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Globalization of Waldorf education: an ethnographic case study from the Philippines

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CHAPTER 6

Two Different Worlds on the Same Road

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Abstract This article explores the identity and image of a Waldorf school in a poor rural community in Central Philippines. The school strives for great ideals. The article examines whether these ideals are supported and implemented by its teachers and students (identity), and how they are perceived by outsiders, e.g. teachers and students at a nearby public school (image). The internal identity appears to diverge from the external image. Within the Waldorf school, the ideals are known, lived by, and reproduced (as cultural capital), but beyond its boundaries the school remains the odd one out. The sustainability of one particular ideal – to have students from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the same classroom, all feeling at home (school belonging) – is coming under pressure. While the Waldorf school is situated on the same village road as the local public school, they are, in a way, worlds apart.

Keywords Waldorf education, Philippines, organizational identity and image, cultural capital, school belonging

Introduction

Waldorf education – founded in Germany in 1919 and known for its alternative educational approach – is globalizing and recently has been introduced in numerous countries in the Global South, including the Philippines (Van Schie 2020). This article evaluates how a Philippine Waldorf school identifies and profiles itself in the local Philippine educational landscape and how this type of education is imagined and perceived by insiders and outsiders. The Philippines offer an interesting location for such research, because of its hybrid and diverse cultural setting (Zialcita 2005). Part of this cultural hybridity and diversity is a predominantly positive attitude towards globalization (Tyner 2009), a centuries-long mixing of cultural influences, as well as the multiple diversities within the Philippine society, including regional cultural and lingual differences, noticeable differences between rural and urban communities, as well as class differences. Especially the latter are associated with school choice (Termes et al. 2020) and school success due to presence or absence of relevant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 2010). Traditionally Waldorf schools are attractive to urban middle class and elite groups (Johnson 2014; Wiechert 2021), but in the setting of this research a Waldorf school is examined that strives specifically for good education for an underprivileged rural community.

The article zooms in on a rural community in Iloilo Province, in Central Philippines, where a Waldorf school is located next to a public school. Based on questionnaire outcomes, in-depth interviews, and group activities with students and teachers, the school's educational ideals and self-perception are compared to the images held by outsiders as well as the experiences of the students themselves. The dilemma the school faces is that, on the one hand, it needs to connect to the values and norms, as well as the referential frameworks of the students of the community where the school is located, in order to create a sense of belonging, while on the other hand, it wants to pursue lofty cosmopolitan ideals, associated with educational ideals of urban middle classes, and therewith with their cultural capital, in order to provide students with new futures and insights. The balance that needs to be found in this dilemma ultimately determines how successful the school under study can be in bringing into practice its educational ideals, without losing sight of the specific place where it is located. This is not only relevant for the school under study – to know its potential and impact – but serves as an example for many other private schools, with outspoken educational approaches and ideals, that undergo similar processes.

In sum, the research question is:

How does a rural Philippine Waldorf school identify itself and how do images and perceptions of in- and outsiders consequently influence the fragile balance for rural students between feeling at home at school (school belonging) and bringing into practice lofty alternative educational ideals (associated with the cultural capital of urban middle classes)?

Waldorf education in the Philippines.

Waldorf education promotes an educational approach based on the spiritual philosophy of anthroposophy, which aims for broad personal development (Rawson, 2019; Stehlik 2019). Since the end of the 20th century, Waldorf education has been part of the educational landscape in the Philippines (Van Schie 2020). Philippine Waldorf schools mainly follow an internationally formulated curriculum, with a relatively strong European outlook (Van Schie 2021a).

From the outset, Waldorf education has been part of a social movement that is broader than education. It is based on the ideology of social threefolding and on broader principles of anthroposophy. Social threefolding assumes that society is comprised of three sectors – the economic sector, the political-judicial sector, and the cultural sector (including education) – which should be guided respectively by the ideals of brotherhood, equality, and freedom. Education should therefore be free from state influence (Steiner 2018). Inherent to social threefolding is the idea that education should contribute to a better society. It is assumed that by providing students with a free, high-quality education, they develop into autonomous, self-thinking, creative, responsible, and caring humans who play a positive role in society. The school also contributes by catering for the educational needs of poor and underprivileged students, like the first Waldorf school in Germany did. This school, in Stuttgart, was specifically established for the poor children of factory labourers at the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory (Murphy 2019).

Identity and image

Identity and image are central concepts in this study. Here, the concept of identity refers to the perception of members of the organization about what the organization is or should be (internal perception), and the concept of image refers to the perception of outsiders about the organization (external perception) (Ravasi 2016, 65).

A school's identity is often summarized and formalized in a mission statement. Usually, this is not a fixed phenomenon; it is always under construction due to a dialectical relation between the members and stakeholders of the organization, including management, teachers, students, and parents, and the outside community, which includes teachers, students, and parents of other schools. A mission statement is generally actively communicated, both internally and externally, as part of a process of conscious and unconscious organizational profiling. This process includes a selection of characteristics, values, educational practices, pedagogical ideals, and cultural characteristics to create a recognizable profile or identity that distinguishes the school from other schools. A clear mission statement allows a school not only to define its own identity but also to create an appealing image that resonates with parents, students, and the wider community. It shapes the perception and portrayal of the school in society, influencing its attractiveness and reputation. The question is whether or not these desired images correspond with the images that exist among students and staff within the school, as well as with the images that exist in the community, including neighbouring schools.

Cultural capital and school belonging

Two other important concepts related to this study are cultural capital and school belonging. Both concepts were mainly used for analytical purposes.

Firstly, cultural capital, a term most notably associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 2010). Bourdieu uses the sociological concept of cultural capital to illustrate how education often aligns with the culture of the elite, enabling that elite to achieve success in educational settings. This alignment perpetuates and exacerbates inequality over time. What appears to be a neutral concept, such as 'taste,' actually contributes to distinction and class reproduction (Bourdieu, 2010). The idea of having 'good taste' is, in fact, defined by the elite.

The concept of cultural capital can help understand the social dynamics behind the impact of Waldorf education in the Philippine educational landscape. Although Waldorf education is relatively unknown to the majority of the Filipino urban elite, this alternative form of education aligns with educational ideals of self-development and individual growth – ideas that are popular among the urban middle class. Hence, the 'Waldorf culture' within Waldorf education subtly aligns with the values of an urban elite. In that sense, Waldorf education in the Philippines, shares characteristics with other private schools, and is likewise associated with higher social classes and better career opportunities (Termes et al 2020). This is also reflected in the use of English as the primary language of instruction and an internationally oriented curriculum that has Eurocentric, and perhaps also unintended neocolonial or un-decolonized, aspects (Van Schie, 2021a). It is, therefore, no surprise that most Waldorf schools in the Philippines are located in urban areas. Although the Waldorf school featured in this study is located in a rural area, it is also particularly popular among urban middle-class families.

Secondly, the social psychological concept of school belonging (Goodenow 1993), can also be related to this study. School belonging refers to inclusion and feeling at home at school (Goodenow 1993: 80). Logically, school belonging only occurs when the school culture is somewhat congruent with the home culture of the students. It is easy to imagine that in a school where cosmopolitan ideals, reproduced as part of cultural capital of an urban elite, dominate, it would be difficult for rural students to feel at home, let alone attract new students from the village to this school, who are not yet familiar with the school.

The Philippine educational context

Formal compulsory education in the Philippines takes 13 years. This so-called K-12 system was enacted by the Enhanced Basic Education Act in 2013, when the system was renewed and extended, including an updated national curriculum (Okabe 2013; Sergio 2012). Private schools often add extra subjects to the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum (Department of Education, n.d.), such as religious education, extra language classes, or special subjects such as computer skills.

Despite the provision of free and accessible basic education for everyone in the Philippines, in practice schools charge for basic items and services, making education an

expensive matter for the poorest groups. This partly explains the high drop-out rates (Pilar 2018) and low literacy for these groups (Termes 2020, 93), and it comes on top of other issues such as a lack of physical and human resources (Durban and Catalan 2012; World Bank 2020, i) (for more information on this matter, see also Van Schie and Vedder, 2023).

In addition to financial barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in society, cultural capital also plays a role in the inequality within the Philippine education system. Local cultural expressions are often not, or only minimally, integrated into the curriculum, partly due to the marginal role of regional languages in education. English, associated with the elite (see Van Schie and Vedder, 2023), is predominantly used as the language of instruction in Philippine education, reinforcing class differences. The regional is undervalued compared to the national and international, and the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism in Philippine education, including the use of American-style educational materials, are hardly questioned. Former colonizers are often portrayed in textbooks as bringers of civilization rather than oppressors, contributing to a negative perception of everything local (see Van Schie 2021a for an extensive reflection on this topic). This can lead to a sense of inferiority among local rural lower-class communities, with the urban, cosmopolitan, English-speaking elites often perceived as intimidating by the former.

The structure and curriculum of Philippine Waldorf education differ from the general Philippine K-12 system. In accordance with its slogan “education for head, heart and hands” (Stehlik 2019, 137), Waldorf pedagogy tries to balance cognitive academic activities with artistic and practical artisanal ones. This is reflected in the curriculum. (for more information on the Waldorf curriculum, see also Van Schie 2021a).

Private education in the Philippines

Waldorf schools in the Philippines are private schools. The Philippines traditionally has a relatively high percentage of pupils who enrol in private schools. About 30% of elementary schools and 40% of high schools are private (World Bank, 2020: ii). Within the Philippine educational system, private schools outperform public schools (Yamauchi 2005, 960). Yet, private schools are not doing better in all respects. In fact, teacher quality tends to be better in public schools because many private schools reduce costs by hiring less experienced teachers who work under less favourable labour conditions for lower salaries (Termes et al. 2020, 105). Nevertheless, private schools have the advantages of a better pupil–teacher ratio (less students per teacher) (Termes et al. 2020, 94-5) and the possibility to select more “high-ability students” (Yamauchi 2005 and Termes et al. 2020).

Most private schools emphasize career chances and personal development in their marketing strategies, for example through the use of English – the language associated with upward social mobility (Young 2001, 222) – as the main language of instruction. Students with higher-educated parents, who strive more actively for educational opportunities for their children, are overrepresented in private schools (Termes, et al. 2020).

Current study

In the current study on the identity and image of Philippine Waldorf education, we take one Philippine Waldorf school as an illustrative example. To put this case study in context, we compare this Waldorf school to a nearby public school.

Formally, the identity and profile of the school under study are anchored in the school's mission statement, which is communicated to interested parties through the school's website, its Facebook account, and on a blackboard in the school's corridor.

The mission statement of the Waldorf school in this study is:

Working out of the spiritual impulse of Steiner [Waldorf] education, our mission is to educate children from pre-school to class 12 using a balanced, innovative, and health-giving curriculum. We aim to be inclusive and accessible to children from diverse backgrounds. We work together to help them to become creative, compassionate, responsible, and free human beings able to find purpose in their lives and to prepare them to meet the challenges of the modern world. In partnership with parents and supporters, we strive to become a healing force that works outward to build community and renew society.

In this study, we will evaluate whether this school mission is reflected in the images and experiences of Waldorf teachers and students, and whether it is compatible with the images that outsiders have of the school. Moreover, in the analysis of this study, we evaluate how cultural capital related to the school's profile, has an influence on school belonging.

Method

Research setting

Central in this study is a Waldorf school in a rural community in Iloilo Province in Central Philippines. Iloilo's rural areas are characterized by lush rice fields and small fishing communities. The landscape is dotted with traditional villages, often with stilt houses in order to deal with regular floodings, where agriculture is the primary livelihood. Despite modernization in urban centres, rural Iloilo retains a focus on subsistence farming and community-based living. In the community where the school is located, there are also many construction workers, many of whom are day labourers. The area is also characterized by emigration flows, mainly seeking work in international shipping and domestic labour. This means that many families are not complete. A few hundred metres apart from the Waldorf school, on the same road, which runs from the closest town to the village, there is also a public school. Students and teachers from this public school were included in the research to give context and comparison to the data from the Waldorf school.

The first school to pass on the road – coming from the nearest town – is the public school.

The school complex is divided into two parts: a primary school sited close to the road and a junior high school that is a little off the road, behind the primary school. Both sections of the school comprise yellow-painted building blocks, around a neat and green school yard, with a flagpole at its centre, on the spot where the daily flag ceremony starts each school day. Students arrive, one by one or in small groups, in a long continuous procession along the road, most wearing tidy school uniforms. Some arrive by tricycle. The students come from the community where the school is, as well as the surrounding communities.

A little further along the road – at the end of a short, unpaved path through the rice fields – one finds a Waldorf school, situated behind a big bamboo gate, with hexagonal, Nipa-style buildings scattered around a green and flowery terrain, with in the middle a two-storey administration building next to a flagpole, where, every Monday, a flag ceremony takes place. Vehicles – a school bus, cars, and many tricycles – drive back and forth over the bumpy road to bring the students to school, most of whom do not wear uniforms. The majority of the students come from outside the community, mostly from the City of Iloilo, or from the surrounding towns, neighbourhoods, or villages. New students are only admitted to the Waldorf school after parents subscribe to the mission and ideals of the school, which includes above the educational ideals a number of very tangible aspects to students, such as, among others, a healthy lifestyle without junk food and without abundant use of media devices.

Research participants

Students and teachers from both the Waldorf school and the public school participated in the research. Our data was collected from students in grades 6 and 8 at both schools: 44 students from the Waldorf school and 55 students from the public school. Grades 6 and 8 were selected because they are thought to be the last year of primary education: In public education grade 6 is the last year of primary education and in the Waldorf school primary education continues until grade 8 (see Van Schie and Vedder 2023 for more detailed information on this sample). The class teachers of the classes that were included in the research were interviewed individually, so two class teachers at the Waldorf school and two class teachers at the public school. The respective school directors of both schools were also interviewed. Beside these in-depth interviews, group interviews and group activities were organized at both schools. These took place during the teacher meetings at both school and – in principle – included all teachers from both schools (about 20 teachers in each meeting). The teachers at the schools did not meet each other. In student activities a meeting between the students at both schools was arranged (see below). Lastly, as part of participant observation, class observations took place as well as numerous informal conversations with people in and around the school, as well as in the village community. These conversations were mostly unstructured and partly based on serendipity.

Design and materials

The findings in this study are based on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork between 2017 and 2020 (see Van Schie 2021a, 384), making use of the classical

ethnographic method of participant observation (described by many scholars, including Spradley 1980 and Agar 1980). The primary reason for choosing an ethnographic approach in this research is that such method offers the best opportunity to gain an in-depth insider perspective on the research question: how Waldorf education is shaped and how perceptions and images of it are formed by both insiders and outsiders in this specific rural community in the Philippines. It also helps to understand how students have a sense of school belonging – or not – within this type of education and how cultural capital is reproduced. Ethnographic fieldwork encompasses the other methods of data collection, as well as all conceivable places and events related to the research setting, including "the teachers' lounge, the playground, the classroom, and school events, camps, festivals, etc." (Van Schie 2021a, 364). Observations and experiences were worked out in field notes (see also Van Schie 2021b).

As part of the overall ethnographic research approach, the following methods of data collection, data processing, and analysis, were used:

1. *Individual interviews and group activities*

In-depth interviews were conducted with the class teachers of grade 6 and 8 and school managers to provide context to the field observations, especially class observations, as part of participant observation, as well as context to the questionnaire outcomes (see below). By gaining a better understanding of the context, we also gained more insight into how mutual perceptions contribute, on the one hand, to a strong identity within the Waldorf school, and on the other hand, to an intimidating or alienating image for public school students in relation to the Waldorf school (see results below).

In addition, group activities were organized with teachers and students, which allowed us to observe how certain viewpoints emerged and were related. For the teachers, these activities took place during the weekly teacher meetings and were a follow-up of similar activities three years earlier. The focus was on the mission and ideals of the schools. Teachers worked in small groups and made posters, which they presented to each other. On the posters they mentioned issues they were seeing as the main purposes of their education, desired results for students and the main points related to the school's identity. With the students, only those of grade 8, we discussed their mutual images of and between the two schools. The student activity took place at the Waldorf school and included a tour and conversations about differences and similarities between both schools. It became a heartwarming activity that dispelled prejudices.

For both the individual interviews and group activities, data was processed in transcripts for later categorization and analysis, which has been done through the comparison of inductive answer categories (Bernard 2002, 464-465) and the use of exemplar quotes (Bernard 2002, 471). These quotes were selected carefully to reflect the main lines of thought, concepts, and theories arising from the evaluation of interview transcripts and fieldwork experience.

2. *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were also used in this study.[3] The questionnaires were used to collect background information of students, as well as information on images they have of their school and images they have of the other school in the village. The questionnaires allowed us to substantiate and quantify insights we had already gathered during informal conversations in the field. On the one hand, the structured data from the questionnaires quickly confirmed the dominant perceptions held by students, and on the other hand, it gave us the opportunity to include and consider less commonly mentioned perceptions in our analysis as well (see results below). The questionnaire included the following sections: a) Background information of the students, where we aimed to learn more about their home situations and socioeconomic status (SES). We assessed SES by asking about their parents' occupations and the mode of transportation they used to get to school, assuming a correlation with income. b) A section on images and perceptions: How they viewed their own school and the other school in the village. These questions included both closed-ended responses and open-ended questions. The analysis of these sections was primarily descriptive (see below under results). Other parts of the questionnaire focused on school motivation and language proficiency (these sections were statistically analysed and described in another article, see Van Schie and Vedder, 2023). Students in the Waldorf school and the public school were asked to fill out the questionnaire forms in their class. Their class teachers were allowed to give additional explanation to help the students fill out the forms. Data processing and descriptive analysis was done with the help of statistical computer software (SPSS-29).

Positionality of the research team

Data collection in the field was carried out by the first author of this article. He was assisted by an educational science student from the Netherlands, Sophie Westhoff. The first author is both a PhD student at Leiden University in the Netherlands and a Waldorf teacher at a Dutch Waldorf high school. This dual role requires careful consideration in the execution of the research. The complexity and value of this dual role have been extensively discussed in another article (see Van Schie 2021b). A complicating factor related to this is the perception in the village of the school as an internationally oriented institution, partly due to the frequent visits of international guests. The research team was also part of this foreign entourage and was therefore also part of the very image it was investigating.

Results

A closer look at both schools in this study

Many of the differences between public and private schools in the Philippines, presented earlier, also apply to the schools under study. Foremost in this regard is the difference in the average socioeconomic status and educational background of the students' parents. This Waldorf school, however, deviates from other private schools insofar as

[3] See appendix previous chapter

the composition of its classes is mixed in terms of socioeconomic status. The children of the doctor and lawyer from the city sit together in class with the children of the farmer, day labourer, and tricycle driver from the local rural community. This is in line with the school's social threefolding ideology. The same level of diversity is not found at the public school, which, in many ways, is a typical rural public school with relatively low educational performance and a relatively poor student population.

Many of the earlier depicted advantages apparently afforded to private school students in comparison to public school students (see, for instance, Trinidad 2020) also apply to the students in this study:

Firstly, the Waldorf school has a better teacher–student ratio with smaller classes (20 to 25 students instead of approximately 30 at the public school).

Secondly, the Waldorf school is able to attract more high-ability students than the public school. We identify two reasons for this: On the one hand, parents' higher socioeconomic status corresponds to higher student ability levels. On the other hand, there is a selection effect, namely, that students at the Waldorf school cannot repeat classes. If they fall behind and tutoring does not help them then the ultimate consequence may be a school transfer. The public school does not have this 'luxury'. It has to provide education for all students.

The language of instruction substantiates a third difference between the schools. At the Waldorf school, most lessons are provided in English to stimulate students to become more proficient in this language. For most Waldorf students, English is either a foreign language or a second language. At public school, the vernacular is the main language of instruction used to support pupils' understanding (Van Schie and Vedder 2023). This difference underlines that English is associated with a wealthy elite, which some people from the local community may perceive as 'intimidating'. Unlike the public school, the Waldorf school asks for school fees. The fees are income-related. In addition to teacher salaries and maintenance of premises, the school fee covers the costs of materials and activities. The public school is free of charge, but parents are asked to make financial contributions for numerous materials and services (cf. Termes et al. 2020, 94). Waldorf school parents from the community assured us that they did not pay more than their neighbours who sent their children to the public school. The Waldorf school is certainly not a rich school. There is probably more financial security in the public school, despite the complaints about a lack of resources, as a minimum of government support is assured. The Waldorf school is constantly looking for extra resources, including donations from international contacts. Moreover, as with other private schools in the Philippines, the teachers at the Waldorf school earn considerably less than their colleagues in the public school. This poses a problem for the continuity of education because it mainly means young teachers come to work at the school but subsequently leave at the point in their lives when they are seeking greater financial security.

Self-images about school and learning at the Waldorf school

Teachers

The Waldorf teachers' opinions and behaviour demonstrate a strong commitment to the school's mission. This is evident from the posters produced during teacher meetings on the purposes and outcomes of their educational efforts, which included statements such as: "Striving for confident, independent, curious, appreciative, responsible, compassionate, conscious, and connected students"; "Give tools to young people to find their place in the world"; "Educate children to become free and responsible human beings"; "Educate the whole human being instead of producing walking-talking 'one terabyte heads'". References were also made to the threefolding ideology: "We want to blur boundaries between classes"; "We want to be accessible to students from diverse backgrounds"; "We want to work for and with the community". Some comments underlined the school's local identity, thus distinguishing itself from other Waldorf schools, such as those in Manila, which were thought to be more urban and less gentle and family-like.

The exercises carried out in 2020 were a repetition of those conducted in 2017. Analysis of the data from both events shows that the emphasis has shifted slightly from the social threefolding ideal of helping the local community to more general anthroposophical principles and practices. In relation to this observation, the term 'community' turned out to be confusing (see also Van Schie 2020, 83), since it can refer to the village community – or even to society at large – as well as to the school community. In 2020, the idea of community in the sense of the village was expressed less emphatically than during the first round of data collection in 2017.

The individual interviews also show that the school mission is known and pursued. New teachers are intensively trained and introduced to the school's ideals. As a consequence, most teachers are enthusiastic about the school and its mission. Even supporting staff – such as the janitor or cleaner – seem to have a clear image of these ideals and feel part of the school community. At the same time, there are variations in interpretations. For some, the philosophical and pedagogic underpinnings of Waldorf education are also a bit of a personal quest or even a struggle. This is the case, for example, in relation to the spiritual elements related to anthroposophy, such as notions of 'a spiritual world' and 'reincarnation'. Such notions are clearly at odds with the Christian beliefs held by most Filipinos. Pedagogically, there is sometimes doubt about the notion of age-appropriateness in this regard, namely, the idea that students should not be pushed too soon into abstract thinking. Some teachers fear that students will fall behind, despite lacking evidence (see Van Schie and Vedder, 2023).

Students

The images and experiences of school and learning presented by Waldorf students also correspond significantly with the school's ideals and mission. These images can be categorized into four themes: (1) the way of teaching; (2) the curriculum; (3) student–teacher relations; and (4) expectations towards students.

1. Students praise Waldorf education's 'unique way of teaching'. This statement is exemplified with references to particular characteristics, such as: the organization of lessons into main lesson blocks of three weeks; the making of main lesson books as individualized and artistic learning books; storytelling as important teaching method; art activities as integral part of all lessons; the many (anthroposophical) verses and songs throughout the day; circle time and games in the classroom; a nature table; and the absence of text books. More abstract matters are also mentioned, such as characterizing Waldorf education as development-oriented, or mentioning the balance between thinking, feeling, and willing.

2. With regard to the curriculum, art classes and gardening are often mentioned as typical Waldorf school subjects, in addition to main lesson blocks. More generally, there is an emphasis on nature in the curriculum, including many outdoor activities and the celebration of seasonal festivals like Michaelmas or Saint Martinmas (see Hoffmann, 2016 for more information), which coincide with the natural rhythm of the year and often come with a general human theme, such as courage or compassion.

3. Many students stress the good relations with teachers, exemplified by the following quotes: "The education is different because the teacher really connects with the student"; "I like school because for me everyone is equal and the teachers care for us and know us. They don't pressure us or say bad words to us". Students find their teachers kind, competent, hardworking, respectful, helpful, and they emphasize the personal attention they receive from them. On the one hand, this school community is described as diverse (emphasizing the mix of city children and village children, rich and poor). On the other hand, the community is described as united or even as 'family'. The school community is especially felt and reproduced during communal celebrations, such as seasonal festivals or the so-called paambittanay, gatherings in which classes present what they have learned to other classes.

4. Students mention the school's expectations in relation to media and healthy food. These issues are tangible differences with other schools and youth. Mobile phones, computer games, social media, televisions, fast food, snacks, and soft drinks are omnipresent in society. An awareness of a healthy lifestyle is fostered by reducing the use of multimedia on the school premises and not eating unhealthy food. In addition, students point out that their school provides for rest and less stress in comparison to other schools, especially the nearby public school, which – according to them – pushes students to perform well and achieve high grades. In contrast to the public school, few tests are taken at the Waldorf school, hardly any grades are given, and certainly no lists of the best-performing students are kept, let alone shown in the classroom. Being relaxed and learning without too much pressure is mainly presented by students as a positive point. However, some students suspect that the Waldorf school programme is, consequently, easier than that of the public school. A grade 7 student responded: "Here, we don't have any pressure, but we learn how to be responsible".

Remarkably, some students (and parents) also noted the good manners of Waldorf students as a typical Waldorf feature. This observation was unexpected, considering the non-authoritarian approach taken by teachers and the emphasis on freedom and individual development in the lessons. The loose adherence to rules regarding the wearing of a school uniform is an example of this ("we are free to wear what we are comfortable with"). It is possible that the perception of good behaviour among Waldorf students arises from the educational focus on collective activities and social dynamics in the classroom. Additionally, it might be a way to counteract negative stereotypes associated with public school students. These negative images of public school students held by Waldorf students include images of an unhealthy lifestyle and abundant multimedia use (opposite to the ideals of Waldorf school): "They eat unhealthy food, including snacks, junk food, candy, and chocolate. And they use cell phones, play computer games, binge watch television series, and use social media". Other examples of bad behaviour that were often mentioned include: smoking; fighting; drinking; bullying; making noise; showing disrespect; being mean; and using swear words (all opposite to the self-image of Waldorf students as behaving well and being responsible). Bad behaviour was also projected on public school teachers. They were thought to not show up during classes, to be disrespectful or uninterested, to use 'bad language', and even 'throw chalk'. Moreover, they were thought to be stricter or even authoritarian. Lastly, stereotypical images of 'the other' also included the idea that public school students had more homework, bulky schoolbooks, more grades, and more pressure, for example, to be in the top-10 list of students, or to gain medals and honours related to school achievements.

Finally, when students pointed out what they liked about school, they mentioned the friendships among each other: the school as a social meeting place. The nice schoolyard was also mentioned as well as the breaks. In this respect, Waldorf students did not differ from public school students. They also mentioned friendships as the most important thing at school, in addition to good lessons, great teachers, and a beautiful schoolyard.

Images about Waldorf education by public school teachers and students

Teachers

In general, despite several joint school annual activities in the village community, there seemed to be very limited contact between both schools. There had been mutual visits in the past, but only a few teachers remembered those encounters. These teachers recalled that there were many creative activities at the Waldorf school, but they also suspected that students might be academically underperforming as a result of this creative approach.

It was clear that public school teachers have at least some knowledge of Waldorf education, but that it is often a bit distorted. For example, one teacher was impressed by the Waldorf approach because of the development of "13 kinds of intelligences, instead of one [like the public school]". This statement seems to be an exaggeration of the ideal to strive for broad personal development, which entails more than just cognitive development. Another teacher thought that 'age-appropriate' meant that all students work at their own pace.

Aside from the pedagogical approach, there is also the impression that Waldorf school students, and therefore also the school itself, are much wealthier. This is partly true for the student population, with a significant portion coming from urban, middle-class families. For the school, however, the reality is more complex, given the constant financial struggles and the relatively low teacher salaries compared to the public school. In fact, neither school can be easily classified as wealthy.

Related to the image of being a rich school for wealthy students the idea is that the Waldorf school is there for children from the city and not for the village children. This point is related to discussions about school fees at the Waldorf school, which are, according to the public school teachers, high. Most people in the village community are aware of the fact that there are also village children at the Waldorf school, but still they perceive it as a place for outsiders from the city – an elite. This is a persistent thought, one reinforced by the expensive cars that rush by on the village road, on the way to the Waldorf school, to drop off children. Children at the public school come on foot or by tricycle. Their parents cannot afford a car.

Students

Waldorf students are thought to be rich, pay higher school fees, speak better English (and worse Filipino), have better facilities at school – such as a basketball court or air conditioning – and regularly receive international visitors to the school. The images that public school students have of the Waldorf school and of Waldorf students are less negative than vice versa. For example, they think the premises of the Waldorf school look nice. Not much is said about the content of the lessons, but what is said is quite interesting and also corresponds quite well to reality. For example, a student states that there is less emphasis in Waldorf education on knowledge and more on skills. Another comments that there is more attention for art subjects. Nevertheless, overall, there seems to be little knowledge about what Waldorf education exactly entails.

In general, Waldorf students are not described negatively. It is mentioned that they come from the city, speak good English, are spiritual – but not Catholic – eat vegetarian food, and that they are friendly. In part, the images of the public school students confirm the stereotypes that Waldorf school students have about themselves by presenting them as well-mannered, less bullying, less often absent from the classroom, and hard-working in their studies.

A meeting between Waldorf school students and public school students

In an arranged meeting between students from both schools, many of the mutual stereotypes were countered. Students got along well and were genuinely interested in each other. Alleged negative images were not confirmed and curricular differences turned out to be smaller than expected. For example, Waldorf students found out that they were not unique in having seasonal celebrations, saying a morning verse, singing during the school day, or learning how to garden, although these things manifest differently at both schools. For example, at the public school, the barangay fiesta or several beauty contests are important celebrations, unlike seasonal Waldorf festivals, such as Saint John

or Michaelmas. And, the Lord's Prayer is recited at the beginning of the day, instead of a verse written by Rudolf Steiner, which is repeated by Waldorf school students. And there is also singing going on, as was demonstrated during our visit, in which karaoke acts were performed in the classroom – albeit no polyphonic canons accompanied by clap rhythms or recorders, as is more typical for the Waldorf school. Finally, the public school students also do gardening, as was shown to us when a large-scale clean-up of the school yard was organized in preparation for a visit by the education inspector. Yet, besides the different output of these corresponding things, there remain many notable differences, which were much talked about by the students during the meeting. To mention a few examples of things that are virtually absent at the Waldorf school but commonplace in a Philippine public education setting: uniforms; top-10 lists of well-performing students; and National Achievement Tests.

An intimidating image

In sum, the outsiders' image of the Waldorf school – wealthy students, fast cars, English – adds up to an intimidating image. This image is strengthened by the fact that the school regularly invites foreign guests. All the things the school stands for – an innovative educational approach, a mix of city and village children in the classroom – feels strange to the *barangay* (village) inhabitants. The *barangay captain*, who unlike most villagers sends his children to the Waldorf school, explained that the supposed high tuition fee is not the main reason that few people opt for Waldorf education: *"It is simply the fact that people are not familiar with the Waldorf system. They want to choose for a school system they know and that feels familiar. They think it is not for them. And they feel ashamed when they mix with rich children. They don't want to improve their manners. They don't want change. They don't really talk negative about the school, but they just feel uncomfortable with it."*

The director of the public school summarized the same thought as follows: *"The community of Libongcogon is not yet ready for the kind of education offered by the Waldorf school. It is too advanced. […] It would have been more logical when this school would have been in the city. […] It is also really a school for affluent students. What are they doing here! Why not start such school in the city?"*

The observation that the school is not succeeding in becoming 'normal' in the village is also known at the Waldorf school. This is not only witnessed in the image presented by outsiders, but also in the actual decrease in the number of students from the village who opt for the school. Despite the school's mission to be a grassroots school offering quality education for the poor children from the village, the school is failing to attract growing numbers of students from the village community.

Discussion

We have seen that Waldorf ideals – which partly align with certain traits typical of private education in the Philippines and therewith align with cultural capital reproduced in urban middle classes and elites– are well-known and shared among the teachers, students, and parents at the Waldorf school. The school therefore seems to form a strong community in which a common identity is shared.

Growing numbers of students in the Waldorf school provide room for the school to opt for a more selective enrolment policy, favouring parents who are more active in their support of school ideals. In practice, these parents come mainly from urban environments, since these ideals seem to fit in well with a reproduced urban and elitist kind of cultural capital. This may even further strengthen the school community and internal consensus; and equally favours and strengthens a feeling of school belonging for those students who are brought up with these ideals by their families. At the same time, however, this may undermine the ideal of forming diverse school classes, being inclusive, and attracting children from lower social backgrounds (from the village community), since these ideals do less align with their direct home environments, and therefore may complicate their commitment and feelings of school belonging. A decrease in the number of children from the village community attending the school suggests that this is the case. It seems that, despite all the good intentions and beautiful things that are achieved, the school is increasingly alienated from the direct local environment. Internal bonding might become stronger, but external bonding is getting weaker.

This is expressed in many ways. For example, by choosing annual celebrations in line with an internationally formulated Waldorf curriculum instead of local celebrations. In fact, there was little exchange between the public school and the Waldorf school, which remain firmly in two different worlds, in which mutual stereotypes can live on. All these factors together are experienced as intimidating by the residents of the village and make it less easy – and, indeed, likely – for community children to choose, feel at home in, or be successful at the Waldorf school.

Our results confirm that the Waldorf school community struggles with external communication, hindering widespread understanding and acceptance. The school contributes to local educational diversity, but growth is driven more by urban, middle-class interests than local enthusiasm. Mutual images indicate limited contact, allowing stereotypes to persist. The idea of the Waldorf school serving as a model for educational innovation therefore remains idealistic. In practice, bridging the gap with the local village community proves challenging, and the perception that the school is not intended for the local residents, despite its presence in the village, persists – the perception of a different world existing on the same village road.

Shortcomings and suggestions for future research

This study is linked to a gradually growing body of literature on the globalization of Waldorf education (e.g., Boland 2015, Hoffmann 2016, Stehlik 2019), as well as more

general discussions in social scientific literature on globalization trends in education (e.g., Spring 2015). Despite this link, a specific case study like this could prompt questions about its representativeness. The generality and specificity of the findings need exploration through additional comparable studies in diverse social contexts. Moreover, a broader exploration is warranted on the actualization of threefolding ideals, sustaining diversity in the classroom, fostering an open school culture, and the conditions for successful integration into local communities. The concepts of cultural capital and school belonging are helpful analytical tools to do so. Addressing these aspects would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Waldorf education dynamics beyond this specific case, as well as more general conclusions in relation to private school cultures, especially in globalizing contexts.

Conclusion

The Waldorf school in this study is characterized by a strong internal identity and loyalty and a lively alternative educational scene, with lectures and enthusiastic followers. The profile and ideals of Philippine Waldorf education are distinctive and therefore contribute to the diversity of the Philippines' educational landscape. Consequently, there is potential for growth and impact. But this growth and impact is also limited due to the limited reach beyond the own school community, especially in rural areas, probably due to urban elitist, or even internationalist cultural capital that is reproduced, that leads to limited feelings of school belonging for underprivileged, lower class or rural students. In this way, Waldorf does not live up to its own ideal of social threefolding. Outsiders do often not really understand the point of Waldorf education and seeing it as an oddity. The inward focus obstructs the ideal of becoming a school with a diverse student population, including poor and underprivileged students, and also the wish to function as a model school with a broad impact in diverse localities, as well as being an example for other schools. Therefore, the potential impact of Philippine Waldorf education remains limited. Philippine Waldorf education has thus far remained an educational niche. A beautiful niche for those who know it, but for everyone else it is a world apart.

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Filipino Anthroposophical Community

From my fieldwork notes:[1]

The anthroposophical community in the Philippines may be small, but it is active, enthusiastic, and committed. Beyond strictly educational initiatives, it also encompasses initiatives in agriculture and healthcare. In the supermarket, for example, I buy biodynamic rice, and in Iloilo I visit a group of anthroposophical doctors. During my stay in the Philippines, I take part in several anthroposophical conferences: (1) the Asian Teacher Waldorf Training in Santa Rosa (see Chapter 4), and (2) the Postgraduate Medical Training on Anthroposophic Medicine in Iloilo, where – contrary to what the name might suggest – a broad cross-section of the Filipino anthroposophical community is represented. I was also invited to join a small anthroposophical study group in Iloilo, where Steiner's texts were read and interpreted together. At all these occasions, one striking contrast stood out: on the one hand, there was a very serious approach to study and high idealism; on the other, a great sense of joy, humour, and lightness. Is that something typically Filipino?

From my fieldwork diary: *It is time for reflection. The rather stiff German lady who gave lectures here looks out over the room with her stern and somewhat grumpy expression and says: "These past days, I have been so surprised by the cheerfulness that seems to prevail here. When we studied the texts of Steiner and Wegman, there was so much laughter. I kept wondering why." Although this is meant as a serious reflection, the audience responds once again with amusement and laughter. The German lady keeps a straight face, gives the room a meaningful look, and continues: "I think I've come to understand it better now…" By now, some people have tears of laughter in their eyes. The German lady visibly struggles to suppress a smile. A shy giggle escapes her – probably not something she experiences often during her lectures. She continues: "I also think I am beginning to understand Steiner better now…" That does it. The room erupts with laughter; people are roaring, cheering, and unable to stop. The German lady is overwhelmed at first but soon joins in, laughing uncontrollably. Amid the laughter, someone from the audience comments: "That's just how Filipinos are. Give them the slightest reason to laugh, and they'll go all out. We are joyful people. Even during floods, you can sometimes see people wading through the water with smiles on their faces…" The English speaker, another lecturer at this conference, takes over, gently restoring calm with her closing remarks. She ends the gathering with a powerful statement: "In Europe, anthroposophy may have reached maturity, but it is also becoming worn and lifeless. The opposing forces are strong, and we must be careful not to turn into museum-keepers. Here, anthroposophical study takes a form I no longer recognize in Europe. You keep anthroposophy alive – you weave it into your lives and into society. Asia becomes an inspiration for Europe, not the other way around. The periphery becomes the centre. Here, anthroposophy continues to live!"*

[1] I have shortened, merged, and rewritten parts of the original notes for the sake of readability and length.

Figure 1 | Iloilo, 20 June 2018. A festive anthroposophical gathering in an old colonial-era villa in Iloilo, with Katherine Perlas – one of the founders of Waldorf education in the Philippines – standing at the front. The gathering was part of the Postgraduate Medical Training on Anthroposophic Medicine.

Figure 2 | West Visayas State University, Iloilo, 20 June 2018. Postgraduate Medical Training on Anthroposophic Medicine: a study session on anthroposophical biographical research and personal development. An example of a gathering within the Filipino anthroposophical community.