Identifying the Potential Need for Change in Waldorf Settings in Taiwan: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Research Purpose

This pilot project asked a group of Taiwanese Waldorf teachers and those interested in Waldorf education to identify the issues and concerns they perceived regarding Waldorf education in Taiwan. By identifying areas of concern and future development needs, this pilot lays the foundation for a more robust and representative study.

Research Design/Method/Approach

Invitations to participate were sent to 41 current and former students of the Waldorf Education master's program offered by the National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, and 15 responses were received (response rate: 37%). The results were gathered through an anonymous online survey available in Traditional Chinese and English. No demographic information was requested outside of the school level that participants associated with or were employed in (i.e., early childhood, primary, or secondary). The responses were analyzed thematically to isolate and identify recurring topics.

Research Findings or Conclusions

The strongest finding was the importance of effective initial and ongoing teacher education for Waldorf teachers. The second major theme was the curriculum—in particular, the importance of localization in the Taiwanese

context, inclusion of digital technologies, and increased representation of diversity. Additional observations regarding areas of concern highlighted the management of challenging situations in the classroom, imbalances in power dynamics, and strategies to foster effective relationships with parents.

Research Originality/Value

The survey served as a preliminary mapping exercise to identify topics that merit further investigation and highlight the general themes that schools and other early childhood settings can address, work on, and strengthen. It gave NTHU students a voice to identify challenges in providing Waldorf education in Taiwan. Their responses highlighted several issues that warrant further exploration.

Educational Policy Recommendations and Applications

The concerns identified in this study can be taken up individually at the institutional and/or national level and can act as focal points for dialogue and possible collaborative work. Several key areas for further investigation emerged, such as effective approaches to initial teacher education, teacher well-being, demographics of Taiwanese Waldorf educators, curriculum-related issues, and teachers' upskilling and professional development.

1. Introduction

Waldorf education has been practised in Taiwan since 1996. The Waldorf World List (Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners, 2024) details six schools and 20 early childhood settings (usually known as kindergartens) in Taiwan. However, the Taiwan Waldorf Education Movement Federation lists 22 schools, not including kindergartens. This discrepancy is due to the fact that the six listed schools have been recognised by the International Forum of Steiner Waldorf Education and the domestic recognition process was only begun by the Federation in 2024. Teacher education courses for kindergartners, primary and secondary teachers have been run for a number of years. A master's course in Waldorf education has been offered at the National Tsing Hua University (NTHU) since 2019 (Hsueh & Cherng, 2021; National Tsing Hua University, 2024). Although there is a growing body of literature emerging on aspects of Waldorf education in Taiwan (Hsueh, 2022), there has not been a study to date which investigates what Taiwanese teachers and those interested in Waldorf education view as issues and concerns in order to identify areas of future development. This small project aims to foreground these issues, seen from the point of view of 'insiders', in the hope that, by identifying areas of concern, ground may be prepared for a broader, more inclusive and representative study. The findings might also encourage discussions to be opened (or continued) on possible ways to transform and further develop the Waldorf movement as a whole in Taiwan. It is possible, indeed quite likely, that questions faced by Taiwanese Waldorf schools are mirrored in different ways in other Taiwanese schools and in Waldorf schools in other countries; in this way this pilot study may be of wider interest.

The project is an initial exploration of the topic and cannot claim to provide an accurate overview of the Taiwanese Waldorf education movement or an indication of its relative health. It takes a limited sample number of participants and asks what concerns they have, what can be done better, and

which topics need to be addressed within Waldorf education in Taiwan. It does not ask what is working well, try to find out what teachers appreciate about Waldorf education, or ask why the participants chose to study Waldorf education at master's level. Such questions would undoubtedly generate different responses. The participants have a clear, stated interest in Waldorf education but are not representative of the Waldorf movement as a whole and were not chosen to ensure a demographic or pedagogical balance. The findings of this initial study may be useful as preparation for a larger possible project taking a more representative sample of Taiwanese Waldorf teachers.

2. Context

Waldorf education first began in 1919 in Germany, in a social and cultural climate very different from twenty-first century Taiwan. From these humble beginnings, it is now practised in some seventy countries worldwide. This gradual expansion has gone in waves. First in Europe, then in North and South America as well as the first schools in Africa and Oceania, then Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and, since the 1990s, in Asia (Stehlik, 2019). The number of kindergartens and schools has grown steadily since the 1970s. There are now some 1200 acknowledged schools and 2000 kindergartens worldwide. This number does not include schools which work with Waldorf principles but are not included in the Worldwide List (Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners, 2024). Most Waldorf schools in Taiwan fall into this latter category (see above).

Hsueh (2022) has undertaken a review of empirical research into Waldorf education in Taiwan. She notes that the founding of the education followed established Waldorf forms (found overseas) regarding curriculum, teaching methods, classroom practice, school organisation and development, the role of parents, and so on, and that some of these have been noted as problematic in a Taiwanese context. This was already highlighted some years ago by Tang (2010) who mentioned the "neglect" of Taiwanese traditions

of thought in the schools, and that the "Indigenisation" sought by Waldorf education in three Taiwanese schools was "suboptimal" (p. 142).

There is a growing body of literature which seeks a critical perspective on the undoubtedly European and Eurocentric approaches taken when establishing Waldorf education in new geographic, demographic and cultural locations (Tyson, 2023). To date, Taiwan has not been strongly represented in this literature (with the exception of Tang) although it is important to note that Ye (2017) has also reported on localisation practices in a Taiwanese school. Work on these topics is underway in many countries outside (and within) Europe which are in the process of localising the education to suit their locations, cultures and changed times (among others, see Adam & Schmelzer, 2019; Boland, 2015; Boland & Muñoz, 2021; Rawson, 2022; Rawson & Steinwachs, 2024).

From Hsueh's study, it is clear that a body of literature related to Waldorf education in Taiwan is in the process of being established. In total, 94 empirical studies were identified – 16 journal articles and 78 theses. For a relatively small country with a Waldorf movement which is still being developed, this is an impressive number. However, no study to date has asked Waldorf insiders what they see as the needs of Waldorf education in Taiwan regarding change and asking them what needs to be looked at for the benefit of students, parents and teachers alike. This small project is an initial inquiry in this direction.

3. Research Design

The aim of the project was to gather what students and graduates of the NTHU Waldorf master's course see as issues of concern within Waldorf education in Taiwan. These postgraduate students and graduates were chosen because, in taking the master's course, they have shown a commitment financially and, more significantly, in time to deepening their understanding of Waldorf education. NTHU students were chosen rather than practising

Waldorf teachers[1] because, in studying on the master's program, they show a clear willingness and wish to increase their theoretical and critical understanding of Waldorf education, by studying it at postgraduate level. Becoming more aware of how teaching practice and educational theory intersect is important in order to gain deepened understanding of the issues at hand. Asking teachers who are busy in the classroom but not actively involved in the same way in cognising their practice or gaining a deepened theoretical understanding would yield different insights. The NTHU course is one of only a few in the world, and the only one in Asia, which critiques the theory and practice of Waldorf education at postgraduate level.

The focus of the study was to identify issues of concern rather than provide a balanced evaluation of Waldorf education as it is practised in Taiwan. It asked participants to identify what they see as needing attention or what is not working well. The survey went to NTHU students and graduates who are mostly Waldorf teachers and administrators, although some are parents or teachers in non-Waldorf schools.

The data was gathered by means of a simple online questionnaire. Advantages of online questionnaires include that data can be collected quickly and easily (Dewaele, 2018), they do not take up a lot of the participants' time, an important consideration when surveying busy teachers, and the data is available for analysis as soon as submissions have been received. It is a suitable means to gather information in a basic pilot study such as this.

The questionnaire was run on Qualtrics software, a leading online survey interface. An invitation letter was sent out to all eligible participants in English and Traditional Chinese and included links to the questionnaire which was also available in English and Traditional Chinese. The questionnaire automatically displayed in the language of the operating system of the browser the questionnaire was opened in, but it was possible

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[1] It is acknowledged that many of the NTHU students are also fulltime Waldorf teachers.

to switch between languages if wanted. It was designed to take less than ten minutes to complete and was formatted so it could be answered on a mobile phone or laptop, although laptop entry was recommended to encourage longer, more detailed replies.

Consent was given on the opening screen of the questionnaire by ticking a box which allowed participants to continue to the questionnaire itself. Once consent had been given, there were two questions. The first asked which sector or sectors the participant worked in (early childhood, lower primary, upper primary and/or high school) in case that became significant during the analysis. It was possible to select multiple options to this question for those who teach across sectors. After that, there was a single text-based question "What do you see as the needs of Waldorf education in Taiwan regarding change? What needs looking at?"

3.1 Ethical Concerns

Ethics is an important part of any research project. The Waldorf community in Taiwan is small, and many people know each other. It was important that all responses were gathered anonymously. No data was gathered electronically about location or other possibly identifying characteristics. Responses quoted in this article are not identified by sector taught. These precautions mitigate the likelihood of identification. The author will have taught the participants at some stage in their academic careers but is not able to identify anyone from their entries.

Within this project, it is important to address the question of positionality and researcher identity (Bayeck, 2022). Commonly, a researcher has been seen as someone who has a 'scientific', objective distance from both the material studied and the participants. That such objectivity is a myth is widely accepted, certainly in the social sciences (Hird et al., 2023); research is carried out by human beings within a particular context.

In this project, I consider myself as, simultaneously, an insider and an

outsider and need to deconstruct the positions which I occupy (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In the responses that follow, the participants speak as 'insiders' as if to another insider (the researcher). My long association with Waldorf education allows me to think, and I believe to be regarded, as an insider. When talking to Waldorf teachers, I can easily slip into a Waldorf role, just as, as an academic in a conventional university, when I talk to non-Waldorf teachers, I can take up a non-Waldorf teacher identity. Beyond this, as I have worked across sectors, I relate to early childhood teachers as a former early childhood teacher, to primary teachers as a former primary teacher, and to high school teachers as a former high school teacher. I hold positions at universities in New Zealand and Taiwan and am writing in my role as an academic. As a New Zealander who visits Taiwan, I am undoubtedly an outsider.

A substantial body of literature has been developed which looks at the ethical considerations of insider research (Toy-Cronin, 2018). Researching as an insider has both advantages and disadvantages. It gives the possibility of a deeper understanding of context and greater ease of access (respondents opening up more easily to an 'insider', leading to deep and nuanced insights). In addition, the researcher likely holds 'insider knowledge' which would not be available to everyone, and has to navigate relationships, whether already existing, shared (Labaree, 2002) or just beginning. At the same time, the insider must beware only thinking from an insider's perspective. "For the insider, who is already a 'native' … true understanding can only be attained by 'going observationalist'" (Labaree, 2002, p. 116), stepping back a pace in order to gain perspective.

My identity in this project is fluid and complex. It is my intention to remain observationalist as I pass in and out of roles rapidly (Bukamal, 2022). It is important to acknowledge here the personhood of the author because it allows the reader to read more critically (and be more informed) (Bayeck, 2022; Bukamal, 2022). It puts additional responsibility on me as the author to remain ethically aware when I write. Observationalist self-awareness of

this kind is easily avoided when adopting a 'neutral', or rather non-declared, stance (Devine, 2021).

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was exported from Qualtrics into Excel format for analysis and graph making. Responses were translated into English as needed, to allow for thematic analysis, and to isolate and identify recurring themes. This is a standard method for analysing qualitative data (Lester et al., 2020). Given the modest scope of the project, no more detailed analysis was necessary (Liamputtong, 2009).

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this short survey indicate potential changes which need to be made in Waldorf settings in Taiwan or issues that merit attention. They identify points of weakness and potential exploration. As already stated, they do not form an appreciation of Waldorf education, nor can they be read as any form of accurate portrayal of Waldorf education in Taiwan as it is currently practised. This was not the purpose of the survey. If there had been questions such as, why do you choose to work in this particular kind of school? what draws you to Waldorf education? or even, why have you chosen to study Waldorf education at postgraduate level? the answers would presumably have been different.

Although participants were asked which sector or sectors they were engaged in (early childhood, lower or upper primary, secondary), in the end, because of the relatively low numbers of participants when separated into sectors, an analysis of the results by sector was not conclusive and has not been included. A not-insignificant number of participants selected multiple sectors so their submissions cannot be easily categorised.

It would be worthwhile to run the study again with a larger group of teachers and ask more specifically demographic questions, to allow these details can be effectively captured.

4.1 Participants

The participants are all current students or graduates of the master's program in Waldorf education at the NTHU in Hsinchu, Taiwan. The invitation was sent out to 41 current and ex-students, and 15 responses were received, a response rate of 37%. The overwhelming majority of people who have enrolled on the master's course are practising teachers, mainly (although not only) at Waldorf schools in Taiwan, from early childhood to high school, with some teachers working in multiple sectors. Figure 1 shows the distribution of teachers across the sectors.
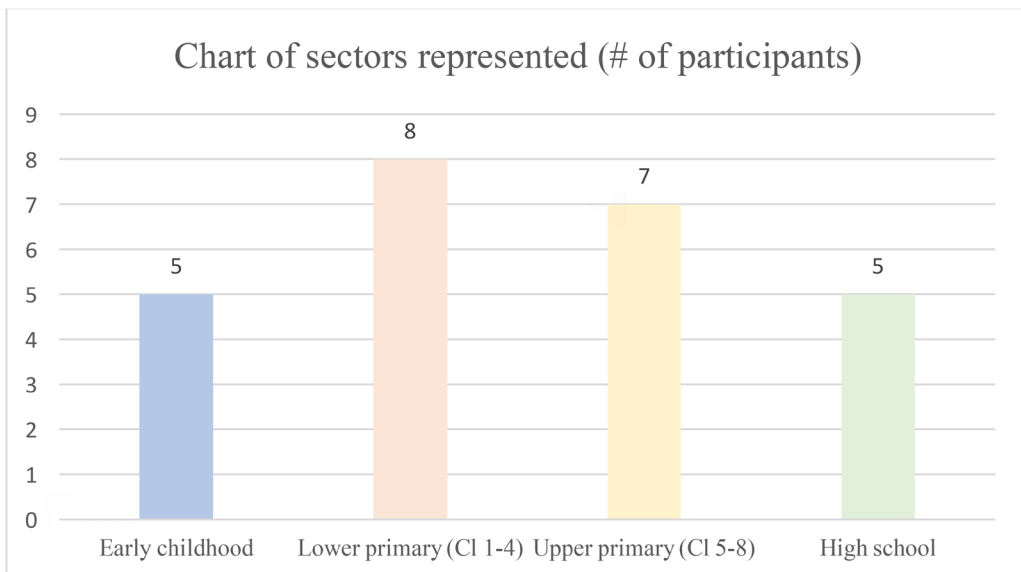

Figure 1. Number of participants by sector (n=15)

No questions were asked as to age, education, employment status, location, belief, ethnicity, gender identity, or similar. The sole criterion

was that participants have completed or are completing the NTHU Waldorf master's course.

Participants were able to leave the questionnaire at any point before the end. After submitting their response, it was not possible to delete or identify it. It was not anticipated that participants would experience any discomfort during the questionnaire but were advised to stop if that was the case. Due to the anonymity of the questionnaire, it was similarly not anticipated that participants would be exposed to any degree of professional risk in filling it out. This anonymity within the survey design perhaps accounts for the frankness of some of the responses.

4.2 Overall Themes

The themes which emerged from the data fall into four broad categories: curriculum; what is not working; what needs thinking about; and general comments. Because of limitations of space, not all or the whole of all responses are presented in this article.

4.3 Curriculum

For a large number of people, including teachers and parents, the teaching of 'The' Waldorf Curriculum (with the definitive article and a capital letter) is one of the elements which strongly characterises a Waldorf approach. As Boland and Rawson (2024) point out, although what is taken to be 'the' curriculum varies from location to location and school to school, the idea of a traditional Waldorf curriculum which can (or needs to) be applied in different contexts remains attractive. This is despite Steiner talking about an 'ideal' curriculum which could never quantified and comprises what a child would need to learn at a particular time.

We need to be able to develop our curriculum ourselves at any moment,

by learning to read from the children what they need, depending on their age. Tomorrow we will compare the ideal curriculum with the one presently used in Central European state schools. We will be well prepared for this if we have really internalised what we need to know in order to understand the curriculum *[i.e. The First Teachers' Course]*. (Steiner, 1919/2020, p. 311)

Over time, a body of collected practice came into being which became accepted as 'the curriculum' (Boland & Rawson, 2024). As schools became established in countries whose cultures were non-European (e.g. in East Asia), questions arose as to how (indeed, whether) to modify curricular content to fit different geographies and cultural backgrounds. Similar questions are asked about curriculum development to meet contemporary needs. Ruhi Tyson's literature review discusses the growing number of articles, books and chapters written on Eurocentrism and postcolonialism in Steiner education (Tyson, 2023).

4.3.1 Localisation

Over the last ten or fifteen years, increasing attention has been paid to the needs of Waldorf schools outside of Europe and Europe-dominated countries and how a curriculum can be developed which reflects the geographies, demographics, cultures, histories and backgrounds of the children in and communities around these schools – in the words of one participant "Adopt[ing] a localised perspective in teaching is crucial." Work has been done and continues to be done in this direction, including in Taiwan, although such work undertaken in Taiwanese schools is not always written about. Ye (2017) is an exception in this regard. However, although the process is underway, there is much still to be considered, not least the issue of how the clear Eurocentric framing of the traditional Steiner curriculum (coming from Europe as it does) can best be approached in different cultural

settings (Boland & Rawson, 2024). One participant noted:

> I believe there should be a curriculum that reflects our own culture, such as literature in high school. In fact, Taiwan has many aspects worth developing, but it seems currently no one is addressing this. Instead, we often study works like the Homer's epics.

This idea is taken further by another participant who reflected that being reliant on others' (often Western) resources can lead to ignoring or not appreciating one's own culture or, indeed, a teacher's abilities as a localiser: "In localisation, we always look outward for resources but not inward for precious treasures."

One respondent queried how smoothly Western approaches translate into some aspects of Taiwanese education, specifically, the teaching of reading and writing. They questioned the emphasis given to constrained skills (finite and readily teachable, such as learning the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet or simple spelling rules) and unconstrained skills (unbounded, such as background knowledge or developing a broad vocabulary). There has been much debate in academic and pedagogical circles worldwide over the past 15 years as to how these should best be balanced, with some suggesting that falls in reading ability are linked directly to too little time spent on constrained skills early on (see, for example, Snow & Matthews, 2016). The comment below suggests also that too little time spent on learning Chinese characters in Taiwanese Waldorf schools (a constrained skill) results in "generally weak Chinese language abilities in junior high schools."

> In [classes at NTHU, we heard] two terms, 'constrained skills' and 'unconstrained skills'. I believe that in Taiwan, 'constrained skills' have been somewhat overlooked. Unlike English, Chinese is not phonetic; it has its own textual context. I think repeated practice is still necessary for proficient usage. However, Waldorf schools in Taiwan currently do

not emphasise this aspect enough, resulting in generally weak Chinese language abilities in junior high schools, including the ability to use written language.

To remedy this, the respondent calls for a language approach to be developed (or, if it already exists, refined) which is compatible with Waldorf approaches and which meets the particular needs of students learning to read and write a language with an exceptionally large set of characters, before focusing on unconstrained skills, commenting

I feel it is necessary for Taiwan to develop its own Chinese curriculum to help students lay the groundwork for the future development of 'unconstrained skills'. This, I believe, is an issue that Waldorf education in Taiwan needs to reconsider.

4.3.2 Technology

Digital technologies were not common when Waldorf education first started being practised in Taiwan. Their use in Waldorf schools overall has been subject to concern, debate and some research (Bleckmann et al., 2022) in a number of countries. Positions have been set out which are nuanced according to age (Glöckler & Brinton, 2018/2019; Weems, 2016). Two respondents mentioned the importance of appropriate critical strategies in dealing with digital media, especially given the ever-increasing prevalence of conspiracy theories and fake news, that education, observing the growing importance of "Media literacy education, such as: distinguishing fake news, assessing its impact on oneself." Being encouraged to discuss the issues which arise from this is seen as an important topic which needs to be considered when creating contemporary curriculum. Another perspective raised by a participant related to the risks of "Exposure to [inappropriate] content, etc." as a potential consequence of digital engagement.

The rapidly increasing use of AI to manipulate images and write news stories makes media literacy an essential tool to be able to engage appropriately in contemporary society (see Li-hua & Chin, 2023). The first comment also indicates the impact which such media exposure can have on the self, particularly on those still at school. It is important that Waldorf schools engage with media literacy in age-appropriate ways yet, as well as addressing the undoubtedly "very high further training needs [for teachers] … for screen media, especially in the areas of parental cooperation, strengthening children to protect themselves from digital risks" (Bleckmann et al., 2022, p. 2). This topic merits active consideration by Waldorf schools.

An allied topic raised by one respondent was the promotion of 3Cs education (character, competence, and citizenship) to support engagement with social media.

4.3.3 Diversity

A significant development which has taken place over the last twenty years in many societies is the increased attention given to issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice in education. In some areas, Waldorf education has begun to address issues of Eurocentricity (Tyson, 2023) and, to a lesser extent, questions of sexuality and gender (Anon., 2016a, 2016b; Campbell, 2014; deForest, 2016; Jeske, 2004; Palmer, 2018; Rawson, 2023), but there is much work still to be done. There is little literature on these topics from a specifically Taiwanese context (Tang, 2010; Ye, 2017). The importance of diversity is reflected in a number of responses, which indicate that what needs looking at includes: "Equality issues education, covering topics like equal educational resources, wealth disparity, gender equality", "[The use of resources reflecting] family relationship education, for example: diverse gender families, single-parent households, intergenerational parenting, new immigrant families, etc." and sex education.

These would be additions to traditional curricula in many schools

(not just in Waldorf schools). The peak body of Waldorf education, the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, has identified Interculturality[2] as a key topic which needs to be addressed (2024). It is hoped that Taiwanese responses to interculturality will continue to be developed, critiqued and published so others can learn from them. The comments received on the topic of diversity can be summed up by another response, that "By creatively developing the curriculum, teachers should deepen their understanding of freedom and responsibility."

Connected with curriculum is a (single) observation of the need to expand curriculum to cover topics which align more strongly with environmental education, specifically, "Caring for humanity, how to integrate science and technology education with environmental education and protect children's senses at the same time." Environmental education is a natural fit for Waldorf education (Code, 2020) and it would be interesting to see how Waldorf education as it is practised in Taiwan can be linked, for example, to the Taiwan Sustainable Development Goals (National Development Council, 2019).

4.4 What Is Not Working

I group a number of topics under this heading, some interrelated, some not. They include: the instance of teachers in Waldorf schools who have not been through a Waldorf training program; the importance of deep understanding of Waldorf education in parents and teachers alike; difficulties in the classroom; power imbalances; questions of academic attainment; and relationships with parents. The subtitle, What is not working, may be a little harsh, but I believe it captures the tone of comments received.

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[2] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2005) defines interculturality as "the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect" .

4.4.1 Lack of Training of Teachers

The challenge most frequently mentioned by participants (7 of 15, or 47% of replies) was the shortage of qualified Waldorf teachers. A global shortage of teachers has been reported across multiple continents (Fletcher & Nance, 2023); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2024) estimates that an additional 44 million teachers worldwide will be needed in the next six years. However, as well as this global shortage, there is a documented difficulty in recruiting teachers to be Waldorf teachers, and even more so finding teachers with a background in and solid understanding of Waldorf education. These lacks are neither new – the problem was mentioned over ten years ago by Graudenz et al. (2013) – nor is it only experienced only in Taiwan; it is part of an international shortage of Waldorf teachers (see, among others, Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training, 2024; Bester, 2023; Finser, 2019). Representative reflections in this study include that "some Waldorf schools struggle to find suitable teachers, leading to situations where teachers may not have the necessary expertise" and that "private Waldorf schools face a shortage of teachers, with minimal qualifications accepted, often requiring only completed [state] teacher training."

Further, that private schools (in this instance, private Waldorf schools) can employ teaching staff without formal teaching qualifications of any kind (i.e. without the "minimal qualifications" mentioned above) is seen as a potential weakness in the provision of high-quality educational experience for children, or even that "some individuals even enter schools with no educational background whatsoever." This is again not only the case in Taiwan. It reflects the situation in private schools in some states of the United States and may be the case elsewhere.

A lack of specific Waldorf training is seen to have consequences both inside and outside the classroom. As well as affecting the delivery of curriculum, participants voiced concerns that "Learning content is not

consistently reliable, resulting in missed learning opportunities", a lack of training can influence the pedagogical direction of the school, One participant commented that this is already visible in some areas, "In southern Taiwanese Waldorf schools, the difficulty in teacher training reflects on the ground, causing uncertainty in the direction of the education system.

Limited training can lead to a pedestrian, formulaic approach to teaching curriculum (curriculum as method). A participant put it in this way: "The inadequacy in handling the curriculum turns the institution into another form of 'Waldorf' system." Denjean (2014) highlights that following a curriculum as if it is a system to be implemented can turn it "first [into] a worn-out path, then tradition and finally a mere list of norms which have to be adhered to" (p. 20). Working to counter such an approach and reinvigorate curriculum is vital to the health of any Waldorf kindergarten or school.

Being a teacher in any situation can be challenging. This is also the case in Waldorf settings in Taiwan in which a participant observed that "Teachers experience high levels of stress, emotional instability … all of which impact the students." This reflects what empirical studies have found internationally (Graudenz et al., 2013). It should perhaps be re-emphasised here that the questionnaire did not ask for positive statements about teacher experience or satisfaction but exclusively for things which need attention.

4.4.2 Importance of Deep Knowledge

Teachers without a specific preparation in Waldorf education and pedagogy can lack (or be seen by others to lack) a deep understanding of the education. Gaining this in-depth understanding is then critical for their professional development. Two representative comments include that "many people are not familiar with Waldorf education, and it needs to be seen and understood" and that

Efforts should begin with enhancing the understanding of education

among both teachers and parents. Educators should confront their own challenges and, in an educational setting, set aside personal issues and burdens, prioritising education as the primary goal in serving the children.

A third response highlights the importance of parent–teacher co-working to support the children who are being educated: "Both teachers and parents need to understand the meaning of education and be able to centre their approach around the core principles of Waldorf education."

4.4.3 Difficulties in the Classroom

It has been anecdotally reported in multiple countries that Waldorf schools can be attractive to families of children who are not doing well elsewhere, rather than being attracted principally by the pedagogical approach itself. This can be a wholly positive experience for all concerned, however, it can also bring challenges. Waldorf education positions itself as an education for all children (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 2024) and it can become the case that the numbers of children with additional needs, including behavioural needs, in a class can dominate and take time from other children and their learning requirements. This is expressed in a number of ways in the observations given to the questionnaire. "Some children who choose Waldorf education are considered unsuitable for the conventional system. They may have emotional and learning issues that can even impact the learning of other classmates."

This can lead to difficult situations in the classroom. The following remark indicates this but also alludes to the lack of a "proper authority figure" who would usually be the class teacher (in primary): "Student resistance to discipline leads to tense classroom situations. In the primary school, children lack a proper authority figure to follow." Without further investigation, it cannot be known in what ways this figure is currently

considered absent.

Peer-to-peer learning, where students help each other learn and learn from each other has a long history in pedagogical literature (e. g., in Vygotsky, 2012). It has a definite place in schools and other learning contexts (Tenenbaum et al., 2020). However, instead of peer-to-peer learning, it is also possible to habitually use more able students as unacknowledged and informal teacher aides, and that, rather than encouraging a two-way learning process, it becomes more one way (see comment below). This is not I believe what peer-to-peer learning is for and needs careful attention.

> With small class sizes and inexperienced teachers, more proficient students are often tasked with teaching those who struggle. However, in reality, struggling students continue to lag behind, leading to a situation where advanced students find the classes boring, and struggling students lack confidence. Due to the school's emphasis on respecting children, the boundaries are unclear. Communication between teachers and students is difficult, with a lack of effective channels for dialogue.

To the degree that this is the case, it would be worthwhile identifying instances and supporting students in need in other ways to allow all students in the class to be stretched and challenged.

4.4.4 Power Relationships

Organisational structures within Waldorf institutions differ greatly from school to school and from country to country. Traditionally, they are not conceived hierarchically and operate on a flatter structure (Zech, 2023). However, as in any school, there are unspoken power structures which operate within Waldorf institutions, perhaps the stronger for not always being outwardly identified by role status (principal, deputy principal, etc.). In this regard, one perspective shared by a participant is that

Long-serving teachers have significant influence over school resources and direction. The school's teaching team is often powerless, maintaining an oligarchic structure. The institution tends to create a strong comfort zone internally, but externally, students lack competitiveness and feel disconnected from the real world.

The latter part of this comment highlights the importance of the reconsideration and possible revision or reframing of the traditional Waldorf curriculum, work which is already underway in multiple contexts.

4.4.5 Academic Attainment

There is a growing number of studies which document the attainment of students who have had a Waldorf education (among others, Baldwin et al., 2005; Barz & Randoll, 2007; Carey & Haralambous, 2024; Liebenwein et al., 2012; Mitchell & Gerwin, 2007, 2008; Schieffer & Busse, 2001). To my knowledge, there has been no similar study yet made of Taiwanese students in this regard. In other countries however, it appears that students leave Waldorf education well equipped for tertiary study.

Specific Taiwanese studies into student readiness for tertiary study may be appreciated by parents and go some way to calming parent uncertainty (in a US context, see Stratton, 2019). This was voiced in the following ways.

Many parents express concerns about their children studying in Waldorf education, fearing that they may struggle to keep up with students in mainstream educational systems. Consequently, some parents choose to transition their children back to traditional schools, especially during the transition from elementary school to junior high. Parents worry that their children might face challenges when dealing with standardised exams, and this decision is often influenced by the structure of Taiwan's

overall education system.

In reality, struggling students continue to lag behind, leading to a situation where advanced students find the classes boring, and struggling students lack confidence.

4.4.6 Parent Relationships

The ideal of Waldorf education includes a high degree of parental involvement, something which cannot be taken for granted, especially in cases where all the adults in the house need to work. Reliance on parental contributions is identified below as sometimes leading to situations where accommodating parental wishes can lead a school away from 'original Waldorf' forms. Of course, this could lead to new forms which are beneficial for children. It is an interesting comment and merits investigation.

In the Waldorf education scene in southern Taiwan, although it is gradually stabilising, there are challenges in collaboration between parents, schools, and teachers. From a management perspective, schools tend to gradually accommodate the demands of parents, leading to a potential shift away from the original Waldorf philosophy. Senior teachers might also depart from the school due to differences in educational philosophies.

… Additionally, when attempting to involve parents in school activities or workshops in the southern region, challenges arise due to parents' economic structures or family background factors, making it harder for them to participate in school programs or events. Consequently, working with parents in this context often results in conflicts or challenges in alignment with the educational philosophy.

4.5 What Needs Thinking About

Under *What needs thinking about,* I include just one response. It highlights the binary approach which has long been discernible around Waldorf education, that of categorising teachers as 'Waldorf' or 'non-Waldorf'. There is significant work to be done to contextualise and connect Waldorf pedagogy and theory with other educational theories and approaches with "thoughtful consideration". This will involve the "real demythologisation of the ideas and figure of Steiner" (Ullrich, cited in Dhondt et al., 2015, p. 641); such work has been begun in some quarters but needs to be undertaken in every Steiner educational context. Overt partisanship does not only come from those interested in Waldorf education; criticism from non-Waldorf sources can be equally partisan in its outlook. A participant mused

> How to break free from the traditional thinking of 'Waldorf' or 'non-Waldorf' and adopt a localised perspective in teaching is crucial. There should be more opportunities for interaction and observation within various communities. Waldorf education should not be seen merely as a 'business opportunity' but rather as an alternative perspective that provides an opportunity for thoughtful consideration and experimentation.

> I think as long as we maintain an open-minded attitude, Waldorf principles can be applied everywhere.

Seeing Waldorf education as something which offers "an alternative perspective that provides an opportunity for thoughtful consideration and experimentation" articulates a worthwhile attitude to hold as Waldorf education continues to develop in Taiwan.

5. Conclusion

The survey was a preliminary mapping of the ground and aimed to provide initial information about topics which merit deeper investigation, to indicate general themes which schools and early childhood settings can address, work on, and hopefully strengthen. My intention in undertaking this project was to give NTHU students voice as they outlined what they see as challenges facing Waldorf education in Taiwan. The responses given raise a range of important issues which merit further investigation. In this way, the project achieved its aims

Each topic identified is multifaceted, layered and interlinked. They are clustered around curriculum (especially localisation, technology and diversity), teacher education, classroom practice, power relationships, and academic attainment. Each contains aspects which can (and needs to be) addressed by individual teachers. At the same time, purely individual actions are unlikely to lead to an elimination of the issues, consensus needs to be built, and joint action agreed to. This requires teachers coming together within institutions to discuss and formulate joint approaches, as well as working together at a regional and national level as well. Indeed, it is unlikely that the issues identified are unique to Taiwan's Waldorf settings. There is value in them being considered in Taiwanese schools in general as well as at an international level in Waldorf schools, if this is not already underway.

I hope that identifying these areas of potential change will encourage Taiwanese Waldorf teachers, kindergartens and schools to reflect on possible avenues of development to help ensure the effective education of the students in their care.

5.1 Limitations, Next Steps

5.1.1 Limitations

This study was designed to be small in scale, which took up little of participants' time and which asked a single text-based question in an anonymous online survey. Although the response rate was adequate, a greater number of respondents would have increased the range of possible viewpoints. It was positive that the responses were more or less balanced between sectors. This was an initial survey to identify and highlight potential areas for future exploration, rather than an in-depth study which included interviews or focus groups. Graduates and students of the NTHU Master's degree do not represent Taiwanese Waldorf teachers as a whole. If a representative response is sought from Taiwanese Waldorf institutions in general, a project would need to be designed to include a much wider group of possible participants as well as having questions which allow for positive statements of appreciation, what is working well, and so on.

5.1.2 Next Steps

There are two possible foci for next steps. The first is that a more extensive, detailed and representative research project is designed which builds on this pilot study. Such a project would need to have more participants, gather demographic detail, for instance whether they are currently teaching in Waldorf settings, how many years' experience they have, what level of teacher education (Steiner and non-Steiner) they have completed, and so on. Interviews and focus groups would provide another level of data. Results could be triangulated with schools' leadership and the Federation, or with a similar study run in another country.

While an extended study remains a future possibility, I hope that concerns raised by participants in this study can already be taken up individually, at an institutional and/or national level and that they might act

as a point of focus for conversation and possible work. A number of topics emerge which call for further inquiry, in particular on effective methods of initial teacher education, teacher wellbeing, the demographic of Taiwanese Waldorf teachers, curriculum questions, and the upskilling and professional development of teachers. These are topics which I believe any teacher or school can and needs to work on, but the responses given in this modest questionnaire may draw attention to areas which would benefit from further work to be undertaken within and by the Taiwanese Waldorf education movement which will in turn help its students thrive in a challenging world.

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The Researcher

Dr Neil Boland has a long background in Steiner education as a teacher at early childhood, primary and secondary levels. He is an associate professor in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand and an honorary professor at the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan. He has a strong interest in how Waldorf education is practised in contemporary, non-European contexts.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher has taught the participants on some master's courses

(primarily on Zoom during the Covid pandemic) and is known to them. Some of the areas of concern raised are topics which have been discussed in lectures and in conversation at different times. This potential conflict of interest has been addressed by the questionnaire being anonymous and by including past students as well as current ones. It is not possible to know who submitted a response or identify participants from their replies. No financial conflict of interest has been reported.

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在臺灣華德福教育環境中辨識潛在
的變革需求：一項試點研究

Neil Boland*

摘要

研究目的

　　本研究是一項前導計畫，旨在邀請一群臺灣華德福教師以及對華德福教育感興趣的人士，辨識出他們對臺灣華德福教育面臨的問題和關注點。透過確定這些關切領域和未來發展的需求，旨在為更全面、更具代表性的研究奠定基礎。

研究設計／方法／取徑

　　本研究將邀請函發送給41名曾參加國立清華大學華德福教育碩士課程的在學或是以前的學生，最終收到15份回覆，回應率為37%。採用匿名網上問卷收集方式，提供繁體中文和英文兩種語言（該課程的教學語言）的問卷，除詢問參與者所屬或任職的教育階段（幼兒教育、小學或中學）之外，未要求提供其他人口統計訊息。回覆內容通過主題分析，旨在提取並識別重複出現的問題。

研究發現或結論

　　本研究最顯著的發現是：有效的初始和持續的教師培訓對於華德福教師的重要性。第二個主題是課程設計，主要是針對臺灣本土化的需求、數位技術的整合，以及課程內容中多樣性的提升等方面進行設計，包括如何處理課堂中的挑戰性情境、權力關係的不平衡，以及如何建立與家長的有效關係的策略等其他關注點。

研究的原創性／價值

　　本調查主要是作為初步的基礎性圖像，旨在提供需要深入研究的主題的初步訊息，並指出學校和幼兒教育機構可以著手解決、發展並強化的共同主題。此研究為清華大學的學生提供了發聲機會，讓他們得以概述臺灣華德福教育面臨的挑戰。調查結果亦凸顯了許多值得進一步探討的問題。

教育政策建議與應用

　　本研究所提出的關注點可在個人、機構或國家層面上加以處理，並可作為對話和潛在合作的焦點。其中，有幾個關鍵領域需要進一步探討，特別是有效的初任教師培育方法、教師福祉、臺灣華德福教師的人口統計、課程設計問題，以及教師的技能提升和專業發展等方面。

關鍵詞：變革過程、實驗教育、內部研究、史代納教育、華德福