

Democratic leadership in Waldorf schools

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores the democratic nature of school leadership in Waldorf schools and compares this with the wider framework of the principles of holistic democracy. The study is set against a background of calls for the reform of international educational policy and what the author sees as the need for reform in school leadership within the Waldorf movement. In a number of respects Waldorf schools practice elements of democratic or developmental school leadership that are felt by some commentators to be lacking in mainstream education, yet at the same time there are some elements of school leadership common to Waldorf schools that do not fully reflect democratic principles. Though mainly theoretical, this paper draws on some qualitative data generated using questionnaires and interviews with around 80 Waldorf teachers in over 10 countries. The paper concludes that the conceptual framework of holistic democracy could be a useful tool for self-reflection in Waldorf schools. The paper identifies some areas in which Waldorf practice of school governance could be fruitfully analysed using Bourdieu's theory of social practice.

Keywords: democratic leadership, Waldorf schools, holistic democracy

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Vor dem Hintergrund von Stimmen, die eine Reform der internationalen Bildungspolitik verlangen, sowie dem vom Autor formulierten Reformbedarf in der Schulführungspraxis an Waldorfschulen untersucht dieser Artikel den demokratischen Charakter der Schulführung an Waldorfschulen und vergleicht diesen mit den Prinzipien der holistischen Demokratie. In mancher Hinsicht praktizieren Waldorfschulen schon seit langem Elemente der demokratischen oder entwicklungsorientierten Schulführung, die manche Beobachter bei den Regelschulen vermissen; dennoch entspricht Manches in der Praxis der Waldorfschulen noch nicht allen Prinzipien der demokratischen Schulführung. Auch wenn der Artikel auf qualitativen Daten basiert, die durch Interviews und Fragebögen mit etwa 80 Waldorflehrern aus 10 Ländern erhoben wurden, bleibt der Ansatz doch überwiegend theoretisch. Die Studie stellt fest, dass die Rahmenkriterien der holistischen Demokratie für die Selbst-Reflexion der Verantwortlichen an Waldorfschulen hilfreich sein könnten. Ferner identifiziert die Untersuchung mehrere Aspekte der Praxis der Schulführung in Waldorfschulen, die auch durch die Perspektiven der Sozialtheorie Bourdieus fruchtbar angeschaut werden könnten.

Schlüsselwörter: demokratische Leitung, Waldorfschulen, ganzheitliche Demokratie

Introduction

In the current educational policy climate many countries are reforming the way schools are run and looking in particular at issues of leadership and management (Bush, 2011, Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). Educational policies internationally have increasingly tended towards closer state control through what Ball (2008) has called an epidemic of policies of standardisation, performativity and managerialism. Some educationalists have been calling for a reform of policies that create a situation in which

...children, teachers and schools are all evaluated by their conformity to ever more standardized norms, with standardised achievement the main currency of education. Education and school have become a machine for more effective governing [...] in the interests of producing a flexible, self-managing workforce for an increasingly competitive and [...] consuming global economy. (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p. 17).

Ball (1990, 2008), who has been documenting and critiquing this trend for many years, uses Foucault's (1980) analysis of the technology of power to highlight that management as a "rationality geared to efficiency, practicality and control [...] embodies a clear empiricist-rationalist epistemology [...] which contends that social life can be mastered scientifically and can

be understood [...] according to law-like generalizations” (Ball, 1990, p. 157). Such policy technologies seek to bring order and efficiency to what is deemed social chaos and inefficiency. In terms of school governance this has brought about a shift in style from “professional/collegial [...] to managerial/bureaucratic” (ibid. p. 153). Above all such policies reflect Foucault’s notion of surveillance as a form of self-discipline by which the workforce disciplines itself because of the threat of omniscient supervision and, for example, unannounced inspection. Such policies also pose a threat to the autonomy of Waldorf schools or marginalise them by denying them access to state funding if they don’t adopt whatever curricula and organizational structures governments deem to be for the common good.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) have identified three major trends in educational policy since the 1960s and now propose a “fourth way”. The *first way*, which was characterised by innovation and professional freedom, was replaced by a *second way* in which competition and educational prescription reigned. This was followed by a *third way* that sought to balance professional autonomy with accountability but the methods applied have become increasingly bureaucratic and quantitative. In their *fourth way* Hargreaves and Shirley recommend that schools become inclusive, differentiated and democratic learning communities that place responsibility before accountability and have sustainable leadership. Schools of the future, they write, “should be the embodiment of norms of reciprocity, active trust, and democratic deliberation. It is not more mandates and management they need, but the broad shoulders of uplifting and sustainable leadership” (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2011, p. 95). They see distributed forms of leadership as key to sustainability (ibid. p. 96).

There has been growing interest in forms of distributed school leadership (Harris, 2009, Gronn, 2009) to replace the largely unsuccessful policies that valorised ‘heroic’ or inspirational individual leadership (Gronn, 2008, p. 142). Whilst distributed leadership can also be instrumentalised to distribute the responsibility for implementing top-down policies (Hartley, 2007), it can also be a key principle in a “coherent and inclusive democratic consensus that joins the entire community in the pursuit of a compelling social vision” (Hargreaves and Fink, 2008, p.239). These authors suggest that through democratic distributed leadership schools can move beyond “arithmetical achievement gaps or vacuous calls for world-class standards” and move towards education being about providing a basis for creativity and sustainability, ecological survival and fundamental human rights (ibid.). These are values that align with those of Waldorf education (Rawson and Richter, 2000).

Several recent studies mention leadership and management in Waldorf schools as examples of distributed and democratic leadership (Woods, Ashley, Woods, 2004), developmental democracy (Woods and Woods, 2008) and latterly holistic democracy (Woods and Woods, 2011). Indeed Waldorf schools practice a form of republican democratic leadership within a non-hierarchical collegial structure based on Steiner’s theory of social threefolding (Rawson and Richter, 2000), as will be elucidated below. They do so in a fairly unique way that even dispenses with the school principal. Thus Waldorf schools are a living experiment in democratic leadership that ought to be of general interest in the current climate of school leadership discourse.

This paper explores to what extent the model of leadership underpinning Waldorf practice and the social theory informing it align with notions of democratic leadership and holistic democracy. The issues at stake are not confined to how schools are run but relate to the wider question of what education is for and the nature of the relationship between education and society.

Data collection

Though primarily theoretical this paper draws on qualitative data based on 80 questionnaires and 10 interviews conducted according to the ethical research values of the University of Plymouth within the context of a professional doctorate. The informants were Waldorf teachers at two international conferences (“English Week”, in Altenberg, Germany in November 2010, the “Asia Pacific Waldorf Conference” in Hyderabad, May 2011) and in a Waldorf school in Northern Ireland. The teachers came from Australia, Austria, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Holland, India, Japan, South Korea and the UK and had an average of around 10 years experience teaching in Waldorf schools. The author is a practicing Waldorf teacher and positions himself as a critical insider using Herr and Anderson’s (2005) continuum of positionality in action research.

Leadership, management and school governance

Unless otherwise stated, the use of these terms relates to practice in Waldorf schools. The definitions given here are drawn from non-Waldorf literature. Following Bush (2011) *leadership* is understood in this paper as relating to the intentional formulating of values, vision, and policy in a school. It should be ethically transformational (communicating a vision, being moral, raising aspirations, motivating (Woods, 2005), instructional (influencing teaching and learning), and its central quality is influence rather than authority. *Management* relates to implementation. Both leadership and management call for decision-making processes, the first being mainly strategic the second being operational. The term *school governance* is used here to include both leadership and management, though the main focus of the paper is on leadership.

Leadership issues in Waldorf schools today

Not only are government policies challenging the autonomy of Waldorf schools in many countries, the schools are also increasingly under internal pressure to review their leadership and management policies, particularly in relation to the evaluation of educational quality, even using self-formulated criteria. One of the main outcomes of an inquiry into the preconditions of educational quality development in Waldorf schools (Rawson, 2007, 2010b) was that this would require more pro-active, binding and coherent forms of leadership than generally exist in Waldorf schools. There is a tension here between this recognition and strong traditions of teacher and school autonomy.

School leadership today is often understood in the wider discourse as supporting conferencing, giving teachers voice, promoting teachers' professional growth and fostering teacher reflection (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). According to Rawson and Richter (2000) the primary roles of leadership in Waldorf schools should be supporting educational quality development including teacher learning, generating knowledge about the needs of the pupils, researching and evaluating practice, creating and articulating shared values. However fulfilling these aims is often hindered by strong resistance to all forms of internal evaluation of teaching, except that of novices and the view that each teacher is an autonomous educational artist and as such, sovereign in his or her realm (Rawson, 2007). A survey carried out for the present study showed a strong preference for informal and voluntary forms of collaboration and teamwork by Waldorf teachers. When asked to assess the levels of collegiality in their schools using a scale describing five stages from weak to strong forms of collegiality (based on work done by Fallon and Barnett, 2009), and then to state the level they would like to see, most (62 out of 80) Waldorf teachers preferred the existing weak and voluntary forms of collegiality that were not in any way managed or regulated. Most gave collegiality a high priority but insisted that it be voluntary. Teacher with less than 5 years of experience, however, felt formal forms would be more helpful to them. This suggests that the notion of teacher autonomy is a strong structure that shapes the way Waldorf teachers relate to the colleague after they are no longer novices.

This preference for teacher autonomy is matched by strong resistance to any form of external regulation of schools, even by their own professional bodies such as national associations of schools. The UK Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship introduced a Code of Practice for quality development in 2002 (Rawson and Swann, 2002) that was fairly novel within the Waldorf schools movement. Characteristically it lacked any form of control or sanctions. The German Association of Waldorf Schools formulated a commitment to quality development in 2005 and recently reaffirmed this in detail in an agreement signed by all schools (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen, 2011). However, attempts to strengthen regulation through inter-school accountability were democratically rejected by a large majority of schools' representatives in 2011 (Bundesarbeitskreis Qualität der Freien Waldorfschulen, 2011) and self-regulation was re-affirmed.

Di Ronco (2010), who is a school management consultant in Waldorf schools, found many schools in Germany to be struggling with issues related to school governance, resulting in frustration and frequent time-consuming review processes that deflect focus from educational development. All the teachers surveyed in the present study said their schools had changed the management procedures in the past 5 years in some way, in many cases significantly. There is also evidence that one of the main causes of teacher burnout is stress caused by ineffective leadership and management (Käufer & Versteegen 2010).

There is also some evidence that many Waldorf teachers have problems articulating what ideas inform the model of leadership and management their schools actually have (Heijne, 2010). Heijne surveyed school representatives attending a national meeting of UK Waldorf schools and found high levels of inclusion in decision-making but low levels of efficiency and considerable ambiguity relating to the theory informing their practice. She identifies that decision-making is a common problem. In a follow up theoretical study Heijne (2011) argues plausibly that models of consensus are more appropriate for policy decisions in Waldorf schools but that operational decisions should be made by informed consent using a sociocratic model developed by Endenberg (1998, cited in Heijne, 2011) in order to increase efficiency and reduce collegial frustration. The sociocratic model suggests that decisions can be made by consent only when no one has a reasoned argument against it. As Heijne explains, consent differs from consensus. Consensus requires the positive and active support of all those involved and can therefore take much longer to achieve, whereas consent allows decisions to be made as long as there are no compelling arguments or any strong evidence against the decision, even if some members have reservations. This is supposed to lower the influence of subjectivity. This suggestion, together with the model of dynamic delegation, in which areas of competence are delegated to individuals or small teams (Herrmannstorfer, 2004) that is increasingly used by Waldorf schools, suggests that collegial consensus as a basis for leadership can be frustrating, time-consuming and ineffective.

Mandating and the appointment of managers appears to be becoming more common in Waldorf schools in the US and the UK, though this is also seen and resisted by many teachers as creeping managerialism. The very limited data generated in this study suggest there are strong national differences regarding the acceptance of managers within the collegial system and suggests that a more thorough study would be rewarding. Nevertheless, Waldorf schools generally have managed to survive and in most cases thrive in many different cultural settings with collegial systems without school principals and thus can be seen as living examples of a particular kind of democratic and distributed school leadership.

Democratic schools and education for democracy

The question of democracy in schools has two fundamental aspects that are linked. Democracy in school governance should be closely linked to education for democracy (Starratt, 2004). Following Dewey's (1916) notion that schools have a key role to play in helping pupils develop the critical abilities they need to question the society they live in, which is essential to a functioning democracy, Starratt (2004) sees the primary task of school leadership in creating an atmosphere that enables participation and the sharing of ideas. Education for democracy involves engaging students in reasoned deliberation. According to Starratt, democracy in this sense is not merely representative but is a "more communal, fraternal, collaborative expression of democracy" (Starratt, 2004, p. 336). Democratic educational leadership "should be focused on cultivating school environments where [a] richer and fuller humanity is experienced and activated by people acting in communion" (ibid., p. 338). Furman and Starratt (2002) argue that democratic communities should accept and celebrate difference and stress the nature of mutual social interdependence and the common good. These authors also emphasise that democracy has both a strong moral basis and practices open inquiry and critique. Møller (2006) sums up the preconditions for an education for democracy as:

- recognizing the basic value and rights of each individual;
- taking the standpoint of others into consideration;
- deliberation in making decisions;
- embracing plurality and difference; and
- promoting equity and social justice (Møller, 2006, p. 56).

Whilst the focus in this paper is on democratic leadership and management it is acknowledged this can hardly be separated from education *for* democracy. As Woods and Gronn point out, the way an organization treats the people within it, "has deep consequences for the type of person that organizational members are encouraged to become [...] For education, what type of person we — students and adults — are encouraged to become is the very stuff of its 'business'" (2009, p. 448). The reverse must also apply. School governance that treats the members of a school community as the means to the ends of organizational or societal systems cannot legitimately educate for democracy. Education for democracy has to "walk the talk" and role model what its educational ethos espouses. To do otherwise would be immoral. As Fullan (2003) points out, good educational leadership is in the service of moral purpose (cited in Woods, 2004).

Building on Dewey's notion of democracy as a mode of associated living embedded in a culture and social relationships of everyday life, Fielding and Moss describe democracy as a relational ethic that can and should pervade all aspects of everyday life, a way of being, "a fundamental educational value and a form of educational activity" (2011, p. 42). They speak of democratic fellowship as both a condition and an aspiration of a person-centred education and school as a person-centred learning community. Waldorf education understands itself exactly in these terms (Rawson and Richter, 2000).

Democratic schools, such as those that belong to the International Democratic Education Network, have a strong commitment to the principle that all learners should be able to directly and indirectly participate in all decisions that effect them, including what they learn. Significantly, there are no Waldorf schools in the network. Whilst educating children towards democracy, citizenship and responsibility (Rawson and Richter, 2000), Waldorf schools believe that the teachers should create a pedagogical framework and invite pupils to participate creatively in their own learning. They believe that this enhances both their learning and their ownership of the process. Older pupils are consulted in many areas through pupil councils and class representatives. Education for democracy does not necessarily entail children choosing what to learn, though their participation in their school communities is a vital democratic element.

Democratic leadership

In a booklet published by the *National College for School Leadership* (Harris, Moos, Møller, Robertson and Spillane, 2006), the authors describe the challenge of democratic leadership as being to create a stimulating learning environment, foster social justice, represent values and cultivate a culture of openness and dialogue, critique and deliberation, which means decisions based on research, discussion and good arguments. Mahony and Moos (1998) see collegiality and co-operation as part of democratic leadership in schools in Denmark, where the principal is seen as *primus inter pares*, as a good teacher who promotes dialogue about good practice. Democratic and civic values have traditionally played an important role in social and educational policies in most Nordic countries. Møller (2006) reports on democratic leadership in schools in Norway, which has a strong ideological tradition of, "viewing schools as an expression of democratic political ideals and as a mechanism for preparing children to play constructive roles in a democratic society" (Møller, 2006, p.53). However, Møller also notes that neoliberal policies and shifts in public attitudes in recent years have led to an emphasis on performance, competition and individualism in Norway, which can be seen as a weakening of those democratic values.

Woods (2004, 2005) characterised democratic leadership as being based on four interlocking rationalities, by which is meant ways of thinking, feeling and acting. These rationalities are:

...decisional (rights to participate and influence decision-making); discursive (possibilities for open dialogue); therapeutic (positive feelings from participation); and ethical (aspiration to truth). (Woods, 2004, p. 4)

Of these rationalities Woods argues that the decisional and ethical are crucial to democracy. In particular it is vital to recognise that advancing truth is worthwhile, social and possible (Woods, 2004). Woods points out that the capacity democratic leadership lies not only in individuals “but is constituted by institutional arrangements, culture and relationships in an organization. Clearly these collective, emergent properties are not disconnected from the actions of people activate them and, over time, evolve them” (Woods, 2005, p. xvii). Woods links this to his notion of a trialectic framework of social dynamics involving structure, person and engagement. Each school evolves a body of social structures that both constrain and enable individuals to act agentively. Engagement is social action that emerges both from the influence of those social structures, practices, roles and values and from the person’s own initiative, which in turn may change the organizational structures and within the school, since democratic participation and the process of deliberation enable change at this level. Moreover Woods has also argued (2003) that democratic leadership in this sense is a response to the Marxist analysis of the alienation of the individual and to Weber’s notions of the instrumental influence of bureaucracy and capitalist rationalities if it allows a creative space within the organization for communicative discourse, which allows for the reintegration of the agentic person into organizational structures. Woods (2008) has increasingly argued that schools need a culture of developmental democracy that orientates itself around substantive values such as recognising the spiritual dimension in the human being, including inner work to develop spiritual capacity, recognising and enabling the development of potential in every person (teachers and pupils) and creating a climate for open discourse. In this connection Woods and Woods (2008) have stressed the interconnectedness between spiritual awareness and democracy in relation to school leadership. They wrote that, “our analysis of collegial leadership in the Steiner school leads us to highlight the importance of people engaging together as a learning community to promote openness to spiritual awareness – as an integral part of democratic agency and ethical rationality” (Woods and Woods, 2008, p.113).

Social pedagogy

Perhaps the core issue that needs to be addressed in considering democratic education is the question as to what education is for, apart from preparing pupils for democratic participation in society. The question may seem superfluous in view of the large number of explicit outcomes that education is supposed to realise these days. However Fielding and Moss (2011) have suggested that social pedagogy offers central aims often overlooked in current education policies. As they point out, in contrast to the “teacher as technician’s role, whose task is to unwrap and present packages of prescribed information” (ibid. p. 17), the social pedagogue’s role in education is to support the overall development of individuals and their integration into society. Social pedagogy, they argue, is more than teaching subjects. It includes the aims of well-being, identity and social integration and involves taking a holistic perspective that addresses what Moss and Petrie (2002, p.143 cited in Fielding and Moss, ibid. p.17) call, “the whole child, the child with body, mind, emotions, creativity, history and social identity...[and] not only the mind, the traditional teaching approach.” What Fielding and Moss have “re-discovered” in the European tradition of social pedagogy is what Waldorf schools have been practicing, albeit around the margins of the educational landscape, in the UK since 1924 and more recently in over 60 countries world wide. For this reason alone, it would be interesting to explore how Waldorf schools practice social pedagogy. There may be lessons for what Fielding and Moss (2011) call the common school.

Holistic democracy

Woods and Woods have built on such notions of democracy in schools by adding a holistic dimension. What makes this approach holistic is that it aims to be enabling

...in two, interrelated ways: by creating an environment which encourages individuals to grow as whole people (who are spiritually, socially and ecologically connected, seek to develop their full capabilities and aspire to truth in open- hearted, open-minded ways) and facilitates the fair participation of all (in decisions which affect them and their environment and in working together to enhance mutual understanding and transcend disagreement and diversity of interests). (Woods and Woods, 2011, p. 1)

Holistic democracy values the search for holistic meaning. It fosters balanced relationships between the developmental needs of the individual and those of the school community. It finds it important to create a climate in which transforming dialogue can occur and in which the well-being of all involved can develop and experience a sense of community, belonging, empowerment and self-esteem (Woods and Woods, ibid., p. 2). Holistic democracy has a commitment to a diverse spectrum of knowledge sources and methods of knowledge generation as a basis for its pedagogy and it assumes high levels of self-organization and autonomy that are balanced by equally high levels of peer- accountability, open discourse, debate and exchange.

A framework for holistic democracy

In order to create a framework for assessing levels of democracy in schools, Woods and Woods (2011) have identified a number of variables within the organization of a school, each of which are represented in the form of contrasting features that are seen as a continuum rather than as a binary, represented by a horizontal line. On the left side of the spectrum are the ideal-typical characteristics of a “hierarchical, rationally focused bureaucratic school” (ibid. p.5). On the right, the characteristics of a holistic democracy are listed. The first variable, for example, is *principal organizational purpose*. On the left side the primary aims are “competitive performance”. This could mean that a school sees its main purpose as gaining success in exam results or year testing and the creation of a competitive school climate through rewards and status. At the opposite side of the continuum the aims of holistic democracy are “substantive ideals”. This might mean that a school sees the development of individual potential, social awareness, ethical behaviour or life skills as its highest pedagogical aims. These aims largely align with Fielding and Moss’s (2011) notion of radical education in the common school. Since most schools with such aims also have to ensure good exam results, the degree of democracy would reflect the balance between these aims. The other variables include, knowledge goals, methods of teaching and knowledge generation, modes of learning, authority structures, spaces and scope for participation, communication flow, key purpose of dialogue, engagement, community, personal attitudes and mindset of the organization. The framework can be used by educational institutions to self-assess these variables within current policy and practice and as orientation for internal discourse.

Steiner’s theory of social threefolding and school governance

In order to explore the extent to which Waldorf schools can be considered democratic it is necessary to briefly outline the origins, theory and common practice of Waldorf school governance. Dahlin (2010) points out, citing Kiersch (2006) that the link between social and political issues is fundamental to Waldorf education but is often overlooked in presentations of the educational philosophy. This view may reflect the German context but would be contentious in other countries.

Historically the original Waldorf School was born out of Steiner’s social and political activity in the wake of the catastrophe of the First World War and the brutal suppression of the November Revolution in Germany and this is reflected both in its organizational forms and curriculum (Neider, 2011; Clouder and Rawson, 2003; Lindenberg, 1992). In founding the Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1919 Steiner created a new form of school governance that reflected on the one hand, the relationship of the school to the state and on the other, Steiner’s understanding of the relationship of the individual to the wider community. According to Steiner’s social theory as outlined in his book *Towards Social Renewal* (1977) and in his collected articles on the subject (Steiner, 1986), the welfare of the community is dependent on the individual’s potential being recognised, respected and fostered, rather than being socially shaped or determined. Following Steiner, society is co-constructed by the individuals who make up the community and thus there needs to be equity in order that one class or sector of society cannot rule over or limit the potential of the others. The health of the community depends on the creativity and initiative of free individuals who have developed a sense of their mutual interdependence with their fellow citizens and who are free to act out of insight and a sense of moral and civic responsibility.

Steiner agreed with the analysis of Marx and Engels that capitalism alienated the individual by controlling, suppressing and subverting human creativity and turning both work and creativity into a commodity (Steiner, 1986). He recognised that the modern capitalistic mechanised economy with a division of labour leads to a lack of interest in and enthusiasm for through the goods and services produced leading to a loss of meaning. This is equally true of both the bourgeois owners of the means of production and the workers and reinforces alienation in both, whilst materially privileging and empowering the former. Steiner saw that the circumstances of materialistic capitalism deny the spiritual origins of the worker’s energy, ideas and labour. Steiner, however, rejected the Marxist solution of ownership by the workers, as not addressing the more fundamental problem of alienation and the lack of interest in the needs of those the economy is supposed to be serving (Steiner, 1986). Steiner actively supported the workers council movement and the Waldorf School itself was founded as a direct result of collaboration between the workers’ council at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory (Molt, 1991). He saw that the social democratic and communist solutions on offer in 1919 would lead to the domination of the masses by the few. This was a point picked up by journalists reporting Steiner’s political speeches to factory worker at the Bosch and Daimler works in Stuttgart. The local newspaper, the *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, wrote on 29.4.1919:

What was said about the proletariat will showed deep understanding and empathy. Steiner repeatedly emphasised that people should not think *about* the proletariat but together *with* the proletariat. (Schmelzer, 1991, p. 125)

Steiner was even more critical of the emergent right wing national socialists, to the extent that he was the target of a campaign by the right wing *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a major newspaper that soon offered active support for the NSDAP and other anti-Semitic parties. The leader of the Bürger-Partei, Roos, who later became active in the Nazi movement wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on the 1st May 1921:

It is not personal motives that have led me to get involved in the conflict concerning Steiner's ideas but the deepest concern for our nation. The Steinerian Social Threefolding Theory is a danger to the existence of our state and soul of our people. It is to be fought with all energy. It is a duty that is applauded by all those who care for the Fatherland (cited in Neider, 2011, p. 83).

Nor was Steiner drawn to the individualistic solutions of liberalism was strongly critical of notions of a free market as a force for social good. Steiner's solution lay in the economic sphere in the cultivation of altruistic interest in other people who benefit from the work. The division of labour calls for social altruism, civic and environmental responsibility. In concrete terms this means that the worker derives a sense of meaning, belonging and well-being when she uses her creativity, energy and initiative to solve social problems, provide products and services people actually need and which are ecologically sustainable in a process that is socially just. This interest in the other is best cultivated by enhancing social justice through a "legal system in which every individual stands as an equal among equals [and] arouses one's interest in one's fellow. One works in such a system for the others because one gives to this relationship between oneself and others a living foundation" (Steiner, 1986, p. 107). This notion resembles Durkheim's (1984) notion of organic solidarity, which is similarly based on the analogy of the way the various organs in an organism are mutually dependent on each other if the health of the whole is to be achieved. For Durkheim, social health is dependent on society living in accordance with the surrounding conditions and not striving towards an unsustainable state. As such it can be interpreted as a conservative force. Steiner's vision of organic solidarity is based on the uncertainty of the future but also on its promise. Therein lies its sustainability. Interpolating Steiner into the contemporary context we could say with Barry (2011) that, given the challenges facing humanity, sustainability requires not only zero growth but also courageous recognition of social vulnerability and the willingness to emancipate ourselves from both communism and consumerism. The challenge, according to Barry, "is to embrace new intelligibilities, ways of being, having and doing, new identities and subjectivities, and new arts of life, all must be part of a project to avert collapse" (Barry, 2011, p. 260).

Steiner's notion of a healthy society is thus based on a kind of social or civic individualism, an idea perhaps akin to Pettit's (1997) notion of civic republicanism that sees pluralism and contestation as important for democratic politics as consensus and agreement. In Steiner's analysis, society is renewed and re-constructed through socially committed individuals who do this in individual ways, yet do not aspire to what Barry (2011) calls the hyper-individualism of neo-liberalism.

Steiner also made the point that capitalistic societies tend to construct administrative bodies that regulate people and social processes, an analysis that resembles Weber's description of the role of bureaucracy in a capitalist society which traps people in an "iron cage of rationality" (Weber, 1971). Steiner (1986) warned against the dangers of bureaucracy stifling individual creativity and potential. Indeed his response to socialist criticisms of his theory of social threefolding was to stress the need to avoid normative regulation of education that does not address individual needs or foster originality and the development of individual potential (Steiner, 1986).

Steiner's theory of social threefolding (1977) makes the case for the relative autonomy of the three spheres of society; the economy and industry, the sphere of politics and the law and the cultural sphere or what we would call today, civil society (Cohen and Arato, 1992), as Dahlin (2010) has discussed. These mutually interdependent spheres are to be separated in the sense that each has a different set of guiding principles that should not be confused or applied in the wrong sphere. The economy should be guided by the principles of association and the meeting of needs rather than by freedom alone, as it is in neoliberalism. The state should follow the principles of social justice and equality and should not for example deregulate the economy or environment. The cultural sphere should be governed by the principle of individual freedom, and not by equality in the sense of "one size fits all".

In the field of individual development, industrial methods of standardisation and measurement, business models of management, consumer choice and a climate of competition should have no place. One of the primary functions of an independent cultural life in society is to enable meaning, values and identity to be developed out of human nature, as opposed to being only determined by upbringing, education, class or wealth. Whilst all these factors exist and can to some extent be regulated or ameliorated by measures supporting social equity and justice, people nevertheless need a free cultural space in which they can develop their individual potential. Without the possibility for human beings to seek, construct and express meaning and identity (Dahlin, 2010), the state and the economy can become tyrannical and at the same time, lose their primary source of creative renewal. Thus social and economic forms are reproduced that inhibit rather than foster development.

Individualism, collectivism and the person

In Steiner's view the primary aim of education is therefore to enable each individual to develop his or her potential and this aim is linked to his view of the relationship of the individual to society. Thus, following Dahlin (2010, p. 50), "a democratic society is characterised by making it possible for each individual to develop his or her own innate potential and then allowing society to develop in accordance with the abilities and the creativity that is released in this way."

This is a more radical view of democracy than simply the right to vote, because it locates democratic power literally in the agentic person. This idea is very similar to Fielding and Moss (2011) notion of the need for a new form of “personalism”, which places the “individual in an inescapable relational nexus, within which individuality emerges and learning occurs and from which community and all other human forms of engagement derive their vibrancy and legitimacy” (Fielding and Moss, p. 48). Personalism is the recognition of the relational nature of society that goes beyond the political. This involves “extra-institutional politics of personal relations” working hand in hand with the politics of institutions. (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p. 160 citing Unger). The relational nature of the self is as they put it, “communal rather than collective. It affirms both the ethical and inevitable nexus of politics and social justice. It also insists on their fulfilment in the felt realities of the human encounter” (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p. 160). This is exactly the position Steiner took. It is a position that calls for a politics for the sake of the personal, to paraphrase Fielding and Moss (ibid.).

Steiner therefore argues for the autonomy for all educational institutions on the grounds that the health of society depends on each new generation freely bringing its full potential to bear on the existing social order. This potential can only be realised through an education that respects and fosters that potential as its primary aim. This means that neither the state nor the economy should determine what young people should learn or become since this would limit the development of their potential by forcing them into the existing framework. Instead, “what should be taught and cultivated in these schools must be drawn solely from a knowledge of the growing human being and of individual capacities. A genuine anthropology must form the basis of education and instruction” (Steiner, 1986, p. 71). One consequence of this, for example, would be to reverse the notion of school readiness, if this implies that children should be ready for what the state deems primary education should be. Instead schools would be “ready” to meet each child’s developmental and learning needs. Rather than fitting children into pre-existing boxes, open learning spaces need to be created and this principle applies in age-appropriate ways at all levels of education. One could multiply this example many times over. This is not to say that there can be no consensus on what children need and therefore no common curriculum, because, following Norwich (2002), children have common needs and entitlements. They also have needs they share with groups of others (such as dyslexics or highly gifted children and others with specific learning needs). But they also have needs that are unique to them. Thus a core curriculum is legitimate as long as it doesn’t assume that all children have the same needs at the same time and recognises that this balance varies with the age of the child. The older the child becomes the greater their need for individualised learning, inquiry and self-expression, a notion that contradicts the aims of standardised exams.

One might object that the notion of potential is fundamentally elitist, it is simply the creation of another form of cultural capital, privileging some, disempowering others, since some have more than others and this factors is undeniably influenced by social structures. Certainly the use of recognizing potential can be instrumentalised in this way by, for example, identifying and promoting highly gifted children. That is definitely not what Steiner meant. His stated commitment (1986) to creating a school in which the future carpenter and future university teacher could sit side by side at a co-educational school (in the 1920’s) until the age of 18 was not a utopian gesture but a modest and pragmatic way of providing equal opportunities for individual development. Potential needs a level playing field or a common school and a social relational community spirit of mutuality forged through shared experience in which each can encounter the other and feel seen, heard and recognised. Potential is the transformation of what is internalized and transformed by the learner or the developing person that is subsequently externalised in the person’s practice. Potential is both transformed and transforming and is not simply input and output and is therefore fundamentally unpredictable, immeasurable, unquantifiable and amoral. Recognising and fostering potential cannot therefore be predicative. Potential will usually be within the discourse but has the potential- there is no other word for it- to be novel, innovative, incomprehensible and may bring about change. Whether the ontology of potential is random or meaningful is a philosophical question that has at this stage to be left open. The best one can do is recognise that given the opportunity everybody can do it. We can only value and contextualise its expression once it manifests.

In spite of all social and class-based one-sidednesses in actually existing Waldorf schools, future carpenters, builders, policewomen and soldiers, professors and numerous other future professions (see Barz and Randoll, 2007) do sit, work, play, perform and argue together at school until the age of 18, whatever academic qualifications they achieve on the way. In many countries their numbers are not as insignificant as the yare in the UK. That in today’s world is no mean achievement.

As Fielding and Moss (2011) note, much contemporary educational language reflects a disciplinary human economic treadmill. They note that what

...emerges out of this impoverished and impoverishing public discourse is an image of the child as an empty vessel, to whom information, prescribed by the curriculum, must be “delivered”; the teacher as a technician, whose task is to unwrap and present packages of prescribed information, the parent as autonomous consumer, concerned only with securing the best buy for their child; and the school as a business competing with other school-businesses... (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.17)

The case for school autonomy

Following the logic of his general argument for the separation of the state, the economy and cultural life, Steiner insisted that schools and universities have to be autonomous so that they can research and identify the needs of their pupils and students, rather than deliver prescribed models or curricula. He argued that:

The administration of the educational institutions, the organization of courses of instruction and their goals should be entirely in the hands of persons who are simultaneously either teaching or otherwise productively engaged in cultural life. (Steiner, 1986, p. 75)

Naturally the state has the task of ensuring equal access to education, social justice and basic standards but pedagogy and curriculum are to be left to autonomous educational institutions which would agree the framework of standards within the community of educational institutions (in consultation with the state and industry). The economy should provide the resources. However, since the spheres are overlapping and the economy, for example, has an educational element (learning, training, work experience etc.) in which it associates with educational institutions and individuals. Similarly, the social, political, legal sectors of the state also have vital educational components. Learning is universal and wherever learning occurs human potential is being developed and realised, a process that creates something like protected islands of individual autonomy within the economic or social spheres.

Steiner's idea of Waldorf school leadership

In an address to the teachers at the founding of the college of teachers in the Waldorf School on 20th August 1919, Steiner wove many of the themes just discussed into a model of leadership. This has supplied Waldorf schools with a model ever since. It is worth quoting the passage in full because it contains much that is fundamental to this model of school leadership and management. Steiner said at the founding of the original Waldorf School in Stuttgart:

[W]e will organise the school not bureaucratically but collegially, and will administer it in a republican way. In a true teacher's republic we will not have the comfort of receiving directions from a Board of Education. Rather, we must bring to our work what gives us the possibility and the full responsibility for what we have to do. Each one of us must be completely responsible.

We can create a replacement for the supervision of the School Board as we form this preparatory course, and through the work, receive what unifies the school. We can achieve that sense of unity through this course if we work with diligence [...] we will practice teaching and critique it through discourse. [...] Here in the Waldorf School we do not want to create a parochial school. (Steiner, 1996, p. 30)

If we analyse these statements in relation to notions of democratic leadership we can see that Steiner instituted collegial leadership. Bush (2011, p. 72) characterizes the central features of contemporary collegial models as the assumption that the members of the collegiate “determine policy and makes decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Power is shared among some or all members of the organization who are thought to have a shared understanding about the aims of the institution.” The management (in the text the original German word *Verwaltung* is translated as *administering* and refers to running the school) was to be done in republican way. Gladstone (1997) has compiled and analysed Steiner's various references to this the question of leadership and management and established that the term *republican* essentially means that each member of the collegiate is a leader in his or her own right, making judgements and decisions on the basis of insight into the issues involved. According to Steiner, “college meetings are republican conversations in which all the teachers are their own masters” (Steiner, 1986, p. 38).

There have been influential voices within the movement suggesting that Waldorf leadership is republican and *not* democratic (Lehrs, 1987) though Brüll (1997) have contested this. Lehrs' understanding of what constitutes republican is a traditional elitist notion of self-appointed individuals who are deemed (or deem themselves) “best suited” to deciding matters on behalf of the common good. The implication in Lehrs' paper is that this authority is spiritual, which can make it feel almost aristocratic in how it works. Even spiritual insight has to be accountable. The question as to the authority base for this kind of republicanism has not been adequately addressed let alone resolved, given that membership of the collegiate is permanent. Lehrs' preference for this kind of aristocratic spiritual republicanism was set against a very restricted notion of representational democracy with majority voting, which is presented as both inefficient and not a true reflection of what is “right” because of its tendency to faction building. Indeed Brüll recommended both the need for strong majorities of 75% to 80% for decision-making and also mandating specific decisions to individuals within the collegiate. However, as we have seen democratic leadership involves much more than the decision-making process. If Lehrs' interpretation of Waldorf leadership policy as republican not democratic were to be the case in practice, then it clearly falls well short of deliberative democracy, let alone developmental or holistic democracy, as Woods (2005) characterises them. The notions of radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, Cohen and Fung, 2004) and deliberative democracy (Cohen, 2008) are based on the twin principles of deliberation and participation. This would challenge any leaders to explain and justify their positions and would be unlikely to delegate without full consultation.

In Steiner's original model there were checks and balances to republican (aristocratic or civic) individualism. These are specified in the teachers' commitment to work in weekly meetings together, creating shared understandings through exchange, discourse, study and research. Steiner spoke of the college of teachers being a university (Hochschule) for the teachers' ongoing education, what Gladstone (1997) termed a *republican academy*, translating and combining Steiner's phrases *true teacher republic* (Steiner, 1996, p. 31) with *living university... a permanent training academy* (Steiner, 1972, p. 208). Furthermore, the creation of a shared vision was also to be facilitated by explicitly working together on the spiritual vision of the school (Rawson, 2001). Steiner created a meditative framework (1996, p. 31) in which an image is invoked by the college members that focuses on the spirit of the school. This so-called *College Imagination* evokes an image of how the individual engages his or her higher self and how the group weaves together that which each individual brings to create an organ to perceive and receive spiritual insight. Steiner was very explicit in evoking the spiritual dimension in all aspects of the education and collegial working. A further aspect of this constellation is the recommendation from Steiner that the process of knowledge generation can use meditative or contemplative exercises to strengthen and tune pedagogical intuition as a skill (Steiner, 1983, Rawson, 2010) or what Biesta (2011) calls pedagogical wisdom or virtuosity.

Two final aspects of Steiner's model as outlined above include the commitment to evaluation of practice and discourse, and finally the reference to school avoiding being *parochial*. According to the online encyclopaedia *Enzyklo* (www.enzyklo.de) the original German term *Winkelschule*, translated here as "parochial", referred to schools that were private schools, not recognised or licensed by the state that had been common in northern German and Dutch cities since the 18th century and that were tolerated before universal education but by 1919 had become a byword for unregulated poor quality. The implication is clear- the Waldorf School should have high quality, should not be a private business and should meet state requirements for educational standards.

The internal logic of Steiner's model becomes clear. The requirement for continuous striving towards a shared vision and ongoing quality development through research drive the need for autonomy and collegial structures are necessary to enhance individual and collective responsibility and participation. Thus the commitment to non-hierarchical collegial structures is about generating common vision, stimulating knowledge generation and harnessing creativity and encouraging individual and collective responsibility. In terms of Woods (2005) analysis of the trialectic framework of social dynamics the teachers individually and collectively engage constructively with the existing organizational and ideological structures of the school in on-going dialogue and discourse. This engagement over time re-constructs both the person and the structures in an on-going co-evolution. The structures channel the process so that it is not a free for all in which anything goes, yet are susceptible to changing perspectives and practice. This works as long as the engagement is both critical and holistic. Since Steiner's view of the human being was holistic, the development of holistic forms of knowledge such as intuition should complement other, more rational forms of knowledge. Furthermore the collegial model was specifically designed to engage with and give expression to navigational spiritual ideas and experiences in the service of the institution, its pupils and teachers. The task of management and leadership is therefore to enable each person to full his or her potential, and as Steiner put it, "Of course it goes without saying that such a system relies upon the highest degree of professionalism and competence" (Steiner 1977: 12-13).

Now we can draw up a table, using Woods and Woods' (2011) degrees of democracy applied to a range of variables within the leadership and management processes in a school to compare the ideal-typical characteristics of holistic democracy and the ideal-typical Waldorf model based on Rawson and Richter (2000), ECSWE (2009) and the International Forum (2009).

Aspect of leadership/management	Holistic democracy (HD)	Waldorf (W)
Substantive purpose	HD is based on higher order values: freedom, social justice, equality, spirituality and individual development. Seeks to go beyond performative outcomes or profitability.	Same. All W. schools are non-profit organizations.
Knowledge goals	HD seeks a holistic knowledge base for professional development and teacher learning.	Same. Tendency to focus on Waldorf body of knowledge.
Methods of teaching	Teaching methods and knowledge creation involve dialectical movement between transmission of knowledge and critique by learners.	Teaching methods aim to meet the child's developmental stage with the highest aim being independent judgment, self-and co-construction of spiritual and moral values.

Professional development	Knowledge co-creation, sharing of views, expertise and information amongst networks of learners.	Collegial knowledge co-creation and self-development; active encouragement of development of intuitive knowledge and holistic study of child development.
Embodied learning	Experience of learning is embodied, using spiritual, cognitive, intuitive, aesthetic, affective, ethical, physical capabilities.	Same
Authority structure	Inclusive, democratic, rights of dispersed authority and leadership, participation for all members of the organization, self-organization, peer-accountability	Teachers' republican collegiate, non-hierarchical, distributed authority and leadership, self-organization/administration, peer-accountability, dynamic delegation.
Space for participation	Inclusive for all	Inclusive for teachers. Participation by parents (and pupils) limited in educational matters but extensive in school community as learning community.
Scope for participation	Maximal	Maximal
Communication flows	Multiple	Multiple
Key purpose of dialogue	Bring together different views, diverse sources of knowing to create new collective understanding.	Same. Emphasis on understanding values and principles of the education.
Holistic engagement	Whole person engaged	Same
Community	Organic sense of belonging.	A healthy community values the individual and the individual values the community. Community as focus for learning
Connectedness	The organization values and encourages togetherness and harmony with the natural world.	Same
Democratic consciousness	Organization values critical and independent thinking, co-operative spirit, social justice and truth.	Same

Discussion and conclusions

Even this brief overview should make it clear how much Waldorf and holistic democracy theoretically have in common. However if the criteria for democratic leadership were to be applied to evaluate practice in Waldorf schools there may be a number of issues that are likely to be problematical. This is of course a good reason for using these criteria for reflection. These issues include the question of participation of parents in schools, the participation of Waldorf teachers and schools in the wider educational discourse, the social accessibility and social inclusion of Waldorf schools and questions of equity, particularly in relation to gender and class.

There is evidence that Waldorf schools can be rich learning environments for the whole school community. Stehlik (2009) has written about how a Waldorf school can be the site for a community of practice for adult vocational education for parents who, as he puts it, buy into the school philosophy. The Steiner (i.e. Waldorf) school he investigated in Australia proved to be a locus for "community members to engage, learn, grow and to develop through practical involvement in an intentional community that both sustains its members as well as sustaining itself" (2009, p. 250-1). It would be interesting to investigate if this is generally true of Waldorf schools and if not, why.

A key issue in relation to holistic democracy is the relation of teachers to the body of Waldorf knowledge. The premise of

Waldorf autonomy is the claim that teachers know best regarding the educational needs of their pupils. This places a high burden on the quality of knowledge underpinning educational practice and policy. Broadly speaking, Waldorf practitioners draw on what can be termed the *Waldorf body of knowledge*. This consists of the texts of Steiner, secondary Waldorf literature and the traditions of practice in Waldorf schools. Given the complexity and unfamiliar nature of Steiner's ideas, the texts are not easily accessible. Much discourse in Waldorf circles still involves the elucidation and interpretation of Steiner texts and this informs practice. As Kiersch points out, it is assumed by Waldorf teachers that Steiner "brought to light a solidly reliable body of knowledge concerning the nature of the human being and the laws of human development" (Kiersch, 2010, p. 64). However he also makes the point that this process has not generally been accompanied by critical reflection. Rittelmeyer (2010) comments that Steiner's works can be taken as a heuristic method that trains the thinking rather than as a proven body of knowledge. Paschen (2010) has explored ways in which the ideas and practice of Waldorf education can be approached through contemporary methods of academic discourse including ethnographic methods of research. Rawson (2010a) has explored ways in which the contemplative practice can be part of practitioner research. However these approaches have yet to take root in Waldorf teacher education.

The Waldorf body of knowledge is also a body of practice that structures habits, attitudes and ways of doing things. Without criticality, Waldorf practice is may be uncritically reproduced through transmission from "experts" to novices. This activity develops a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice situated within a community of practice as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). In the absence of critical reflection, this can be a process that remains at the level of reproduction rather than becoming a process of transformation.

Finally, in order to engage critically with the structures of Waldorf school organization and the ideology underpinning it requires a critical exploration of the social dynamics. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social practice has been applied to analysing a number of processes within educational institutions (Rawolle and Lingard, 2008; Tomson, 2005; Reay, 2004) and has proven useful in analysing the often hidden formative structures that shape people's habits, patterns of behaviour and their relations with others. According to Bourdieu, the experiences we have predispose us to ways of being and regular exposure reinforces these patterns, thus generating habits or dispositions that influence how we think, feel and behave and in particular how we position ourselves in relation to others. These habits are embodied, largely unconscious and co-determinative, in that our habits are shaped by our social environment, which in turn is structured by the people within it, the positions they take and the way they behave. Bourdieu used the term structuring structures to describe this process. People position themselves relationally in the social context in response to the positions taken up by others. Institutional patterns or structures can also function as implicit policies. As Thomson (2005, p. 741) put it, Bourdieu's conceptual "tool kit offers a particular way of theorizing the rules, narratives and self-held truths of social phenomena and of educational policy." Ball (2008) notes that informal policies can be

...both systems of values and symbolic systems, ways of accounting for and legitimating [...] decisions [...] to a greater or lesser extent [policies] have a semantic and ontological force. They play their part in the construction of a social world of meanings, of causes and effects, of relationships, of imperatives and inevitabilities. (Ball, 2008, 13)

Following Bourdieu's (1977) frame of analysis, a social subfield, in this case a Waldorf school, is a bounded social space in which there are determined positions that are held by people in relation to others in the field and these relations are governed by rules specific to that field. Those who are adept at "playing the game", to use Bourdieu's metaphor for social practice, are rewarded by acquiring cultural or social capital. Cultural capital includes forms of knowledge, taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences, language, narrative and voice. Social capital is who you are in the given context. Those perceived as possessing cultural or social capital by other "players" will be rewarded by status, authority and influence. The point is that the social field is never level and that some people are always privileged and others disadvantaged. Only when one recognises the rules and the currency of the various capitals that are valued has one the chance of changing the rules to reduce the degree of privilege through reflexivity. Whilst Bourdieu's analysis does not seem to offer a path to liberation, it offers an important tool to reveal the territory in which we operate and can certainly assist the kind of trialectic suggested above involving engagement between individual and structure.

There are many obvious ways in which the social environment in a Waldorf is not a level playing field and some positions are privileged within the dominant discourse. This differential can occur between novices and experienced teachers, between kindergarten and Upper School teachers, between class teachers and subject teachers, or between those who might be termed Waldorf-insiders and those who are seen to be less knowledgeable about Waldorf ideas, or who are more obviously committed to the Waldorf cause through membership of certain groups or bodies. Given the collegial and non-hierarchical nature of formal structures within Waldorf schools, these informal structures nevertheless may shape the practice of leadership. Recognising the habitual structures and the positions individuals situate is a first step towards reflexivity.

The criteria for holistic democracy could offer Waldorf schools a conceptual framework to explore their leadership practice and to reflect critically on the theoretical frames informing existing leadership policies and policies in use. If such reflection was accompanied by research, it would not only offer valuable feedback to schools but would offer the educational community insight into the working practices of a fairly unique form of democratic leadership.

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