Steiner-based Academic Research on Education in Australia completed 2008-2018

Research Data Compiled by Dr Jennifer M Gidley (2018)
Commissioned by Steiner Education Australia (SEA)

STEINER-BASED ACADEMIC RESEARCH
(Substantially informed by Steiner philosophy or pedagogy)

1. PhD Research

1.1 PhD Research completed (Listed in chronological order of completion)

1.1.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy

Dr. Burrows, Leigh (2010), University of South Australia, Adelaide

Title: Accessing the inaccessible: restoring the pathways to wellbeing and learning for a young person on the autism spectrum through holistic-relational practice.

Abstract: Vulnerable young people with impairments in their capacity to relate to others such as in the condition of autism, and their families represent a particular challenge to education professionals, schools and systems, since their social and behavioural patterns tend to place them at odds with school structures and staff expectations thus increasing the risk of exclusion (Swayne & Fielding 2006). School and systemic responses may not be holistic or relational enough to deal with complex cases characterised by disconnection and discord involving young people, their families and education professionals. This thesis explores via an in depth case study of an ‘unreachable’ and ‘uneducable’ young person with autism how educational relations can both enhance and obstruct the development of wellbeing for vulnerable young people, their families and education and other professionals. It proposes an alternative approach that gives primacy to finding ways to develop more wellbeing-generating environments (Riikonen & Vataja, 1999) that according to Sidorkin (2004) have the potential to transform schooling and system cultures. A holistic-relational approach foregrounds the relational nature of wellbeing and learning by developing the young person’s capacity for social interaction and understanding, alongside supporting the relational skills of parents and education and other professionals to find his or her wavelength through participating in mutually enjoyable, meaningful and developmentally tailored activities thus contributing to the generation of a positive ‘relational field’ that is more beneficial to human flourishing (Sidorkin, 2004). As a result of the individualised intervention developed for the young person who is the focus of this case study, an improvement in his capacity for social relating, emotional expressiveness and the ability to maintain attention and engage in classroom learning as well as a reduction in agitation and reactivity were observed over a two year period. Changes in adults’ styles of relating to him were also observed as they developed the ability to become more emotionally attuned to him and his needs and also more supportive of each other. This study supports previous research and clinical observations that conditions such as autism may not be as immutable as previously thought and that parents and professionals can be assisted to develop their own relational competence to more effectively connect with vulnerable young people with impairments in relating (Alvarez & Reid, 2004, Gutstein, 2000). This can also assist in the generation of more positive relational fields (Sidorkin, 2004) and cultures that can be of benefit to both those receiving and those providing supports (Loewenthal, 2002) and thus contribute to the reform of educational cultures. A flexible guide to using a holistic-relational approach in other cases, along with an artefact from this particular case in the form of a collaboratively produced therapeutic children’s story, are also provided as appendices.
**Dr. Lambert, Althea (2012), Aukland University of Technology. NZ**

**Title:** BELONGING AND BECOMING: Voices of Harmonious Being

**Abstract:** There are two central strands to this study, the voice of Steiner (or 'Waldorf') education and the voice of young women - voices rarely heard in the mainstream educational arena. Together they are the voice of 'harmonious being', a phrase which I have used to describe the phenomenon of the Steiner education experience which aims for harmonisation of the whole human being. Who the young person becomes is central to this experience yet there is little in-depth research exploring the Steiner student's voice. By addressing this gap and inviting young women Steiner students to explore this phenomenon through conversation this study achieves three significant visions. First, it raises the social voice of young women and challenges the negative stereotype of 'adolescent girl' proffered by the media. Second, it illuminates the living experience of an educational initiative that fosters connectedness and humankind's spiritual wisdom. Third, it demonstrates the value of simply talking and 'listening with spirit' to stay present in conversation and 'experience the other' through empowered and heart-centred relationships. As a consequence of doing this research, a fourth vision has emerged showing the value of love as methodology. Over one school year (9 months) I met regularly with twelve young women secondary students (14-18 years of age) from a New Zealand Steiner school to explore the phenomenon of harmonious being through conversations about their lives. Our conversations advance an intuitive methodology of love, connectedness and wholeness, which is encapsulated in a new methodological mix combining Goethean phenomenology with Carol Gilligan's relational psychology. Together they invoke the recognition of our innate connectedness. Goethe's is an artistic science of withness and wholeness ('one voice resonates with all voices') focusing on the epiphany experience of the archetypal phenomenon. Gilligan's voice-centred relational psychology has provided a humanistic feminist lens through which women and men come together as 'human' as heard in the layers of conversations with these young women. In this study, epiphany moments were unfolded in detail in six conversations series through a four stage process of Goethean layered listening. The themes of 'Belonging and Becoming' that emerged were explored through the collective voices of the twelve young women. The young women in this study offer insightful and rare views of their lifeworlds; voices rich with wisdom constructing 'adolescence' as a time of creative development. These young women show a remarkable interest in the world and a keen awareness of their social, cultural and physical environments locally, nationally and internationally. As evocative social agents they recreate the conventional 'moody adolescent' to a meaningful picture of what matters to a young woman as she authors her own life. What Gilligan calls 'the voice of resistance' is alive and well in these young women. Their experiences of 'harmonious being' transcribe a fluid lemniscate path of discovery between voice as self and their world-relationships: a structure with ribbon, says Laura. They describe an awakening to 'who they are' as a 'self-belonging', which creates space to become and belong more fully to 'who they will be'. Through the voices of young women Steiner students this study tells that the living spirit of Steiner education is alive and well in the 21st Century. This research became the very experience of the phenomenon we were exploring, unfolding a natural human science that has shifted the voice of phenomenology from 'lived' to 'living' experience and revealed a relational methodology of an embodied dynamic voice, epitomised in the phrase: belonging and becoming.

**Dr. Curson, Sheila K. (2013), Macquarie University, NSW, Australia**

**Title:** A Very Moral Minority: An Investigation of the Influence of Rudolf Steiner's Esoteric Weltanschauung (worldview) on the Purpose and Principles of Waldorf Education.

**Abstract:** Waldorf or Steiner Schooling is recognised worldwide as the brainchild of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), noted as one of Germany's leading twentieth century spiritual researchers and mystics. The doctrine and meditative discipline of Anthroposophy or Anthroposophical Spiritual Science, carefully crafted by Steiner from ancient Christian beliefs and the teachings of Rosicrucianism have been acknowledged as forming the basis of the work carried out in the Waldorf School (Freie Waldorfschule) opened in the German township of Stuttgart in 1919. Prior to this study there had been no attempt to enter the so-called "enchanted wood" (Ahern, 1984, p. 101) of Steiner's esoteric worldview and synthesize it in a way that would make it possible to define the linkages
between it and Waldorf education. The research therefore set out to draw together the complex strands of Steiner's particular form of esoteric scholarship and identify its linkages with the purpose of education and the key principles relating to the methodological praxis and teaching content he devised for the original school. The initial focus of the research was to establish the broad parameters of Steiner's theories using original sources as far as practicable. This was followed by an exploration of the nexus between what transpired to be a radically different perspective on reality, the social system he believed would counter the rise of socialism in the post-war years and the educational practices he devised to bring his ideas to fruition. In order to establish the persistence of Steiner's ideological groundwork and its application in the Waldorf school classroom the research investigated contemporary practices through reviewing the literature in relationship to selected aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy. The study placed particular emphasis on the primary years of schooling. Steiner's epistemology and theories dedicated to unveiling the spirit in human consciousness were shown to "fit" the currently accepted model of esotericism as defined by Faivre (1994). They were also demonstrated to provide the foundation for Steiner's educational philosophy. The principal objective of education as Steiner perceived it was to prepare the child's bodily "temple" for possession by the spirit which would lead to a lifetime of moral thought and action in the image of the Christ archetype. As such, Steiner saw education as a "salvation" and current teachers in Waldorf schools have referred to their task as preparing the child to become a vessel of the Solar Christ. The methodological practices Steiner devised for the Waldorf School were found to be based on the techniques fundamental to the meditative discipline of Anthroposophy and teaching content incorporated esoteric "truths" via an "inner" or "occult" curriculum intended to create a worldview commensurate with Steiner's teachings. The research further shed light on the relationship between Steiner's desires to bring about the social renewal of the dysfunctional German State following World War I. It confirmed that Waldorf education was "a child of the Threefold Commonwealth" (Strawe, 1998, p. 43), a new spiritualised social order in which Steiner envisaged Waldorf graduates would come to play a leading role. Analysis of the textual content of many of Steiner's lectures associated with the preparation of the teachers indicated that in the early years of schooling the emphasis was on developing the concepts of the "feeling heart" and the power of the imagination to guide the will of the child to be able to freely make decisions and judgements informed by the spiritual laws of the moral Universe. His pedagogical theories were demonstrated to belong to the romantic stream of educational philosophies. Contemporary educationalists were found to adhere to Steiner's original pedagogical principles through maintaining the Main Lesson curriculum. The findings concluded that every aspect of Waldorf schooling investigated could be directly related to the aspects of Steiner's esoteric weltanschauung as discussed at the outset of this study. In order to build on this preliminary investigation further research of this imaginative, creative and value-driven form of education is required. Of particular interest is the work carried out in the Waldorf High School which is purported to be the stage at which the curriculum and pedagogy must combine to reinforce the moral and spiritual awakening of the adolescent that will enable them to meet and one day, transform the world.

Dr. Korobacz, Konrad F. (2014), University of New England, NSW, Australia

Title: Songlines of Learning: The Establishment of Shearwater The Mullumbimby Steiner School as a Centre of Place Conscious Education

Abstract: This thesis, 'Songlines of Learning: The Establishment of Shearwater The Mullumbimby Steiner School as a Centre of Place Conscious Education' is about the intersection of dual crises of people having lost their core capacity as place-makers and their relation to place in post-modern society. It examines the moment where (auto)biography and ethnography cross paths with educational theory and practice to derive potent alternatives, and employs an archaeology that leads back to the primordial and forward to new potential. The education of children is at the centre of this research because it provides the opportunity to examine how these all-important intersections occur, and how the living relation to place and place making can be recovered. In this sense the thesis is also a story about finding a new way of seeing, about finding or rediscovering identity in relationship to landscape, in this case to the Australian landscape.
**Dr. Haralambous, Bronwen G. (2016), University of Canberra, ACT, Australia**  
**Title:** Surfing the wave of emergent renewal: Re-imagining Steiner’s Vision for Teachers’ Research and Professional Learning  
**Abstract:** In the dissertation I identify from the literature and my professional experience a set of problems and need-related concerns that pertain to the professional learning of Steiner teachers; I then explore their genealogy and address their resolution through critical analysis and creative synthesis. A ternary design element that supports the achievement of three closely interconnected research goals underpins the dissertation: I undertake a theoretical study and two case studies. Based on the premise that Living Thinking lies at the heart of Steiner’s philosophy and of his pedagogical vision for teachers’ professional learning and research, following the first design element, I describe in a dialogical-phenomenological way and interpret hermeneutically, heuristically and intuitively key features of Living Thinking. In line with the second and third design elements and the practical orientation of the research pathway, I investigate the educational implications of these features in relation to teachers’ professional learning, firstly in the context of tertiary courses and secondly, in school based teacher research. Taking into consideration the further claims that Living Thinking is an imaginative, inspirational and intuitive thinking (Steiner, 1999) that can be strengthened through Contemplative Inquiry (Zajone, 2009) and practice, in the case studies I followed the “participatory turn” in action research (Heron & Reason, 2008; Kemmis, 2008) and in transpersonal psychology (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Puente, 2013). Co-researching with other educators and teachers, we set out to explore together the influence of Living Thinking on our professional learning through participatory events and participatory knowing. Building on the dialogical orientation (Bakhtin, 1981) of the dissertation towards transdisciplinary research (Brown, 2010) and exchange with mainstream education we applied a double lens: we turned a critical focus inwards to investigate elements within Steiner education that spotlight what can be done better; and turning the focus outwards, we set out to determine what a reconstructive survey of Steiner education has to contribute towards potentially positive and creative synergies with other pedagogies and philosophies. Drawing on the emergent findings from the critical theoretical inquiry and the two case studies I constructed a “design anatomy” (AITS, 2014) which identifies “components” relating to professional learning course design, and “elements” that describe creative capacities, learning processes and research methods. On the basis of this design anatomy and the underpinning conceptual framework the dissertation makes recommendations that support the embedding of features of Living Thinking in tertiary and school-based professional learning courses.

**Dr. Denford-Wood, Gaylene (2018), Flinders University, South Australia**  
**Title:** The mindfulness of seminaria: A heuristic inquiry with teachers and leaders uncovers a poetry path to wellbeing  
**Abstract:** This heuristic inquiry into ‘the mindfulness of seminaria’ (TMoS) qualitatively explores the nature and being of a seven-line, 27-syllable form of poetry. Designed as ‘seminar form or verse’ by J.-P. Linde in 1988–1989 from the scholarship of three seven-step processes, from Aquinas’s 13th century Quaestiones to the rudiments of 21st century Scharmer’s (2009) Theory-U, TMoS was adopted by six classroom teachers and educational leaders employed in state and independent settings from early childhood to higher education in New Zealand and the UK. Integrating it into their existing mindfulness, contemplative practices daily for three weeks they found the mindfulness of seminaria to be surprisingly creative and grounding. Its key benefits—meaningfulness and self-realisation—highlighted the versatility, vitality and potential of this mindfulness practice for attaining subjective wellbeing. Though introduced to its theoretical construct, the research participants were encouraged, in practice, to explore it in enjoyable ways that suited their personal and professional needs. From a standpoint of ‘teacher as reflective practitioner’, possible applications included: recording events, processing feelings, problem solving, child study, contemplative inquiry, ‘book-ending’ the day and planning ahead. Moustakas’s (1990, 1994) ‘heuristic inquiry’ is transpersonal and phenomenological. Participants become co-researchers because the essence of the phenomenon under investigation is derived from their perceptions and experiences regardless of the interpretation of the researcher whose lived experience remains focal. Therefore, this study reveals the prefatory experience phenomenologically evoked in the author by a month of
walking mindfully across Northern Spain, followed by soundings in the Great Pyramid, and participating in an Alamandria Art of Mindfulness event where—introduced informally to the form of seminaria—the genesis of a new mindfulness practice for teachers was ignited. Heuristically, whilst a walking-sounding-thinking integration undergirded the quest of the primary researcher, seminaria was independently investigated by each of the other six educators. From the strongly coherent themes they highlighted, a creative synthesis of findings illuminates the vitality of the nature and being, use and potential, of the mindfulness of seminaria, whether for personal—professional direction, emotional understanding, or cognitive enrichment. Support was found for the protective effects of TMoS in reducing occupational stress, and the value of mindfulness meditation practices for teachers’ personal and professional wellbeing. Thus, the mindfulness of seminaria builds on and contributes to mindfulness research in initial teacher education (ITE), and to professional learning for experienced teachers and leaders, alike. Significantly, all participants in this study were themselves, long-term mindfulness/meditation practitioners who, without exception, attributed to their practice of seminaria, a capacity to connect more consciously with other aspects of themselves, thereby restoring a sense of vitality through self-realisation and meaningfulness—recognised by the OECD (2013) as key subjective wellbeing indicators. Moreover, marking it worthy of further investigation, is the discovery of its use as a simple tuning-in device—like a poetry app.—to which teachers and leaders could turn and re-turn for solutions when stressful feelings mitigated against their concentration, calm, and creativity.

1.2 PhD Research in Progress (Listed in alphabetical order)

1.2.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy

Bak, Tao (due for completion 2019), Victoria University, Victoria, Australia
Working Title: Negotiating Difference, the story of Steiner education as an alternative tradition in the Australian Educational landscape.

Moller, Virginia (due for completion 2019), University of Sydney, NSW, Australia
Working Title: Leading practices of Principals and teachers in Steiner schools: A reflective practice perspective.

Bronwyn Gallagher, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia
Working Title: Steiner philosophy (inner work of the teacher).

2. Masters Research

2.1 Masters Research completed (Listed in chronological order of completion)

2.1.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy

Klugman, Lynne (2009) Master of Education, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia
Title: Between worlds: The world of matter and the world of spirit
Abstract: This thesis involves a preliminary exploration into an educational practice which strives to link otherwise discrete worlds through the medium of consciousness. It involves a biographical exploration of the course of Steiner's life in relation to the development of his epistemology. It also covers aspects of his spiritual science which underpin the educational impulse known as Steiner/Waldorf Education. I endeavour to create a holistic overview of this approach through the act of writing, engaging with the content from an Artistic, Scientific and Religious standpoint. The Religious standpoint is present as an attitude of Veneration and as a deed of Re-
Ligione, Re-Aligning or Joining two otherwise separate entities - the World of Matter and the World of Spirit. Both Rudolf Steiner's, and my own biography, form part of the research project. A multi-layered description of the phenomenon of the Steiner educational approach as a lived-experience is provided. Throughout the thesis the underlying intention is to seek to explore, and exemplify, ways in which human consciousness might, in and of itself, be able to form a bridge connecting knowledge received via the physical senses and that which can be received via supra-sensory experience. Links are established to the work of both Goethe and Gebser in particular.

Jones, Catherine (2012), Master of Education, University of Canberra, ACT, Australia
Title: Bringing the Outside in and the Inside out. Action Research in the Classroom: How explicitly teaching spelling strategies to a whole class affects the spelling and writing skills of a particular student.

Abstract: Teaching spelling strategies to a whole class targeting the needs of a particular student does work. Strategies that specifically work for students with dyslexia include visualisation, organisational skills, imaginative exercises and motor neurological exercises. Action research in the classroom benefits the researcher as much as anyone else. The value of action research and awareness of formal, rigorous research as a teaching tool to inform one’s own practice is enormous. Teachers need to continually reinvent themselves and applying the action research to lesson planning and evaluation allows for ever new, relevant and effective teaching. This research aims to test what it is like to formally research a classroom issue and to improve the writing and spelling skills of a particular student by teaching the targeted spelling strategies to the whole class. The study focuses on teacher effectiveness and pedagogical principles that reach all student learning types in a classroom setting with the intention of increasing the spelling and writing results of a particular student.

2.1.2 Steiner Philosophy as Broader Context for Pedagogical Understanding


Title: A Foresight Perspective of Leadership and the Social Field in K–12 Education in Australia: Do the Leadership Models for schools serve the emerging consciousness of humanity for the future?

Abstract: If the leadership models for schools are flawed or out of step with the emerging consciousness of humanity, distress and conflict could, and most probably would emerge within the social community. This research looks at two very different leadership models presently at work in Australian schools. It seeks to investigate the ideas that developed into these models and to find symmetry with the evolving social expectations and ambitions of the 21st century. A foresight perspective of educational leadership is about making decisions now to bring forth the whole child to step into the emerging future. The leader faces uncertainty about the prospective future; nevertheless the child is born for such a time as this and the role of education is to prepare and equip him. The foresight perspective could generate dialogue on the value of futures-based and child-focused leadership models in education. Should this emerge as a value of this research, it could provide a means to social emancipation for our children and a thrivable and symbiotic world in the future.

3. Academic Books (Listed in alphabetical order)

3.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy

Burrows, Leigh (2011) 'Feeling real': it's like putting my hand through a wall into another world. Brisbane, Australia: Post Pressed.


4. Articles in Refereed Academic Journals (Listed in alphabetical order)

4.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy


4.2 Steiner Philosophy as Broader Context for Pedagogical Understanding

**5. Chapters Published in Academic Books** (Listed in alphabetical order)

**5.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy**


5.2 Steiner Philosophy as Broader Context for Pedagogical Understanding


6. Academic Conference Presentations (Listed in alphabetical order)

6.1 Steiner Education/Pedagogy


7. Research Sponsored by SEA in 2018

Title: Approaching Literacy through Narrative and Creative Writing
Researchers: Dr Shelley Davidow (Lecturer, USC School of Education), Dr Michael Carey (Senior Lecturer USC School of Education), Dr Paul Williams (Senior Lecturer USC

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School of Creative Industries) and Dr Bronwen Haralambous (Adjunct Lecturer USC School of Education).

**Research Question:** “Can a narrative-inspired and creative writing approach improve writing skills (as measured by the NAPLAN Writing Test) in year 9 students?”

The purpose of this project is to address the national priority of literacy and engagement in year 9. Evidence shows that over the past few years there has been no significant improvement nationally in year 9 NAPLAN results in writing and in fact the evidence appears to indicate falling standards over the past years (“NAPLAN results”, 2017). This project seeks to put into practice a narrative approach to teaching literacy that could yield positive results for year 9 students.

It is proposed that a 10-week year 9 literacy project based on autobiography and specific scaffolded creative writing exercises will facilitate an improvement in writing skills and attitudes towards writing as well as inter-personal understanding. The project proposes that all students learn through narrative; that emotional transportation and an approach to literacy that takes into account a view of the developing child as a physical, emotional and psycho-spiritual being is essential for deep learning to take place.

It is proposed that when put into practice, a narrative and creative writing approach will result in improved engagement and attitudes to writing, improved overall skills in writing and an increase interpersonal understanding.

**Acknowledgements**

I would particularly like to thank Virginia Moller and the other members of the Executive of the SEA for having the foresight to approve this update to the earlier project (2008). To my knowledge there is still nothing comparable anywhere else in the world. I also wish to thank all those academics and educators who have undertaken this important research. Everyone I contacted has been very helpful in supporting the project. Finally, much of this material is not accessible in library databases, so without accessing the ‘Australian Steiner network’ I would not have been able to complete this project. I give many thanks to all who are part of this living network.