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**Evaluating the work of Waldorf
teachers**

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Introduction

As a Waldorf educator, I am concerned about the introduction of the teacher career model, including the education supervision system and the teacher qualification system, because in my view, these evaluations conflict with the principles of Waldorf education in many aspects. I consider evaluation to be an important tool for the development of teachers' work, however, at the same time I also consider it essential that the evaluation process is consistent with pedagogy and considers and supports it to a large extent.

Waldorf education is the most important representative of alternative education in Hungary, with almost one hundred institutions and nearly a thousand teachers. Waldorf pedagogy differs in many respects from mainstream education in its operating principles and practices. The aim of my research is to examine the current teacher evaluation system in relation to Waldorf education, which represents a markedly different approach than from the institutions of the state public education system, and to explore the evaluation principles of Waldorf education in order to better visualise the interconnections and contrasts between the two. In other words, my aim is not to assess the pedagogical evaluation system in general terms, but only to formulate my observations in relation to Waldorf education.

In my thesis, I first presented the context of the research, starting with the emergence and development of reform pedagogies, including Waldorf education, then I presented the development of teacher evaluation and the social influences that shape it, and then I described the teacher evaluation system in Hungary today and its relation to quality in Waldorf education.

I began by presenting the theoretical framework by reviewing the literature on evaluation, then I gave an overview of Waldorf pedagogy and its approach to evaluation, and finally I presented the literature on the chosen research strategy and methods.

Research questions

1. What are the basic principles of Waldorf education in relation to evaluation according to Waldorf experts in Hungary and Waldorf teachers who have participated in the qualification?
2. How do these principles appear or how should they appear according to Waldorf experts and qualified Waldorf teachers, in the evaluation of teachers' work?
3. How did the Waldorf teachers experience the qualification?
4. At what points do the public teacher evaluation system and Waldorf education clash?
5. What are the skills and competences that are not included in the areas of competence defined in the Hungarian teacher evaluation system, but are essential for the performance of Waldorf pedagogical tasks?
6. What would an ideal assessment consistent with Waldorf pedagogy look like?

Research strategy

I chose a qualitative approach for my research because Waldorf education itself represents a qualitative path, furthermore, the field of research is absolutely unexplored, and I have not found any literature that has examined the evaluation and assessment of teachers' work in the light of Waldorf pedagogical particularities, nor even one that, apart from Waldorf pedagogical peculiarities, focused on teacher evaluation and assessment practices in mainstream schools. Thus, I had no concrete hypotheses and no quantifiable correlations, only open questions. I did not find any references to teacher evaluation in the Waldorf pedagogical literature, so I saw the exploration of the general evaluation principles of Waldorf pedagogy as my first task, and starting from this, to look for basic principles for evaluating the work of Waldorf teachers. The nature of the topic and the aim of the research justified the choice of a qualitative strategy because quantification does not play a major role as the affected population concerned is not large, and on the other hand context plays a crucial role, since the question under investigation is determined by the values of Waldorf education.

In order to validate triangulation methodology, my research consists of three parts: 1) document analysis, 2) in-depth interviews with

highly experienced Waldorf experts to get a professional view of theoretical Waldorf education, and 3) thematic interviews to explore the practical experiences of Waldorf educators involved in qualification procedures.

Population, sample

The research population is represented by Waldorf teachers and Waldorf institutions. Among alternative pedagogies in Hungary, Waldorf pedagogy has the largest number of institutions in terms of both kindergartens and schools. These institutions are small in size, with the majority of kindergartens having one mixed-age group and the majority of schools having one class per grade. The approximately one thousand Waldorf teachers that work in Waldorf schools and kindergartens represent 0.64% of the national teaching workforce. 0.5% of kindergarten pupils, 0.68% of primary school pupils and 0.8% of secondary school pupils in the public education system attend a Waldorf institution.

As samples for the documentary analysis, I have chosen the guidelines and manuals of the qualification and supervision procedures – in force at the initial stage of my research – as well as the recommendations prepared by the working group of the Hungarian Waldorf Association.

I chose the maximum variation strategy to select the sample of expert and qualification interviews. My aim was to have a selected sample of all levels of education (from kindergarten to high school), male and female, from rural areas and Budapest, employees of small and large institutions, and from people with a national perspective as well as people who are active only in their own institutions. I only sought age variability for the qualification interviews because a certain age has to be reached to gain a high level of experience as an expert. With regards to the qualification interviews I also paid attention to making sure that the interviewees included people who had qualified at the beginning of the process (around 2014-2016) and people who had qualified recently (around 2017-2019). Taking these criteria into account, I ended up interviewing 8 Waldorf experts and 17 qualified colleagues.

Methods

I used open coding analysis as the method of document analysis. Prior to the data analysis, I identified the following main categories of inquiry based on Kennedy (2005): 1. Supported forms of knowledge acquisition appearing in the document, 2. The role of individual and professional community development, 3. Accountability, 4. Professional autonomy, 5. Is the main purpose to transfer knowledge or to support transformative practice? Each document was broken down into three separate levels – 1. objectives, principles, 2. forms of evaluation, 3. activities evaluated – and analysed. Through open coding, I identified elements that could be linked to the main categories, formed descriptive categories within them, and then compared the descriptive codes to look for trends that would allow me to identify patterns.

The main strand of the research is provided by qualitative interviews: on the one hand expert interviews with highly experienced Waldorf educators to explore: 1. What do experts consider to be Waldorf-oriented evaluation? 2. What are the Waldorf experts' views on the evaluation of teachers, leaders and institutions? On the other hand, the qualification interviews, with which my aim was to gather the experiences of the Waldorf teachers who were qualified in the evaluation process in order to identify the problematic points and aspects of the evaluation process from a Waldorf perspective. My intention was to gain insight into the knowledge that the interviewees carry from the interviews. To serve this goal, I chose the in-depth interview format for the expert interviews - as my aim was to understand their experiences and how these experiences are interpreted (Seidman 2002; Szokolszky 2004, p. 459). For collecting qualification experiences, where interpretation was not so important, I found the qualitative thematic interview format most appropriate (Szokolszky 2004, p 463). In both cases I conducted semi-structured, individual interviews.

Among the phenomenological approaches, I approached the analysis of the interviews as described by Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, quoting Kvale (2005, p. 61), whereby I sought to understand social phenomena

from the participants' perspective. At the same time, I also intended to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects' knowledge, to capture the qualitative diversity of their experiences (Georgi, 1975, cited in Kvale (2005, p. 62).

The interviews were recorded on a mobile phone. I converted the recorded audio material into text myself. For the analysis of the transcripts, I used Georgi's phenomenology-based meaning condensation for the expert interviews (Georgi, 1975, cited in Kvale 2005, p. 192). This gave me the essential meanings that were useful for the research problem. In the analysis of the interviews, I used axial and selective coding. From a technical point of view, I used a word processor for the expert interviews, but without using a text analysis program. For the qualification interviews, I coded the edited and checked texts using the online version of the Atlas.ti software. As these interviews were shorter and somewhat more structured, there was no need for text condensation. Already during the analysis of the expert interviews, the question of the affective level of the texts arose, which I also carried out using the Atlas.ti software, based on the categories of the Geneva Emotional Wheel (Shuman and Scherer 2014; Mesterházy 2019) developed in the GRID project. I did the same for the qualification interviews.

Results

In the results of the *document analysis*, I mention in the first place that there are significant differences between the individual procedures of the state teacher evaluation system. While the qualification procedures for the Teacher I and II degree, the Supervision of Teaching and the institutional self-evaluation show a high degree of similarity, both in their approach and in the practical implementation of the procedure, the qualification procedures for the Master and Research Teacher degrees differs significantly. The Master and Research Teacher procedure is closer to the Waldorf approach.

My second finding is that there is a significant contradiction between the aims and principles of each procedure and their practical

implementation. Accountability is not a stated goal of either the education supervision or the self-evaluation procedures, but the assessment procedure and the means of evaluation do not differ from the Teacher I and Teacher II qualification procedures that were designed for accountability. At the same time, the Master's degree qualification procedure, although it is also a procedure for evaluating the performance of a teacher according to its statutory purpose, is more formative in its approach and in the tools used.

A further important finding of the analysis is that there are clear contradictions in the state evaluation documents that are also present in the international discourse (Anderson-Levitt 2003). There is a sharp conflict between the intention to support accountability and development and the intention to reinforce the central system of expectations and autonomy. In the clash between accountability and support for development, accountability emerged as the winner, and from the tension between central expectations and autonomy, the former has clearly been dominant. In principle, the teacher evaluation system seeks to promote the development of pedagogical work. This intention can be found in all the documents, but at the level of practice, the procedures and methods used do not work in this direction (Nahalka 2014).

When analysing the *expert interviews*, I first examined the cognitive level of the interviews. First of all, I looked at how each interview portrayed the content of each thought, in relation to each other i.e. in which interview which code is present in which way. I then looked at the frequency with which each code appeared in the interviews as a whole, to see if anything striking or noteworthy emerged in this respect. (Due to the qualitative nature of the research, I did not analyse the frequency of occurrence of each code using statistical methods.) Finally, I examined each code in terms of content, looking for the meanings they carry during their occurrence in the interviews. As a result, I ascertained the following.

All the experts identified the aim of evaluation as the support of development based on insight and inner will, and the strengthening of

the necessary self-reflection, because a responsible, creative and intuitive attitude of teachers is essential for the authentic cultivation of Waldorf education, which cannot be regulated from outside. The experts also unanimously agreed that the evaluation should not be limited to pedagogical work, as the work of Waldorf teachers – due to its self-directed nature – has areas beyond the pedagogical tasks. Therefore, in the case of Waldorf teachers, it is more appropriate to use the term *evaluation of the teacher's work* rather than *evaluation of the teacher's educational work*. The experts also agreed that, because of the striving towards self-direction in Waldorf institutions, it is not possible to imagine the evaluation of management work in a similar way to institutions with a traditionally hierarchical organizational structure. The experts had very different experiences and opinions on institutional evaluation, but this diversity of opinions converged in two respects. One of these aspects was to understand the essence of the school, to strengthen the unity of the school as an institutional evaluation objective. The other common quality was the strengthening of self-evaluation and self-reflection in the evaluation process.

Regarding the method of evaluation, there was a unanimous emphasis on the need for individualisation of assessment and a disinclination to accept standards. They all emphasized that evaluation should be non-judgemental, supportive and process-oriented, and that it should involve the person being evaluated. On several occasions in the interviews, fear of evaluation was associated with judgement and judgementalism.

In defining the criteria for the evaluation framework, all experts agreed that it was important for the institutions and teachers to feel ownership of the evaluation system and they also agreed that it is necessary to have a common understanding of the concepts used in the evaluation, that it was important to provide the possibility of individual and flexible shaping, and that the evaluation should be a reflection of real life, and therefore the criteria for the evaluation should be formulated by practising teachers. In addition, several participants raised the need for some kind of professional support and guidance. It is interesting that none of them thought about using the

state system; the acceptance of a Waldorf-type evaluation system by the state was seen as an advocacy task.

In terms of evaluation tools, all of them considered classroom visits and self-evaluation to be the most important. It was agreed that the assessment of teachers' pedagogical work by a single head teacher is incomprehensible in Waldorf schools, and that this role can be played by the teachers' conference. *No more than necessary* principles were considered acceptable in the document analysis, with differing views on the inclusion of peer review, parents and pupil opinions in teacher evaluation, while feedback from pupils and parents was considered particularly important in terms of perceiving the impact of actions.

At the emotional level of the expert interviews, feelings with negative charge and positive energy (anger and fear) dominated.

From the results of the analysis of the *qualification interviews*, I highlighted the following: there were four categories of codes associated with the experience of rating, with both positive and negative experiences. These were the Waldorf features (*presenting Waldorf education, defending Waldorf education*), elements of assessment (*portfolio, classroom visit, use of electronic interface, guidance, self-assessment*) experiences with assessors (*positive about assessors, interest of assessors, negative about assessors*) and feelings (*pride, curiosity, fear, anger*). Solely positive experiences were only related to the *career overview*. Solely negative experiences were related to problems of content arising from the different approach of Waldorf pedagogy (*different language, fictitious situation, being outside the system, not being understood*) and system problems (*time and energy absorption, too much administration, too much, compulsion, compulsory, time, qualification, access to E-site, timetable, disruption of teaching, difficult*).

In terms of lack of areas of competence and indicators, interviewees stated that they were unable to reflect the complexity that Waldorf education represents in the assessment, considering that the qualification process is designed to evaluate a pedagogical process that focuses only on the development of the intellect. Difficulties with

competences were reported by colleagues in more than two thirds of the interviews. The specific difficulties arising from the particularities of Waldorf pedagogical characteristics were grouped around four themes: *use of ICT tools, assessment, support for learning, talent management*. In relation to the *indicators*, those who had participated in pre-2016 procedures found many overlaps between indicators. Others found it difficult to interpret the indicators, both because of the unfamiliar jargon used and because of the different approach than Waldorf education.

The need for teacher evaluation was always discussed with some condition (e.g. it is necessary if it is supportive, or if it is non-judgemental, etc.) but as they currently experience it, they believe it is unnecessary. Its quality was defined as: it should be *developmental evaluation* and *linked to professional dialogue*. It is necessary that the class is attended by people who can contribute professionally to what they have seen furthermore, *collegial cooperation, self-reflection, freedom and process approach* were the most common qualities expected. Several have pointed out that the current system does not give a realistic, real picture. It was also suggested that Waldorf schools should develop their *own evaluation system*.

Conclusions

I have answered the conclusions in relation to and in the order of the research questions.

1. What are the basic principles of Waldorf education in relation to evaluation according to Waldorf experts in Hungary and Waldorf teachers who have participated in the qualification?

For Waldorf experts, the purpose of assessment is generally to help development. According to Waldorf pedagogy, the most powerful driver of learning is intrinsic motivation, which without honesty and commitment to the pursuit of truth can lead in wrong directions, thus one of the most important prerequisites for assessment is to support self-awareness. However, honest self-reflection can only be expected where there is no fear of the consequences of evaluation. For this reason, Waldorf pedagogy considers that only stress and fear free

examination performance can be a realistic basis for evaluation. The assessment should be aiming for completeness and holistic, not limited to easily measurable intellectual abilities, and Hungarian Waldorf experts are strongly averse to standards. Nevertheless, the assessment should be age-appropriate and individualised. As a result, children's progress is measured in relation to themselves rather than to each other, so there is limited scope for any form of classification assessment. They mostly use text-based forms of assessment. Waldorf teachers are opposed to standards and have a different approach to grading than the average, not seeing it as a realistic assessment tool. The collegial nature of assessment is also a characteristic of Waldorf institutions. The assessment of pupils' work is not based on the isolated opinions of individual teachers but on collective reflection, and child and class discussions provide an opportunity to help children develop together, which is unique in the educational arena. Finally, I mention a specific Waldorf quality, the contemplative character, which in addition to the literature, also appeared prominently in the interviews when teachers mentioned their daily reflections (Steiner 2016a; 2007; Trostli 2013).

2. *How do these principles appear or how should they appear according to Waldorf experts and qualified Waldorf teachers, in the evaluation of teachers' work?*

Respect for human dignity and, consequently, avoidance of judgement is of primary importance, followed by **encouragement of development**. Regarding the encouragement of professional development, the need for *professional dialogue, collegial cooperation, self-reflection, freedom, a process approach and a subject-based approach* emerged from both the expert and qualification interviews. For professional dialogue to take place, it is essential that the evaluation is carried out by professionals who can give their professional opinion on what they have seen. In this respect, a deep knowledge of Waldorf education is more important than whether someone teaches the same subject. According to the expert interviews, it is only at a point in time when a decision has to be taken on a teacher's continued employment (at the end of a probationary

period or in a crisis situation) or on whether the teacher being evaluated is ready to take on independent tasks, that it is appropriate to take a judgemental rather than a developmental approach to the teacher's work. In the context of accountability, it was mentioned that it is essential to awaken the internal will of the person being evaluated, since no one can be motivated to make real progress from the outside.

3. How did Waldorf teachers experience the evaluation, the whole process, the individual elements of the process and the areas of competence and the indicators?

The subjects of the qualification interview generally found the process difficult because of the time and effort involved and the difficulties arising from the specific Waldorf characteristics. However, it is surprising that they did not mention that the classificatory nature of the evaluation system conflicts with the values they represent in their daily work. It is clear from the interviews that evaluators who are not familiar with Waldorf education are not only unable to be partners in professional dialogue but are also unable to realistically judge the teacher's performance.

The evaluation as a whole did not give a real image of everyday pedagogical practice because in most cases the interviewees made extra effort – or actually did something differently – to meet expectations. Fear of evaluation was particularly high among trainees.

In terms of competences and indicators, problems related mostly to the expectation to use ICT tools, but there were also problems related to the difference in interpretation of assessment of student work, support for learning and talent management.

4. At what points do the public teacher evaluation system and Waldorf education collide?

The fundamental difference between the Waldorf approach to evaluation and the current system of teacher evaluation is that Waldorf education sees evaluation as a developmental tool, whereas the state evaluation system, contrary to its declared developmental purpose, is judgemental in all aspects, and thus does not promote development,

but only accountability¹. From the point of view of the principle of *self-management* represented by the Waldorf approach, problematic is that the state evaluation system reinforces headmaster's responsibility in educational institutions.

The school supervision and qualification system, (using 0,1,2,3,4 N/A. values) and grading system is contrary to the principle of maximum respect for human *dignity*, and it does not focus on the quality of everyday practice but on performance at a key exam moment, often leading to injustice in order to achieve a good result. Although there are many elements of *self-reflection* in both the qualification process and the supervision of schools, the fact that performance, and within it self-reflection itself, is judged, does not encourage real self-criticism but a kind of self-polishing that does not promote progress at all.

The teacher evaluation system does not allow the *process approach* at all (Falus 2014). Nor can the approach take into account a person's individual situation prevail, there is not even any difference between the indicators of the abilities required for the teaching and educational tasks of children of different ages.

Contemplative attention is also sorely lacking in the current qualification system. Not only is it absent as a formal element, but there is not enough time to reflect on the presence or absence of indicators.

The main point of conflict I see, is that the specific approach of Waldorf education cannot prevail, despite the fact that the evaluation should be based on the educational curriculum of the institution. Problems include the different qualification requirements resulting from the class teacher system, the specific timetable resulting from

¹ These statements refer to the Teacher I and Teacher II degree, as well as to the supervisory and institutional self-evaluation procedure, which has the same procedure. The procedure for the Master and Research Teacher degree was found to be consistent with the Waldorf approach

epochal education or the Waldorf kindergarten principles and, above all, differences in pedagogical content and approach.

Regarding the need for the competences in the state evaluation system, Waldorf pedagogy does not differ but it is difficult or impossible to justify the implementation of the given indicators, because Waldorf education has a different approach to certain pedagogical tasks. The indicators used in the teacher career development system, or their interpretations from traditional pedagogy, are not able to identify non-traditional pedagogical practices, they cannot be used to measure the presence or absence of competence of Waldorf teachers, they only show the realisation or non-realisation of traditional pedagogical practice.

5. What are the skills and competences that are not included in the areas of competence defined in the Hungarian teacher evaluation system, but which are essential for Waldorf teachers to carry out their tasks?

The work of a Waldorf teacher consists of many elements that are not measurable. It is also not easy to find measurable qualities in the area of their relationship with children, because, in Waldorf pedagogy, children's perception goes beyond the physical and psychological levels. Their relationship with adults is also of a different quality than in a traditional educational institution, due to the self-directed organisation, collegial responsibility and a closer than usual parent-teacher relationship.

Two other aspects of the practical implementation of Waldorf education are missing from the state system of expectations, which are also non-measurable categories. One is the importance of intuition, the other the complexity of the pedagogical task.

6. What would an ideal assessment consistent with Waldorf education look like?

The aim of an ideal assessment in Waldorf institutions is to help to perceive processes and the effects of actions and to contribute to development by raising awareness of them. Judgement has a role only at points where a decision has to be made on the suitability of

colleagues to perform certain tasks, in all other cases the purpose of assessment is to reinforce realistic self-evaluation and thus support development.

For the evaluation to be truly developmental, it is essential that those involved are able to identify with the whole process, its purpose, method, tools and criteria. Avoiding unfamiliar jargon is essential for this identification. On the other hand, it is also important that it is interpretable to the individual situation of the people involved, and therefore the possibility of flexible formulation must be ensured. Thirdly, it must be based on everyday practice, so it must be formulated by practising teachers.

An assessment in line with Waldorf education respects the free will of the individual, promotes honesty, creative freedom and fosters self-responsibility. This primarily requires that the assessment is free of any dependencies. An important prerequisite for a supportive evaluation is a process approach, and since a decision can only be made in a given context, any evaluation must be tailored to the person and the situation.

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