frontiers | Frontiers in Education

TYPE Perspective
PUBLISHED 05 December 2024
DOI 10.3389/feduc.2024.1401388

OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 15 March 2024
ACCEPTED 18 October 2024
PUBLISHED 05 December 2024

CITATION
Boland N (2024) Navigating an uncertain interregnum.
Front. Educ. 9:1401388.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1401388

Navigating an uncertain interregnum

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This article seeks to identify trends in Steiner Waldorf education through the lens of Clarence Beeby's work on educational myths. Beeby calls myths a form of communication between contemporaries or between generations, ways of conceptualizing education that can be understood quickly yet are flexible enough to accommodate a range of interpretations. A myth holds for a period and then transitions into a new myth that best suits changed times and changed circumstances. I reflect on what the myths of Waldorf education might be and take up Gramsci's well-known quotation on change, "The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear," In writing this, Gramsci extended the interregnum beyond its usual papal connotation to include the socio-cultural condition as well. I use the notion to consider if Waldorf education is currently in an interregnum period and is displaying both "morbid symptoms" and promising signs of fresh development. In addition, I contemplate if these promising signs point toward a new myth that will allow Waldorf education to step beyond its century-old, colonial heritage.

KEYWORDS

Waldorf education, interregnum, Steiner education, educational change, educational myths

Introduction

In this article, I look to distill and interpret trends in Waldorf education as it is practiced, discussed, and written about in different geographic and cultural contexts. In doing this, I observe negative trends that appear to intensify with time and that are not reversed. This has led me to consider the need for new forms to be developed, and if Waldorf education is in the process of transitioning from one myth, one story, to another, from one "deep, though not always clearly defined, … aspiration" (Beeby, 1988) to a new one, specifically one that addresses societal and demographic changes within which Waldorf institutions work. Such a change would serve to challenge the status quo in multiple ways, not least in issues of Eurocentricity, colonial thinking, diversity and inclusion within the curriculum, gender stereotyping, and the relationship between Steiner's worldview[1] and Waldorf education.

Before I go further, I need to deconstruct the positions that I occupy (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). As a former Waldorf teacher, I consider myself an "insider," with some insight into ways in which Waldorf teachers view themselves and their profession. I am a white, CIS-gendered man in my 60s, a naturalized immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand, and have worked on different continents as a teacher and teacher educator; this has given me an idea of how

1 Anthroposophy is the name given to Steiner's cosmology and philosophical approach. It is expressed in the 35 books Steiner wrote and the 6,000 lectures he gave during his life.

Waldorf education is practiced in different contexts. At the same time, I am no longer a Waldorf teacher but work in the field of education at a large public university and have a nuanced non-Waldorf identity as well. In this regard, I am an outsider, observing Waldorf education from a distance. My identity as I write is fluid and complex. I hope I remain aware of this as I navigate this insider–outside role (Bukamal, 2022).

The power of educational myths

The great New Zealand educationalist, Beeby (1988), viewed the development of education as transitioning through what he called myths.

> An educational myth is, for me, a form of communication, spoken or assumed, between contemporaries or between generations. It's a communication that cannot be taken quite literally. It gets public credence and support from its capacity to express, in relatively simple terms, relations between ideas and events that aren't completely understood and whose outcomes cannot be fully foreseen. Within limits, it can be interpreted in different ways by different people; it leaves some place for the element of the irrational that underlies most human activities, and it gives a sense of direction rather than absolute goals (Beeby, 1986, p. 10).

A myth then is a way to view the complexities of education in a simple yet effective image; it is not an educational plan or curriculum. Elsewhere (1988, p. 10), Beeby gives five characteristics to distinguish a myth from an education plan. I give them here in full as they are relevant to my argument.

1. An effective educational myth must be either an assumption rooted deeply in a country's history or the expression of some deep, though not always clearly defined, public aspiration; it must say briefly, in simple terms, something new for which many have been trying to find the words.
2. It must be expressed in language that is flexible enough to permit a reasonably wide range of interpretations. It gives a broad sense of direction on which most people will agree, though they may differ in their specific goals and in their reasons for seeking them.
3. However, the language and the objectives must still be narrow enough to rule out altogether some lines of action so that administrators, planners, and teachers can get practical guidance from the myth.
4. The myth must not be fully attainable for at least a generation if it is going to sustain 25 years of change without being constantly and confusingly modified.
5. People working for the new myth must believe in it so completely that they will fight for it in its youth—and perhaps in theirs—they must hold to it more critically in its middle age, and, when it has served its purpose, they must be willing to see another myth take its place, though an old educational myth, such as many ancient faiths, is usually quietly absorbed into the new, with a fresh interpretation of ideas and a change in direction.

These "myths of purpose" take time to gain general acceptance and transition slowly. Specific myths that Beeby identifies in New Zealand's educational history include the survival of the fittest, the education of the whole child, equal opportunity, and equity (equality of outcome). These were superseded toward the end of the last century by the myth of education as a commodity (neoliberalism). As neoliberalism itself is now being strongly challenged, the myth of education as a commodity to be bought and sold on the open market is also under question (Nevradakis and Giroux, 2015), and "The hunt is on for its successor" (Beeby, 1988, p. 11). Numerous authors have taken up this challenge, including Clark (2004, p. 18), Gerlich (2013), Gidley (2017), and the current author (Boland and Dobson, 2020). Deeply embedded myths in educational and social thought can also have negative consequences, as convincingly put forward by Hetaraka (2022) regarding beliefs about Māori students in education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Waldorf myths?

It is not my intention here to examine Beeby's ideas in depth, but rather to highlight the insights generated by such mythical thinking and to recognize how the educational ideas of the public (parents) and teachers change over time. It leads me to consider what myths exist of and in Waldorf education, which narratives are told of Waldorf education, which give a "broad sense of direction on which most people will agree" (Beeby, 1988, p. 10). These are not the same as what are commonly referred to as Waldorf myths (see Sagarin, 2008; Wiechert, 2014) [2] but are ways of conceptualizing Waldorf education.

There are several Waldorf myths that I would put forward in this regard. The first is what Rawson has called the "foundation myth of origins" (2023), a narrative of the founding of the first Waldorf school in 1919. In this myth, Waldorf education was seen as a school for the children of factory workers made possible by the generosity and foresight of Emil Molt; it is an educational movement springing out of an innovative social impulse at a time of acute need in post-war Germany.

Another myth that has had great currency is of Waldorf education as an "education for freedom." This phrase comes from Steiner (1922/2004, p. 49) himself and was mirrored in the title of a book by Carlgren (1976), *Education toward freedom*. Written at a time when Waldorf schools were rapidly being established around the world and translated into many languages, this book promoted a myth of an education toward freedom, which tells how each child and young person can receive an all-round, balanced education (head, heart, and hands) in a Waldorf school, which will allow them to find their place in society, leaving them free to follow their own paths, and find their own life direction. I believe that this is still the dominant myth of Waldorf education. Whether the claim to be an education for freedom for everyone can be justified has been questioned (Boland and Muñoz, 2021); however, a myth exists as an ideal that gives "a broad sense of direction," whether or not it is realized in the details.

2 This kind of Waldorf myth is often to do with accepted practice or attitudes, for instance math gnomes, main lesson books, morning circle, the color black and young children, the use of block crayons, among others.

Steiner (1919/2020) spoke and wrote in multiple places about the need for Waldorf education to respond to the needs of the time and to the needs of children of a particular time. In *The First Teachers' Course,* he pointed to the importance of this, commenting that "Teachers must understand the times they live in because they must understand the children entrusted to them in relation to that time" (p. 163). In an article a few months later in the newsletter *Waldorf Nachrichten* (Waldorf News), he wrote, "It would be fatal if the educational views upon which the Waldorf School is founded were dominated by a spirit out of touch with life" (Steiner, 1919–1924, p. 2).

This notion of Waldorf education being able to meet the needs of children of a particular time, in touch with life, has led to it being called "an education for our time" (Wiechert, 2009). Furthermore, its potential for development and modification has led to it (also) being "widely regarded as an education for the future" (Attfield, 2024, p. 3).

Former myths then seem to me to include Waldorf education as an education for social renewal, an education for freedom, an education for the present, and an education for the future. There are likely more. However, I propose here that there appear to be new images and purposes of Steiner education trying to come into being. As Beeby (1988) himself said, these old myths do not disappear nor are simply replaced (think how resilient the survival of the fittest model has proven to be in many education systems), but a new myth will emerge as a new understanding or new chapter of the narrative of Waldorf education, adding to what went before.

For the last 15 years, I have worked outside the Waldorf education movement while maintaining connections to it. My observations (from conversations, conference contributions, and from visiting schools[3] and working with teachers around the world) are that Waldorf education has entered a period of significant transition. There are growing tensions between established traditions and developments that move away from these traditions, which appear to intensify. These tensions are not new and were identified by Oberman (2008) in her book, *The Waldorf movement in education from European cradle to American crucible, 1919–2008*, yet they continue to be unresolved and the potential transition remains emergent.

Signs of an interregnum?

This emergent transition can be thought of in different ways. I have used the metaphor of sticking wings on a caterpillar (Boland, 2016) to underscore a lack of significant transformation, namely, that making ever-more additive amendments to existing Waldorf practice without a rethinking of the premises of the education (a metamorphosis) cannot be reckoned to be transformational. This could be framed in the light of thin and strong equity (Cochran-Smith and Keefe, 2022), although I prefer the caterpillar image. I have also looked at possible steps toward what I called at the time Waldorf 2.0 (Boland, 2017). With Dirk Rohde, I have looked at the development of Waldorf education in relationship to time—specifically to the intersection of past, present, future, and eternity (Boland and Rohde, 2022). Others will think of images that are more meaningful for them. However, it remains my hunch that Waldorf education is in the process of transitioning from one "deep, though not always clearly defined … aspiration" (Beeby, 1988) to a new one.

Transitions are seldom comfortable and often messy. They necessarily involve a change from something familiar to something new. As Otto Scharmer puts it, you need to let something go in order to let something new come (Koenig et al., 2023). Change can bring with it a fear of the unknown, a feeling of loss of control, and a loss of the familiar. Change similarly can bring with it anxiety, leaving well-established zones of comfort (pedagogical and emotional as well as mental) for something that is initially unclear. It can bring with it challenges to professional identity and the pain of saying farewell to valued traditions and familiar ways of being and doing.

Transitions are also not things that happen overnight; they take time, and with that comes uncertainty. I believe that Gramsci (1947/1971, p. 276) well-known quotation sums this up well: "The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms ('*fenomeni morbosi*') appear", and that we are currently in what can be called a Waldorf interregnum. This is a transitional state from one way of being to another. If this is the case, are there "morbid symptoms" (see Achcar, 2021) that we can observe? Babic gives a useful definition, "[These] symptoms are morbid because they show that the existing order suffers from existential problems that are unlikely to be solved within the limits of the old framework" (2020, p. 773). I consider next what these morbid symptoms might be in Waldorf terms, existential problems that have been observable for a number of years and cannot be solved within the existing framework, and also positive developments that appear to be moving in new directions.

Morbid symptoms and green shoots

The main "morbid symptoms" I am going to look at here are teacher supply and the closure of Waldorf teacher education centers, the closure of schools, teacher engagement with anthroposophy and Waldorf as a method, and Eurocentrism and dated attitudes. I can only indicate each briefly for lack of space. For each negative symptom, I give ways in which it is currently being addressed.

Teacher recruitment, retention, and education

There is currently a shortage of teachers worldwide, with UNESCO estimating that an astonishing 44 million new teachers will be needed before 2030 (UNESCO, 2024). Beyond this, there is a visible and growing shortage of teachers coming toward Waldorf education (see, among others, Bay Area Center for Waldorf teacher training, 2024; Bester, 2023; Finser, 2019). In a number of countries, all teachers need state certification, and it becomes increasingly difficult to ask teachers for specific Waldorf training in addition. A consequence of this is that there are ever fewer students and teachers enrolling in Waldorf training programs and ever fewer working in schools with formal Waldorf credentials. In a recent study I undertook into the needs for change in Waldorf institutions in Taiwan as identified by the teachers themselves (Boland, 2024), the education of teachers already

3 In this article I talk mainly about schools, 1–12. I believe that similar questions can be put to the Waldorf early childhood movement, but my focus here is on schools.

working in Waldorf education was highlighted as the most pressing need, with many participants commenting that, without a workforce well-prepared for the job, maintaining standards will be difficult.

This drop in numbers has resulted in the closure of formerly thriving full-time teacher education courses around the world, for instance, Emerson College (UK), Taruna (NZ), Rudolf Steiner College (2017), and the Waldorf Institute of Southern California on the US West Coast. Some of these continue with reduced programs.

Teacher recruitment is not a new concern. In Steiner (1923/1991, p. 382) mentioned the difficulty of finding new teachers for the Waldorf school, which may be relevant to the current situation. Speaking about academic congresses held in various cities in 1920–1922, he said,[4]

> There was no inclination [amongst anthroposophists attending] to engage with the world. And you have to engage with the world if you want its co-operation, not its opposition. … I would just ask you to bear in mind that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find Waldorf school teachers. Why is that? Because encapsulation [looking inward] has become systemic.

In the intervening century, Waldorf educators have largely remained inward-looking and do not engage strongly with the rest of the educational world. With notable exceptions, Waldorf teachers talk to other Waldorf teachers. Is this inward-looking gesture attractive to potential teachers?

Repositioning Waldorf teacher education

To support the work of teacher educators, the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum initiated the International Teacher Education Project (ITEP) in 2017 to help "ensure there is sufficient consistent and high-quality teacher education to support the need of Steiner educational initiatives for well-trained and well-supported teachers" (Boland and McAlice, 2020, p. 4). This work is ongoing and slowly progressing. One outcome is the establishment of monthly online meetings of teacher educators from different continents to exchange experiences and work on elements of teacher education identified in the ITEP project. Numerous new online initiatives have been developed in recent years, sometimes standalone and sometimes as an additional offering from an established institution.

Schools opening and schools closing

Over recent years, a number of Waldorf schools have closed their doors, something that happened rarely in earlier decades when the gesture was strongly one of expansion. These include the Santa Fe Waldorf School, the Urban Prairie Waldorf School, the high school in Honolulu, Brighton Steiner School, Perry Court, and Michael House School in the UK. Furthermore, a number of schools in England (including Wynstones and King's Langley) were deemed not to meet minimum operating standards and were closed by the government. Rawson notes that in Germany, the country with the greatest number of Waldorf schools, "pupil numbers are stagnating or dropping, and it is getting harder to recruit teachers" (2023).

4 My thanks to Martyn Rawson for bringing attention to this passage.

Expansion in "new" Waldorf countries and new school models

Despite the closure of some established schools and contracting school rolls in others, as a movement, Waldorf education continues to expand, with new schools being established regularly. These are primarily in "new" Waldorf countries, often in Asia. Another impulse that needs noting is the growing number of public Waldorf schools in the United States, with around two new schools opening per year, with expansion into new states. As these schools are state-funded, they can sometimes draw both students and teachers from more established, private Waldorf schools.

New schooling models are also becoming increasingly common, particularly micro-schools and pods, and various forms of homeschooling. The growth of these accelerated during and after the COVID pandemic. It appears that the question of suitable models for educating children and youth is increasingly up for discussion (for example, see Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Engagement with anthroposophy and Waldorf as a method

Connected to the diminishing number of students in Steiner teacher education courses is a lessening of Waldorf teachers' engagement with Steiner's work firsthand. Whereas active membership of the Anthroposophical Society was common among teachers in earlier decades (my personal experience), as well as membership of the School of Spiritual Science, it is much less common now. I believe that part of this is because engaging with Steiner's ideas is hard work. His texts are dense and hard to penetrate. It takes time, effort, and repeated application to win through to some insight. These are in increasingly short supply in an ever-accelerating world.

Ten years ago, Denjean (2014) wrote a small article in which he articulated a series of steps that show a clear progression of decreasing engagement with the anthroposophical impulse.

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

These two simple sentences give insight into what has been a lengthy process in many Waldorf schools and classrooms, from a pedagogy inspired by anthroposophical insight to Waldorf education being applied as a successful pedagogical method, disconnected from Steiner's work (see Ullrich, 2008, 2015).

Growth of interest in inner life and exploration of connection with anthroposophy

Several publications, including those by Zdražil (2023) and Rawson (2023), have recently explored the connection between anthroposophy and Waldorf education and Waldorf educators. I see this as a positive development that has the potential to open up spaces for increased dialog. Rawson usefully seeks to clarify the meanings given to the word "anthroposophy." They are anthroposophy as meta-narrative; anthroposophy as charismatic foundation myth; anthroposophy as self-directed esoteric path of schooling;

anthroposophy as philosophical, epistemological, and ontological practice; and applied anthroposophy as basis for professional practice. In discussions about the role and place of anthroposophy in Waldorf education, it is important to separate these so it is clear what is being talked about. Anecdotally, these discussions are beginning to take place.

Eurocentrism and dated attitudes

Waldorf education was established over a century ago in a context far removed from the ones found today. Over the past century, it has built up rich traditions of practice that can be found in diverse guises around the world. As schools have spread geographically, questions have increasingly been raised about the degree to which educational practice is in harmony with local contexts. In addition, as demographic and social changes take place in locations in which Waldorf education is long established, there are similar questions as to how these changes are reflected.

Dated attitudes to diversity and inclusion in Waldorf education have been written about by numerous authors including Jeske (2004) (gender stereotyping in secondary education) and Knight (2022) (investigating the Waldorf kindergarten space as an expression of colonial values).

Postcolonial and intercultural approaches

The issue of the Eurocentricity of Waldorf education is being increasingly addressed, both regarding the traditional Waldorf curriculum and questions of equity and inclusion.

Regarding curriculum, Rawson has written widely, including in cooperation with others, on innovative ways to approach curriculum (Boland and Rawson, 2024; Bransby and Rawson, 2022; Rawson, 2021) including using Thiong'o (2014) notion of globalectics to counter persistent Eurocentric framing. The breadth of literature that has been built up over the last few years around this topic is evident in Tyson's extensive literature review of the same (2023). This extends to the work of intercultural Waldorf schools (Adam and Schmelzer, 2019; Schmelzer, 2015) and the establishment of organizations that promote DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) approaches in Waldorf education such as Alma Partners (2024) in the United States.

While traditional Waldorf festivals (including those based on the Christian calendar) are widely celebrated, new festivals are being developed in a range of countries that meet the needs of the local population. These include Indigenous festivals in Peru and Kenya (Hoffmann, 2015, 2016) and the Oratorical Festival established by Seaside Charter Schools (2024) in Florida, inspired by the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and in honor of Black History Month, which allows students to "explore how words can be used to evoke ideas and inspire others to stand up for what they believe in and make positive change in the world."

The Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum has taken Interculturality and Curricula as a major theme over the coming years (Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, 2024). Interculturality is defined as "the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialog and mutual respect" (UNESCO, 2005). Equitable, in the case of Waldorf education, will hopefully involve change beyond soft equity (minor surface-level changes) to strong equity (changes at a systemic level). This is what I had in mind when I called for a deeper transformation than sticking wings on a caterpillar.

Another new direction that may prove fruitful is the identification of resonances between Indigenous educational approaches and aspects of Waldorf education (see Muñoz, 2016, 2019), which have led to the establishment of schools by and for Indigenous peoples in Canada, the United States, Taiwan, and Peru (and likely elsewhere). Indigenous languages are taught in some Waldorf schools (Boland and Goddard, 2023) and under consideration in others.

I am reminded of a saying by Einstein (Viereck, 1929) that significant problems cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them. There are obvious signs of new thinking in all of these areas. However, there is much work still to be done for Waldorf education to address how and if it can move beyond its inherited past (Boland, 2015).

The old is dying and the new cannot be born

Of the issues mentioned above, it is those clustered around postcolonial, intercultural approaches that are at present receiving the most attention. As this work develops and matures and the body of available literature broadens (Tyson, 2023), the tone of some writing from other positions has become stronger within the last short while, reflecting, I suspect, the concerns and anguish of the authors. These counter-positions to a degree mirror attitudes found in the "culture wars" of contemporary society. It is perhaps not surprising that such a polarization can be found in a large, distributed education network. As an example of these counter-positions, I mention briefly a lecture given a few months ago. I believe that it illustrates (growing) tensions between traditional and progressive approaches to Waldorf education.

"*Class of 2033: Waldorf at war*" (2024) is a strongly titled online lecture by Schwartz (2024). In it, he links the "new activist spirit [which] arose in response to racism and gender issues [the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020]" with the "chorus of European Waldorf leaders … calling for the "decolonization" and "dehierarchization" of the Waldorf curriculum." In this process, Schwartz contends that "Rudolf Steiner has been denounced" and "schools and teachers [encouraged] to deconstruct the anthroposophical foundations of Waldorf methodology." The flyer for the talk strikes a serious note, pondering if, given "the struggles of the Waldorf movement," "Waldorf does, indeed, have a future," and if "the profound reverberations that the struggles of the Waldorf movement will have in relation to its sister movements [will affect] the viability of Anthroposophy in America." These strongly worded statements indicate that, to the author, the very nature of Waldorf education is endangered by the processes of questioning that these acts of decolonization entail. Hill (2024) states that "it would be disastrous for Waldorf Education if the 'idee fixes' [*sic*] of academic post-modernism (gender, colonialism, etc.) were to obscure our perception of [the] simple living process" of "natural growth from origins in one place to localisation in other places."

As a final word here, it is striking how often Rudolf Steiner spoke about being awake to the needs of the times and how these needs demand constant adjustment to existing forms and ways of doing things. It appears that he regarded societal organization in a dynamic way rather than something fixed or constrained. This can be thought

of as in contrast to static visions of anthroposophical endeavors in which there is (or has been) 'a right way' of doing things that needs to be maintained and adhered to at all costs, irrespective of changes there are in wider situations and circumstances.

An example of Steiner (1917/2008) thinking around this topic can be found in the 1917 lecture cycle published in English as *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness*. This is substantially about processes of coming into and going out of being, of the birth and death of social impulses and their spiritual foundation. He gives an example of someone or of a group of people striving to do the same thing better and better, to move toward increasing perfection. One might think that this is a worthwhile endeavor. "This," however, "is not in accordance with the law of reality" (p. 65). "A change occurs through which the desire for perfection becomes a weakness" (p. 66). Over time, what is aimed for turns into the opposite if it does not continue to respond to and change in line with changing times. "However good the right may be that you want to bring to realization – it will turn into a wrong in the course of time… We must seek ever new ways, look for new forms over and over again. This is what really matters" (p. 66). In order to progress, old forms and familiar (and loved) ways of doing things need to be relinquished for the sake of progress, letting go so that something new can come into being. "Perfection becomes weakness, benevolence uncritical adoration, and right turns to wrong in the course of evolution" (p. 67). It is informative to view the tensions that are building within the Waldorf world in light of these statements.

Fabula emergens

All the initiatives above, which I have called green shoots, speak of a broadening of context beyond what has been practiced for a century. The work is ongoing, and it is not yet known what results will or can be achieved in these directions, or what forms any change may take. An interregnum is a process rather than a fixed state (Babic, 2020). It is full of uncertainty. It contains future impulses striving to find appropriate forms and requires a gesture of inquiry and curiosity about the nature of the present day and how to best respond to it. There is no single moment of transition from the old to the new but rather "long, multidimensional and transformative processes … that … can develop a 'life' of their own" (p. 771) and move through periods of disorganization. Neither are interregna necessarily short lasting—Beeby talks about myths taking 25 years to be fully established. Having documented the transformations of educational myths over centuries, he comments that "an old educational myth, like many ancient faiths, is usually quietly absorbed into the new, with a fresh interpretation of ideas and a change in direction" (1988, p. 10). These words may be comforting to those who feel that current strong processes of change endanger what they value in Waldorf education.

I am not able to foresee what will emerge out of the current interregnum. There is a strong move toward postcoloniality tied in with aspects of intercultural understanding, and it could be that a new myth will be one of Waldorf education for social justice. At the same time, I think that this is something that badly needs to be addressed yet will not form a new myth as such. Within the sphere of social justice, we hear much about human rights, and expressions of human rights are developing all the time. They are critiqued as too linked to Western cultural norms, emphasizing civil and political rights over economic, social, and cultural rights, and prioritizing Western notions of individual autonomy (Santos and Martins, 2021). What I find more intriguing and what holds more promise for me than a focus on human rights is the notion of human responsibilities (Kuper, 2005). Instead of considering what your rights are, what are your responsibilities? How do you express your responsibility for your fellow human beings? To the natural world? To the planet? How would education (Waldorf and otherwise) look if its aim was to teach to promote human responsibility? If it was a pedagogy for human responsibility? For me, human responsibilities mean accountability for the welfare of others; they mean (re)forging connections with others, seeking to understand and support them, being aware of the harm all of us cause, and trying to mitigate it.

I have written in a couple of places about new purposes for education. In Boland (2013), I wrote about education for holism and later, in an article for a national news site, I highlighted the need within education to work toward building connections, to repair the disconnections made evident by the COVID pandemic (Boland and Dobson, 2020). While neither of these pieces focused on Waldorf education, my thoughts about Waldorf lead me in a similar direction; I would choose Education for Connection as a future myth. I suggest this to counter strong tendencies of disconnection that we can experience in our societies on multiple levels and which are leading to increased materialism, climate breakdown, conflict, and a flawed sense of reality. An Education for Connection would actively seek to (re)connect students to their inner selves and to build meaningful relationships to the planet and the natural world; it would seek to strengthen the ability to make meaningful connections with fellow human beings and, ultimately, reconnect us to ourselves and our appreciation of what is real. I believe that these impulses for connection are implicit in much of what already exists in Waldorf education and are what I suggest could become the next Waldorf myth.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

NB: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

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