

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Renewing Steiner Teacher Education: A Conversation with Florian Osswald

Neil Boland

Abstract

This article contains an interview between the author and Florian Osswald, one of the co-leaders of the Steiner education movement worldwide, held at the end of the four-day Asian Steiner Teacher Educators' Conference in Yuchi, Taiwan in February, 2020. It focuses on the work of the International Teacher Education Project (ITEP), an initiative set up by Osswald in 2017; the aim of ITEP is the renewal of Steiner teacher education worldwide, through a process of long-term engagement with teacher educators around the world. The interview covers the consultative process Osswald has chosen for ITEP and indicates how a century-old, globally distributed, spiritually based educational movement is looking to maintain that relevance. It gives insight into the current status of Steiner teacher education and some indications of directions in which it might develop further.

Keywords Waldorf, Rudolf Steiner, Steiner education, teacher education, interview

Introduction

Steiner Waldorf education has recently celebrated its centenary. During the last hundred years, it has expanded from its beginnings in Stuttgart, southern Germany, to be practised throughout the world. At the same time as this geographic expansion has been taking place, there has been a similar broadening of the cultural backgrounds of students in Steiner early childhood settings and schools. In addition, the nature of the times we live in has altered out of all recognition compared to a century ago. Given the steady expansion of Steiner educational initiatives, it seems fair to say that the education still finds relevance across different continents and cultures; how then does a century-old, globally distributed, spiritually based educational impulse maintain that relevance? To what degree are discourses which are active in the wider education context mirrored within Steiner education, and what are specifically Steinerian considerations? What are appropriate processes for maintaining relevance?

The International Teacher Education Project (ITEP) was initiated in 2017 by Florian Osswald, one of the co-leaders of the Steiner education movement worldwide and who is based in Switzerland. Osswald speaks here from a position of deep knowledge of the global

Steiner Waldorf movement, having travelled extensively for the last ten years gaining an in-depth understanding of Steiner education on six continents.

The broad aim of ITEP is the renewal of Steiner teacher education worldwide, through a process of long-term engagement with teacher educators around the world. This article is the record of a conversation in February 2020 at the end of the four-day Asian Steiner Teacher Educators' Conference held in Yuchi, Taiwan. Osswald is interviewed by the author, a New Zealand academic with a background in Steiner education and a member of ITEP since its inception. We had visited Taiwan to give the keynote addresses at the conference and to take part in workshops with the participants.

The conference in Taiwan was one of an extended series of meetings that have taken place since 2017 on possible future forms of Steiner teacher education, in which opinions, thoughts, ideas and critiques have been sought from Steiner teacher educators worldwide. At the Taiwan meeting, guidelines recently drafted by ITEP for the education and continued professional development of Steiner teacher educators were extensively discussed and critiqued over a period of four days by around 80 people, all involved in Steiner teacher education to some degree.

The conversation below covers a range of topics. It is part retrospective—going over the establishment and progress of ITEP and the establishment of the renewal process—and part forward looking, reflecting on the long-term goals of the project. Of note are insights into the current status of Steiner teacher education and some indications of directions in which it might develop further. Points arising from the interview are expanded on in the Discussion section. The transcript has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Interview

Boland: Florian, why do you think this project is necessary? What did you observe that made you want to begin?

Osswald: Well, the first thing is that people who work in teacher education today are usually people who were teachers, usually good teachers, including those who taught a specialised subject. They are people who have a good set of teaching skills and so are asked to do teacher training. In that way, they are sort of self-made people. They have rarely been trained to take up this new task.

From what I observe today, [as an educational movement] we have to reflect much more deeply. This needs emphasising, the need to reflect increasingly on your own practice: why do you do things and how you can improve through reflection? And to do this better, we need to educate the teacher educators.

Boland: Is there anything aside from increased or deepened reflective—or perhaps, best said, reflexive—practices that you think needs to be emphasised? Have you noticed anything within the [Steiner] education movement over the course of time, which makes you think that it could be good to put effort here into such a project?

Osswald: There are many considerations. The first is that we have to be contemporary schools, we have to be a contemporary school movement. And my observation is that, after one hundred years, there is a lot in schools which is traditional. It is good that on one side

there are certain traditions, but to be a contemporary school you have continually to adapt to changed times, invent new ways of teaching, so we need teachers who are able to do this. We have to ask ourselves how can we give them the education, the skills to dare to do this, and not to fall back into what is known and just repeat and repeat it. It's a different skill.

Boland: And so, this self-made person is essentially a classroom-based model—passing on of good classroom practice—but being a teacher involves a lot more than just classroom-based things. Would you agree?

Osswald: Yes, this is an assumption which I think has changed. There is a question of working appropriately with other people. For example, nowadays parents are much more involved in the schools, so you must be able to work well with parents. I also think that children are needing more; we must become ever more sensitive to diversity. As this grows, teachers need new skills. So in the Steiner education world we have to think everything over, think it over and try new things.

I think it is fair to say that, in the past, teacher educators did not give a lot of time to how student teachers learn; I believe they were more concerned with passing on content. They undoubtedly got to know their students but not so much the way they learned. Whereas now, when you have student teachers in front of you, you get the feeling that they're different, and it is up to you as a teacher educator to find out how they are different.

I think that nowadays we as teacher educators need to look much more at our adult students and ask ourselves how we can meet the needs of this generation who experience life in different ways from how we experienced it. They look for information in a different way from how I did and so on. How can we meet their learning needs? If I'm honest, I think this was not such an issue in Steiner teacher education 20 years ago, but today it becomes more and more of a question.

Boland: So do you think that now the whole gesture of teacher education has changed, or needs to change? Previously, in a Steiner teacher education course there was an amount of content which had to be gone through, activities which had to be completed so students would be ready to teach in a Steiner school. It was not a case of asking: what are your questions, how best do you learn, how can I respond to what you need? It was more a case of giving the students what they needed to step into teaching life.

Osswald: Indeed. Something else which has changed is that when you look at why Steiner teachers stop teaching, it is clear that school parents have an enormous effect on teachers today. It was not so much the case some years ago. The teacher was more an authority. That is still the case in some places such as Finland for example, where teachers are given complete authority, but in most countries this situation has changed; the teacher is not widely seen as an authority. Teachers quite often stop teaching because they have difficulties working with parents. If we teacher educators were really to treat student teachers as adults, work with them as adults, then, I think, it would be good preparation for future teachers to be able to work with parents. I think this is interesting and should be followed up on.

Boland: OK. Can you talk a bit about this transition from being an excellent teacher of children to being the teacher of adults? For often, as you've said, it's the good teachers who go on to become the teacher educators. In a Steiner education sense, it asks for completely different skills. You might be fantastic with four year olds, but are you going to be as good with twenty- or thirty-four year olds? Can you say something about that?

Osswald: In teacher education we have to find out, is this person really the right person to work with adults? It is a big question. How can we do this? What kind of processes do we have to put in place? I think it depends to a degree on the cultures involved, but the first step is definitely, are you able to reflect deeply on your practice? Are you willing to question yourself? Questioning yourself in front of the children is one thing; questioning yourself in front of adults is completely different.

Aside from reflection on practice, for me, adult education has to do with research work. We talk about teacher inquiry and are happy when people do this but, to be honest, not many people are doing research. I think in a certain way the adult teacher educator has to be a researcher.

Boland: This is slightly jumping on, but I'm just going to follow this thread. Why do you think there is, to a degree, what I would call an almost allergic reaction to the word "research" when you mention it to some Steiner educators?

Osswald: Because it's not seen as artistic. It is specialised academic research and, to be honest, I am not sure most people have a clear idea what methods to use.

Boland: And so, we have the standard methodologies and methods which all researchers use. Do you think that there are other possibilities which might be particularly relevant to Steiner education?

Osswald: Yes, of course—research using meditation. The pity is, we haven't done it to any degree. I have to blame myself as well. In the Steiner movement we haven't sufficiently developed this kind of method to make it of value. So people can start using it immediately—today, not tomorrow.

Boland: Can we explore this a little? I think it would be very positive if educators engage in research of this kind, research built on meditation, contemplative inquiry, first-person research or whatever you would like to call it. We would like them to explore Steiner's indications for using meditation as an investigative tool. But it is not described clearly and there are few examples to say, this is how it can look, or this is what the results can be. Within Steiner education, we have all the standard methodologies which are certainly useful, but we can also expand on these by using meditation as a research tool. It would be liberating to see more first-person research in a Steiner context. Work in this area might itself renew quite a lot. Imagine if numbers of teachers or teacher educators were working like this—then we would be making progress.

Osswald: Yes, that's the point. We will have to produce clear guidelines which indicate how this kind of research works in a practical way and what it might be used for—and also give examples of such work.

Boland: And how to ensure that it is done in a robust way. Such research can certainly be undertaken, but it needs preparation.

So, could you describe just briefly what gesture the Pedagogical Section wanted to give when you decided that it was necessary to begin this work in teacher education? People look to the Pedagogical Section for guidance to a certain degree, they look to you as one of the co-leaders of the Steiner education movement. Is that what you intended?

Osswald: No, the gesture is just the opposite. In the past, the Pedagogical Section has not said what is right and what is wrong but has instead sought to create a space in which things can happen. So, what we have done in this case is to begin a process to find out what teachers and teacher educators actually need. To do this, we went around the world asking groups of teacher educators what they consider of greatest importance when teaching people in the process of becoming teachers. This is the way we began this work—as a consultative process.

The teacher educators gave us the material regarding teacher development and we formed an international group to work with it; this has now become ITEP. The work was not done by the Pedagogical Section; the Section was part of the group—it created a space for the work to take place and provided financial support so the initiative could go forward. The ideas we gathered from round the world were consolidated and initial guidelines for initial teacher education were produced; these were then reviewed more than once by the people who put forward the [initial] ideas, as a kind of cycle, an action research model.

Boland: This consultation took place on different continents—where did you go?

Osswald: We started in South Africa, in Johannesburg at a Pan-Africa meeting so we could include people from East Africa as well. That was in 2017. After that, we went to Chengdu in China and worked with around 80 people from different countries in Asia. Next was South America, in Buenos Aires, followed by San Francisco for the North Americans, and there were two sessions in India, in Hyderabad. There was a meeting in Italy and one in Germany, but only a small group of people, and a session in Switzerland. And you sent some material from New Zealand. We put the same question to all these groups of experienced educators: “What are the qualities we wish for in a graduate of a Steiner teacher education programme?” The focus was initially on teachers and later moved to teacher educators.

These responses were collated by what is now the ITEP group into drafted guidelines for areas of focus in Steiner teacher education. I went back to Africa with this material so it could be reviewed, and then to South America, where there was a large meeting in Lima. We did the same in the U.S. and again in England with a group of around 25 teacher educators. These were the first reviews of the material, but the conversations were mainly about what content should be presented to the student teachers rather than which overall areas of professional development we wanted to encourage.

And this was not what the idea of the project was. It was to identify areas of development which training institutions, individual teachers and then teacher educators should work on. It is basically like a framework which you can use to ask yourself, am I working on and deepening my understanding of these different fields? This can be done at an initial or expert level—the areas of development apply to everybody. For schools, we had the idea that the project can

provide guidelines for professional development, as a framework for on-going professional development. We haven't put that in place yet, but we definitely will.

Boland: When you were drawing the members of the group that has become ITEP together, did you also aim—so far as was possible—to have a diverse group, male, female, early childhood, primary, secondary, from different places?

Osswald: Yes, but early childhood is not included, which is not ideal. I should have said earlier that of course I went to IASWECE, the international kindergarten body. I introduced our work and did workshops at two of their conferences, one in Barcelona and then in Ireland. So, they are with us, absolutely. But we need to work more on this. And just now in Taiwan, there were quite a few early childhood educators, which is excellent.

So, just to reiterate the aim of this work; we are trying to give guidelines which, ideally, should be applicable to teachers from all sectors. These guidelines should be open enough to suit early childhood, primary as well as secondary equally, and also they should be able to be adapted to any kind of course, whether it be a full-time, four-year one, a part-time within a school, or some other format. And the aim is also that they are sufficiently neutral that they can travel well. That they can be applied in any context, any culture or geography. As someone described it yesterday, these guidelines can act as a seed and that seed can then be planted in lots of different places. It can grow into the plant which will be suited to wherever it grows.

Boland: So each person who is trying to work with these guidelines essentially has to develop the work themselves.

Osswald: Absolutely. It's not a finished product, it is just a beginning, an indication.

Boland: Yes, and we've really striven not to put any content in in these guidelines, which I know will frustrate some people. There's no content and there's no "how to do it." There's not a "what" or a "how" which for me is a real strength and wonder of it. All the guidelines show is, these are the areas we think teachers need to pay attention to. To think, "Where am I, who am I, who am I working with? What really fits here?"

Osswald: That's the idea behind it. Doing this work, we have not had a large international conference of the teacher trainers. We tried twice to do this; it didn't work very well because the groups were small and I don't think they were really representative of the global school movement. Whereas now, in working with groups around the world as we have done, educators are asked to take part in the process themselves. So an open way of working together has been established, in which we can ask each other questions; this is the beginning of collaborative work.

If this doesn't happen and people have questions, it is not up to us [in the Goetheanum or in ITEP] to answer them; the answers come out of the work. This is the way we can work together in the future, in which we can evaluate each other in the work. If we can do this in the next few years, I think we will have made a big step. I get the feeling that many teacher adult educators are to a degree lonely. They have few or no partners to talk with about their questions. Now they have—this is something I hope will grow.

Boland: When I started working in teacher education, I was still a teacher. I had no idea what I was meant to do. I was just told, “You can do this. Go and do it.” I don’t think I did a bad job, but there was no guidance given.

What ITEP is proposing, for me, has a strong advantage, which I can already use myself, that it forms a structure which allows you to self-assess, and to say, “I realise that there are areas of being a teacher/teacher educator which I’ve been ignoring, areas I haven’t even thought about which I see are important for me to work on, or areas I have not been extending myself in, in order to be a rounded and constantly improving teacher educator.” And having identified these, it gives you areas to work on and develop yourself. That I think is of great value.

So, in this project we began looking at areas of development for teachers, but we’ve since moved on and have now spent the best part of the year on identifying the qualities of a teacher educator.

Osswald: Yes. The role and development of teacher educators formed the biggest concern in the beginning. After work and consultation, we have now put guidelines together about what the qualities of a teacher educator are. What a teacher educator should be able to do.

Boland: And also, to a certain degree, what kind of person should they be?

Osswald: Typically, yes. The importance of them as role models. From the beginning we thought that we needed to look at the people in teacher educator positions, the people who do this job in order to give them support and try to create change. It is the teacher educators who are essential to change. We now have suggestions for qualities of teacher educators which we are getting feedback on.

I think a next step in this process will be to bring the thinking away from a purely Steiner context and say, what are the attributes of an adult educator as such? Because first you must be an adult educator and then second, you must be someone who is able to work effectively in this way within Steiner education. I think this is important.

If you’re not a good adult educator, you are not going to be a good Steiner teacher educator. It’s like with teachers—will you ever be a good teacher just by studying anthroposophy? Anthroposophy helps you to become a Steiner teacher, but you also need to be a good teacher. What do you have to do in order to be a good teacher of adults? So we’ve put together guidelines and are back in an evaluation cycle again. Taiwan is the first place in which we have asked teacher educators to evaluate our suggestions. What I have felt over the last few days is that they’re touched; the questions have become personal. They seemed to think, “This is not only what I have to do; this is something which affects and involves me.” This I think makes it even more powerful. We’ll see what happens.

Boland: Yes, it also seems to me that, in the meeting we’ve just come from, people realised that this is a question of self-transformation and with this possibility comes a degree of excitement. There seemed a sense of “I think I can do this; I’d really like to do this. At least a bit ought to be achievable.” I thought that this was palpable in the conference and it certainly wasn’t just an academic exercise. All the discussions I was in were very lively.

Osswald: This is the hope we have. We have given certain ideas, but teacher educators themselves will build their own structures around this basic framework. They can change the structure if it doesn't meet what they need. But if you don't have an overall idea, you can't create structure.

Boland: On another topic, the draft texts we presented to the teacher educators here in Taiwan were gone over with a fine tooth comb.

Osswald: Yes, that was good to see. People really engaged deeply with what was suggested. So, from all the feedback we received, we now have new insights and have experienced how the suggestions were picked up in an Asian culture, with people telling us, we look at things differently. It is very helpful. Now we [ITEP] have some work to do to rewrite the guidelines in the light of this feedback. It was interesting that the general areas were confirmed, but that the wording of the condensed texts were strongly critiqued. We'll need to work on that.

I had the feeling that there was an enthusiasm about it. That was very heartening.

Boland: I don't think I'm making it up, but I would describe the atmosphere in the room as like a sense of empowerment. A real wish to begin to work with these guidelines. I hope that that isn't only a Taiwanese phenomenon. It'll be very interesting to see how and if this is taken up in other countries—particularly when we're going to some of the countries with a long history of Steiner education. How do you see this process then continuing?

Osswald: I think we need to design a course or courses to support Steiner adult educators in certain areas, particularly in teaching practice, for example—how to work with adults in a Steiner context. Adult education is a world in itself and [Steiner] teacher educators need an introduction into this world. Just as we do for high school teachers.

Boland: Thinking in seven-year periods, 14 to 21 is not the same as 21, 28, 35, and so on.

Osswald: That's it. We need to be aware that the range of ages Steiner teacher educators have in front of them is not the same as in a normal university class—you will know this better than me—but they are certainly not all 20 to 25. So, how do we work appropriately with different ages and different levels of life experience? What is the best way for us to work with student teachers as partners, to really work together? This is something we could specifically develop.

And then we have to be honest—now that we have started, we will have to continue this work for at least the next three to five years to establish these meetings around the world and begin to affect change. I would like it to become a habit that teacher educators work together. Nationally, internationally, by continents. We will see. I think the meetings we are having around the world are extremely important. I also see that this process cannot stop until we have actually established change. That's going to take a while.

Before we finish, I wanted to talk about mentoring. The mentoring of student teachers in schools is vitally important, but there are things to consider around this.

I think the best people to do the mentoring are the ones who know both the schools and also the university or the place where students are doing their teacher education, but who do not belong either to the school or the university. Such people are possibly the most helpful for students—because you get new ideas, progressive ideas from your teacher education and then

may find that schools are more conservative. So, working with people who have knowledge of both but who are independent could be very powerful.

Boland: I agree that there is a model of being socialised into the school. In other words, join us and we will show you what you need to do, how to fit in. I think it's relatively common; it's the preferred model in some places. The advantage of course is that the school gets a teacher who is classroom-ready, which is an understandable and very desirable thing.

Osswald: But...

Boland: But, it potentially leads to what lives in a school—or in a school movement—becoming self-perpetuating. There is of course much that is good, but as students change, society changes and the times change, the classroom-ready model risks perpetuating what is old and does not promote innovation or change. Or responsiveness. Questioning is unlikely to happen and, without a research culture, it has the potential to become static, inward looking, self-referential.

Osswald: Yes, so there needs to be change. The change will come from the new teachers. But we teacher educators have to bring the relevant insights to these teachers-to-be. It's the teacher educators who have to be the change; they have to live it. If they don't embody the change themselves, we will stay as we are.

Discussion

This interview raises a number of points. Not all can be unpacked here due to limitations of space; I select a few while noting others for possible further exploration or research.

As a century-old educational movement, it is clear that there is a wish and perceived need within the Steiner movement to “move with the times” and that this impulse is in tension with its established pedagogical and organisational traditions, its *modus operandi*. This is increasingly reflected in literature on Steiner education (Boland, 2017a, 2017b; Denjean, 2014; Rawson, 2020). It is equally clear that “It's the teacher educators who have to be the change” (Osswald in interview).

In this conversation, it is interesting to note the degree to which topics arising in the conversation reflect broader discourses within teacher education. I take four points and locate them within relevant literature. They are: becoming a teacher educator; pedagogy and process; the strength of tradition; and, the place of research.

Becoming a Teacher Educator

Osswald states that the position and role of the teacher educator “was the biggest concern in the beginning. After work and consultation, we have now put guidelines together about what the qualities of a teacher educator are.” He has the same broad understanding of what comprises a teacher educator as Snoek, Swennen & Klink (2011)—“someone who contributes in a formal way to the learning and development of teachers” (p. 652); this includes school-based mentors, visiting “experts,” those in private training establishments as well as in universities. This opens up the area to many teaching professionals who may not identify as teacher educators as such. As in other situations (Loughran & Menter, 2019), the large

majority of Steiner teacher educators and mentors come to the work through having been skilled and successful teachers, often later in their career—“self-made people”—who have not usually had a specific training themselves to take on this new task, possibly struggling for a number of years like their non-Steiner peers with the issues of professional identity (Swennen & Klink, 2009).

What the ITEP project is looking to establish are guidelines indicating possible paths towards becoming a Steiner teacher and teacher educator and trajectories for further professional development. Within the Steiner education movement, this is new ground and involves asking a range of questions, as Osswald says:

“In teacher education we have to find out, is this person really the right person to work with adults? It is a big question. How can we do this? What kind of processes do we have to put in place? I think it depends to a degree on the cultures involved, but the first step is definitely, are you able to reflect deeply on your practice?”

This extract from the interview raises a further complexity—that the suggested guidelines are intended to be used and interpreted in a wide range of cultures and geographies, from Buenos Aires to Brisbane, Helsinki to Hanoi, and Calgary to Cairo. This is an ambitious aim. This is addressed by omitting detailed content and leaving the structure and content of any programme to the experience and local understanding of each centre, as best suits their situation.

Pedagogy—Process Adopted

For Rudolf Steiner, the developmental stages of a growing person were discontinuous—the human being develops in particular stages, that each stage has a beginning and an end with certain kinds of behaviour present in each stage. This he has in common with a range of developmental psychologists including Piaget (1977), Erikson (1950/1993), Montessori (Lawrence, 2015), Kohlberg (1973) and Maslow (Pichère, 2015).

Steiner pedagogy works with the first three seven-year periods, these are learning by imitation (0-7), inner engagement (7-14) and independent thinking (14-21). There is no established Steiner approach to teaching adults—a Steiner andragogy. As most teacher educators are successful teachers of those under 21, there is a possibility and perhaps a likelihood that these skilled teachers will take some of the pedagogical approaches they have used successfully with school students, or even in early childhood settings, into their work with adults (see below). This is stated clearly by Osswald in the interview: “I think it is fair to say that in the past teacher educators did not give a lot of time to how student teachers learn.” While the sentence is expressed in the past tense, it highlights the importance of addressing the issue rapidly and effectively. There could be further advantages: “If we teacher educators were really to treat the student teachers as adults, work with them as adults, then, I think, it would be good preparation for future teachers to be able to work with parents.”

Process

Allied to pedagogy, it is worthwhile to consider briefly the process which has been created by Osswald which feeds into the work of ITEP. One of the strong features of andragogy (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015) is that teachers need to be involved in and given agency in the planning, direction and guiding of their learning, and that this learning has immediate relevance to their working context. This is clearly reflected in the development of ITEP, that both in the process undertaken (instrumentality of educators worldwide) and the desired outcome (each school/institution/programme adapts the guidelines to their own working contexts) agency is given to practising teachers and teacher educators.

Osswald acknowledges that to do this effectively in Steiner education, being distributed around the world, is a slow and gradual process. Going out to what he terms “continental groups” a number of times is time-intensive and costly. It is significant that a collaborative model has been adopted from the start and that the feedback from people in the field has been asked for and responded to over a growing number of cycles, encouraging what can be seen as “buy-in” at least with some of the groups consulted (Boland: “I would describe the atmosphere in the room as like a sense of empowerment. A real wish to begin to work with these guidelines.”).

At the same time, Osswald accepts the long-term nature of the project—that it will take the next “three or five years” to embed change to any degree. It is possible that this is an optimistic estimation of the time needed. The distinguished New Zealand educationalist, Clarence Beeby, stated that “qualitative change ... is always distressingly slow” (1988, p. 5), and that:

general progress must be measured in decades rather than in years. The speed at which a total system can change depends ultimately on the speed at which the average and below-average [sic] teachers can understand the changes, feel secure with them. And accept them as their own. (Beeby, 1988, p. 6)

The Steiner educational movement is smaller than most national educational systems which Beeby is referring to and has good channels of communication; this may help it move more swiftly but, nonetheless, change will necessarily be slow.

Conservatism

Beeby’s life’s work on long-term change processes in international education systems (Beeby, 1980, 1992; Renwick, 1998) makes his overview of creating change of value to explore here. Beeby speaks of the inherent conservatism of schools and school practices, and that school leaders and classroom teachers can find themselves in a difficult position between progressive policy makers and conservative consumers of education, what he calls “trapped between the upper and lower millstones, the one moving and the other stationary” (Beeby, 1988, p. 8).

This is something that this project in Steiner education is going to have to be cognisant of and work with.

Administrators at the centre of the system must plan for the country as a whole and for the future...In my experience, there is much more chance of pressure for innovation coming

from the producers of education, the administrators or outstanding teachers, than from the consumers, but that the chance of their surviving depends, in the long run, on their eventually being willingly accepted by both consumers and the average teachers. (ibid.)

It will be illuminating to see how ITEP's guidelines are communicated to and taken up by the global Steiner movement. Regarding tradition vs innovation, Osswald states:

after one hundred years, there is a lot in schools which is traditional...to be a contemporary school you have continually to adapt to changed times, invent new ways of teaching...[otherwise we] fall back into what is known and just repeat and repeat it.

This tendency to fall back into what is known is an acknowledged tendency of the classroom-ready model of teacher education mentioned later in the interview which (Boland): “risks perpetuating what is old and does not promote innovation or change. Or responsiveness. Questioning is unlikely to happen and, without a research culture, it has the potential to become static, inward looking, self-referential.” This mirrors what is found in literature on models of teacher education over an extended time period (Loughran & Menter, 2019; Parker & Gale, 2016; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The weight Osswald puts on teacher educator research shows a clear wish to balance this by complementing the learning about the practice of teaching with “sharing, critiquing and building a knowledge base” (Loughran & Menter, 2019, p. 225).

Place of Research

Osswald: “For me, adult education has to do with research work.”

This unequivocal statement identifies and gives importance to what has been noted as a weakness in Steiner education (among others, Ullrich, 2008): the lack of a broad, robust research culture. This echoes a possible over-reliance on established traditions (Denjean, 2014) and less work being done to create new knowledge and take up critical positions on the education from both theoretical and practical viewpoints. The purpose of a significant amount of research into Steiner education is to promote or celebrate it as an educational approach, rather than investigate what it does not do well in order to improve. Ullrich (2008) notes that Steiner is something of a polarising figure with voices being strongly for and strongly against. For da Veiga (2014), this could be ameliorated by “expert insiders” with deep knowledge taking a (more) critical stance towards existing practice and theory (Traub, 2020).

In the interview, I mention the possibility of “expanding [existing] methodologies...to include [those] built on meditation, contemplative inquiry, first-person research” as a way of using and testing Steiner's epistemology as research method. This has been documented but (Osswald) “the pity is ... we haven't sufficiently developed this kind of method to make it of value.” There are isolated examples of it being used in academic research (Boland, 2019, 2020; Zajonc, 2009) but it is clear from the conversation that this activity needs to be taken up more strongly, if it is to become something which “in itself might itself renew quite a lot.” For this to happen it needs to be promoted actively in tertiary institutions where Steiner education is studied, especially universities.

Next Steps

This interview highlights future intentions of ITEP as well as raising questions. The consultation process will be continuing with further conferences and meetings planned with teacher educators on different continents, with the intention of publishing the guidelines for teachers and teacher educators in 2021. Osswald: “We will have to continue ... to establish these meetings around the world” so that it “become[s] a habit that teacher educators work together. Nationally, internationally, by continents.”

The interview also identifies many possibilities for future inquiry. As Osswald indicates, there is a growing need for a Steiner adult pedagogy to be articulated; to the author’s knowledge, this is not yet established. There are specific pedagogies for early childhood, primary and secondary school, but not a Steiner andragogy. It behoves the Steiner movement overall to look into this to aid the quality of education programmes in its various disciplines. Then there is a need “to design a course or courses to support Steiner adult educators,” especially in the realm of andragogy. There are two large conferences planned for the coming two years (Goetheanum, 2020) “call[ing] for new approaches in anthroposophic adult education.” These may form an important step in this direction.

Lastly, discussing possible attributes of Steiner teacher educators and their continued development highlights how little is known about this influential body of people. Although there is steadily increasing research into Steiner education and Steiner teaching/teachers, there is significantly less which focuses on teacher educators: who they are, what they see as their identity and how they develop that identity, their job satisfaction, working conditions, experiences, challenges, hopes, and so on. Research into this area would create an important resource to support the work of ITEP.

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