Schmelzer examines his topic chronologically along the stages of Steiner's life and work. Four aspects guide him:

- Steiner's philosophy of freedom
- Steiner's socio-political views
- his excursions on peoplehood and nation
- his statements on the topic of "race"

Method and conclusion

Schmelzer's investigation is detailed, sober, and unsparing, written from the perspective of an observing historian. His aim is to compile the material in such a way that the reader is enabled to make an informed assessment of their own. To this end, the

chapters each end with summaries. In the concluding assessment, the author also allows himself an overall evaluation in light of the four aspects mentioned. His analyses are nuanced and substantiated, as he refers back to relevant passages previously discussed. They sharpen the field of tension named in the title, but they do not resolve it—since this tension belongs to Steiner's transmitted textual corpus.

Overall assessment

Schmelzer's book sets a new standard in dealing with the topic of "race" in Steiner: on the one hand, he unfolds the topic meticulously along Steiner's biography, clearly identifying and evaluating problematic passages. On the other hand, he situates the topic both in the context of its time and within Steiner's overall work. In this way, the reader is given a robust basis for forming their own judgment beyond hate-mongering and whitewashing.

A book well worth reading for all who do not shy away from such a controversial topic and who prefer differentiation to quick judgments.
