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**Master Thesis**

Experiences on peer observation:

How do class teachers and subject teachers experience  
visiting a colleague's lesson in a Waldorf school?

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## **Abstract**

Supporting collaboration between teachers in schools is emphasised considerably in the new curriculum of educational institutes in Finland. According to latest studies, teacher collaboration increases the well-being of individuals in schools as well as the well-being of the whole community. Co-operation between the teachers could also increase collegiality in schools. Peer collaboration can take place e.g. through peer observation, mentoring or meetings. Sharing craft knowledge makes teacher's work more transparent and visible. Peer visits were arranged for this study to enlighten the experiences of teachers observing each other's lessons.

To explore the experiences of peer visits a qualitative research was performed. Data was collected with the use of three voluntary teachers and qualitative interviews, which were made by semi-structured and open-ended questions. Data was then analysed through the conceptual framework of this study consisting of collegial work, Waldorf education, continuous self-development and teacher well-being.

The research findings revealed the peer visits being a positive experience. The participating teachers had not experienced observing colleagues before. Peer visits were seen as a possible tool for gaining familiarity between the teachers. Also many ideas were suggested for the future to transform congenial relationships in schools into more collegial ones. Observing with a feedback session was also considered as a research theme for the future.

The conclusion on this research was that peer observation could work as a tool for increasing collaboration between the teachers among other activities. Peer visits were seen as a positive experience and the participants wished to have continuity for them.

The main concepts of this study are collegial work, peer visits, congeniality and teacher observation.

# 1. Introduction

Teachers' profession today is versatile and multifaceted job of an artist who needs to seize every moment of valuable teaching time with the youth. There is also the need to root the children with all-around knowledge and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Also the focus has turned into the schools as a working community and teachers' well-being. Teachers as individuals should be continuous learners about their craft *and* working together to maximise their collective impact on student learning. This culminates in the concept of the school as a professional learning community (PLC), a collegial group committed to its own learning and growth (Barth, 2012, p. 100). Education research has found out that collegial work is connected to teachers' professional growth and positive student outcomes, but for various social and psychological as well as organisational reasons, teachers often face challenges working together (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012, abstract). There can be personal obstacles and conflict avoidance in the school communities as teachers have chosen a career that involves their days in the company of minors and not adults. Barth (2012) mentions that educators are conflict avoidant and they wish to help, foster, inspire and encourage (p. 101). Trying to reform new collegial structures in schools could be challenging. As Bengtsson (2014) describes, collegiality is the least common form of relationship among adults in schools. Instead, there is congeniality -rather a mutual supportiveness, which is about getting along well and being friendly (p. 2). The difference to collegiality and is that collegial approach aim for de-privatising the work of teaching and being able to disagree constructively about professional practice (Evans, 2012, p. 104).

This thesis is made for advancing and supporting co-operation between teachers in schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences teachers in Waldorf schools have on visiting each other's lessons and maybe reflect on their thoughts on this kind of experiment and their own practice.

In Waldorf Schools and especially in the school I work in the interaction between class teachers and subject teachers is happening and should be happening every day; we have subject teachers teaching classes already from the first class. On the other hand, some of the subject teachers do not have any contact with class teachers if they are just concentrating on teaching the upper classes. So in other words teachers who are sharing the same class have

co-operation with each other and others maybe not. Subject teachers not teaching lower classes do not need to be in any contact with class teachers except for the weekly teacher meetings. We have eight class teachers in our school, the rest of the 35 are specialised subject teachers. During this class teacher's period, which in Waldorf schools goes on for the first 8 years, there is a very little interaction between the class teachers and the subject teachers. It seemed to me like there actually were two social groups of teachers and schools instead of one: primary school from classes 1 to 8 and then the other, higher secondary school or high school with classes 9 to 13. Teachers were working in the same building but did not know what the others were doing. I was puzzled about this. Was there any possibility to increase the co-operation in our school so that people would get more familiar with each other at work? Barth (2006) describes collegiality as getting the teachers to play together and growing professional learning community (p.10). How could we be called as a school community if we do not even know each other's names?

There was also another, educational disparity between these two teacher groups. We all were working in a Waldorf school, but only the class teachers have had Waldorf pedagogical teacher training. Most of the subject teachers have a Master's degree without any or a little knowledge of Waldorf education. Some of them have made themselves familiar with Steiner's work and philosophy, but officially there is no necessity for it. For developing the co-operation in the school community there should be a chance for colleagues to discuss and share knowledge and thoughts. There should be a possibility to talk about students, to talk about pedagogical issues, observing one another and a chance for peer teaching (Hoerr, 2015, p. 88). In this thesis I focused on one of these actions to advance the collaboration between the teachers by peer visits. What was there in collegiality that the school community would benefit out of? Noddings (2014) describes that increasing collegiality also raises intellectual level and understanding of teachers and students and by doing so it also raises morale (p. 16). So it would not only affect to the teachers or the individual well-being, functional collegiality would also have an influence on the whole educational surroundings. Noddings also states that school should not be thought as a centre place for the production of learning. It is also a place where people become attached (p. 16). So school should not be just a place where teachers have to come every day to earn a living but a place where you have social contacts and get personally involved in.

The amount of knowledge that teachers carry around with them daily is also underrated. According to Barth (2006), schools would transform overnight if the educators could only

unveil their rich craft of knowledge to one another (p. 13). And if there is no personal attachment or interest, they do not get involved with each other for sharing their thoughts or knowledge.

I intended to research collegial subject because it is closely related to my work. As I have been sharing my days for six years now with my own class the more and more I have been interested in knowing, what will be there for them after my task with them is done. Who are the professionals who will be teaching them in the future? And I was also thinking about the upcoming teachers, would it not be convenient to know at least some of the younger ones by name?

I had the idea of peer visiting and observation from the articles I read about collegiality. For example, Barth (2012) mentioned pair visiting as a simple way of narrowing down the gap between colleagues (p. 9). Hoerr (2015) agrees with Barth about teacher observing one another teach as a way of increasing collegiality (p. 88). I asked three of my colleagues, two subject teachers and one class teacher, if they would like to participate my research and luckily they agreed. There have been some trials for bringing teachers closer and more familiar with each other, but during the years it had some how been forgotten. Why has this happened, I also would like my research to shed light on that question. Some of the teachers could be very strict concerning visits during their teaching, but these three were happily welcoming me. I wanted to ask teachers from the both groups, class teachers and subject teachers, to visit each other's lessons and just observe, what thoughts and experiences they could get out of them. After these visits I would interview the visitor and ask about the experiments, and later on gather them around for one more interview. On the second round the interview was more descriptive and narrative. I as a researcher and a teacher would be also doing the visits and reflect on my experiences after the lessons.

In the research I looked for answers to this following question:

How do class teachers and subject teachers experience visiting each other's lessons?

I wanted to concentrate mostly on their perceptual experiences on their visits. The experience is something personal, subjective and leaves an impression to the experienced. The concepts I focused on in this thesis were collegial work and congeniality, teachers, peer visits and Waldorf education. I wanted also to find out does this kind of visiting activity have any effect on participating teacher's thoughts about collegiality and working environment in general.

Barth (2006) interprets in his article that strengthening the relationships among educators will improve professional practice too (p. 9).

I specifically wanted to limit my research to pure observation and not do any kind of evaluation session afterwards. I wanted this study to focus on the reflections and experiences on peer visits. There was quite amount of literature about peer visiting including evaluation of the observed teacher after visits, but I really liked to keep this study without any peer estimation, assessment or judgement. In my opinion evaluated research could also affect and put more pressure to the participators and to the actual class situation. This research was not about assessing peer teachers or focusing on their work, rather the experiences were in the centre. My aim was to advance and support collaboration and peer learning. I thought that the observing situation should be as authentic as possible, so each teacher was visiting a lesson just by her- or himself. This was important especially on the lower grades, where the small pupils can easily be distracted and react to unusualness.

This study was carried out in a Waldorf school in Finland. This particular school was chosen for this research because of its location. After the visits I interviewed participating teachers twice. First round was straight after the visit and the other one was a couple of months after. On the first round all the interviews were individual ones. On the second round I carried out one mutual interview and one individual interview. The observers mostly reflected their memories on these visits and the feelings that arose during and after the visits narratively.

It was anticipated that the information gained from this research would enlighten the experiments of collegial work and interaction with the colleagues. As a researcher and a colleague, I thought and assumed that this kind of trial would bring co-workers closer and more familiar to each other. As I asked for these certain teachers to participate, I did not think of the possible results or outcome of this study. I could have asked any of my colleagues to take part. These three I chose only because they do not have daily interaction with each other by sharing the same classes. If the outcome of this research was seen as positive or profitable, I hope it would inspire Waldorf schools to continue co-operational experimentations like this in the future.

At the time of conducting this research I as the researcher was working as a class teacher in a Waldorf School. As I included myself as a visitor in this study, I also recognised my liability and possibilities to have an influence on the research design and the interpretation of findings.



I carried out critical self-reflection and had reliability checks with my supervisors to strengthen credibility of this study.

After the introduction chapter this thesis begins with an overview with the literature related to the subject. In the literature review chapter I first concentrate on the Finnish school system in general and on the Waldorf education. Then I open up the collegial decision-making in schools and concepts of collegiality and congeniality. Then follows a review of peer observation. In the end of the literature chapter I unwrap the conceptual framework and how it is related to my research design and concepts.

After the literature review is the closer focus on the methods and the research design of this study. In the chapter I describe the participants and the methods used in this study. I also open up my research design approach and data analysing methods. The ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations of this study are discussed at the end of the method chapter.

Then comes the analysis chapter, where the empirical data is analysed and the findings are being presented. The analysis chapter is followed by discussion chapter, where the data and the references are interacting.

After the analysis and discussion comes the conclusion chapter, where research question will be answered and the theoretical contributions of the thesis will be discussed. Also the possible future research topics or issues will be addressed before appendices and the reference list.

## 2. Literature review

To be able to function as a Waldorf school, as a healthy school and organism, the teachers have to work well together. Their community needs to be open, active and operative – they are in charge of everything. And if their co-operation does not work out, how can they manage a school? In this research I focus on teachers' experiences on observation and co-operation in Waldorf schools.

In the beginning the aim of a new Waldorf schooling system was revolutionary. Waldorf schools were made to change the basic structures of society. For example Gill (2010) suggests that Steiner's ambition was to create a new kind of educational system that would also effect on every level of the society, also on the macro level (p. 32). Steiner reflected this by setting up curriculum and the structure of the school as an example for the rest of the society, how organisations can work effectively and healthily. According to Steiner all schools should never be driven by economical or political agenda. Schools should belong to the field of cultural-life and their central principle should be "freedom". That is why the name of the first Waldorf school, "The Free Waldorf school", also reflected that it was a non-government school and independent from the state (Steiner, 1995, p. 10). This kind of new orientation gave a huge responsibility to the teachers running the schools. Steiner's vision of a self-administrative school was free of political and economical programs. The faculty of teachers was responsible for everything happening in the school. Main focus of the Waldorf school was the children, the classroom, the curriculum and the pedagogy (Gill, 2010, p. 43).

In the literature review chapter I first try to enlighten the background of Waldorf schools and what they were all about. After the basic information about Waldorf school I open up the definitions of the structures and decision-making in those learning institutions. Then I focus on teacher learning, collegiality and congeniality. In the end of this literature chapter are subchapters about peer observation, teamwork, peer observation and the conceptual framework of this study.

## **2.1. The school system in Finland**

The main aim of Finnish education principle is to offer citizens equal opportunities for education. The Finnish National Board of Education (2016) indicates that the focus in education is on learning rather than testing. There are no national tests for pupils in basic education in Finland. Instead the teachers are responsible for assessment in their subjects on the basis of the curriculum. The accountability of an individual teacher can be quite extensive. Schools are responsible for teaching arrangements and the effectiveness and quality of teaching. Generally education and training is publicly funded and in basic education also school materials, school meals and commuting are provided.

Teachers in Finland are highly educated. In general teachers are being required for a Master's degree if they are orientated towards basic or higher education. In vocational education and training the requirements for teacher competence might differ. The high level of education and studying is seen important because teachers are very autonomous. There are periods of practical training included to the teacher studies and the length varies according to the specialisation field of education. In Waldorf pedagogy teacher training there are four practical internship periods during the four years of schooling. Teachers are encouraged for in-service training in working life too. At most levels of education teachers are required to participate also in in-service training every year, which is seen as a great privilege (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Nowadays there are a growing trend of simultaneously teaching or two teachers sharing the class and lessons. In Waldorf schools the possibilities for shared teaching is unfortunately minor in Finland, but maybe the opportunities will increase to try it out later in the future.

There is also a great deal of private schools in Finland. Waldorf schools and Montessori schools are just an example of the variety of alternative pedagogies available. Most private institutions and almost all Finnish Waldorf schools receive public funding from the government. In 2016 there were 26 Waldorf schools and 11 Waldorf kindergartens in Finland (Steinerkasvatuksen liitto, 2016). The collegial decision-making and administrative structures in them still differ a lot from state-schools, although according to the new regulations every school should have a named principal or head of the staff. In most Waldorf schools in Finland this designated head of the teachers is chosen among the teachers for a few

years at a time. In greater Waldorf schools there can be a genuine principal and the school might be administrated by a smaller group of teachers.

## **2.2. Founding the First Waldorf school**

Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart for children of the workers in the factory after the end of the First World War. The main idea was to build something new for the next generation. The Free Waldorf school was founded upon the impulse for social change, upon the need to reform society into a humane community. Great meaning was given to teacher's inner work and to Rudolf Steiner's spiritual insight. The goal of Waldorf education was that the teachers would develop in the children such power of thought, such depth of feeling, such strength of will that they would grow during their school years into full members of the society, who could be able to meet and transform the world (Lathe & Whittaker, 1995, p. xiv). The education in Waldorf school should improve human development of the pupils by reforming their will, feeling and intellect, rather than filling their lessons with superficial knowledge. Teaching should become an art in the hands of the teachers (Steiner, 1995, p. 11). Rudolf Steiner was very precise in his instructions but at the same time he intended his ideas to be as an example for educators so that they could form their own design and system.

In Waldorf schools there could be found two principle columns. The first one is the research of human development and the curriculum that has evolved from it. The second one is that the schools had to be based on the three-foldness of social field. Gill (2013) describes how the three-foldness of the human body – body, soul and spirit - is an inspiration for the social three-folding in schools (p. 29). The three-fold structure of social order describes organisations as dynamic, living, social entities created by human beings. Steiner divides the social field into three different spheres: political (*legal-financial*) sphere, economic sphere, cultural-spiritual sphere. All together these three create society (p. 43). These three spheres affect profoundly and dynamically to each other and are dependant from one another (Rawson & Richter, 2000, p. 37). Rawson (2011) points out that these spheres have different set of

guiding principles that should not be confused or applied in the wrong sphere, although they are mutually interdependent (p. 7). Schools belong to the cultural-spiritual sphere and it obeys different principles than businesses (*economic sphere*) or political institutions (*political sphere*) (Heijne & Buck, 2013, p. 26). This cultural-spiritual sphere should be governed by individual freedom's principle, not by equality, which in this case means "one size fits all"-mentality (Rawson, 2011, p. 7). Freedom is the guiding concept for the cultural-spiritual sphere, equality and justice for the political sphere and reciprocity for the economic sphere. If these three principles are misused it will lead into social instability and conflicts (Rawson & Richter, 2000, p. 37). Brüll (1997) uses almost the same kind of division for Waldorf schools as living three-folded social organisms by reporting different organs. He mentions the organ of spiritual life, the rights organ and the economic organ. The spiritual life of school could consist of college of teachers but he prefers not to use that name because the only thing belonging to this organ is the spiritual life of the school. The economic organ is the complete opposite for the spiritual one and it represents the economic life of the school. The rights organ is needed for the decision-making, to discuss collegially what is right in specific situations (Brüll 1997, pp. 11-29).

There should also be a balance between life and form in a social organism. When they are in balance, when there is openness and structure, "the organisation should gain in health, efficiency and inclusivity" (Heijne & Buck, 2013, p. 30). Their empirical part of the study suggests that the members of communities and schools would prefer more inclusive and effective governance. The three-folding of schools and other social organisms may help to develop new orderings of different areas within the organisations (Heijne & Buck, 2013, p. 39). Rudolf Steiner wanted to separate state, economy and culture from each other. He also wanted to make schools and universities autonomous, so that they can research and identify pupils' needs rather than follow up curriculum created by authorities (Rawson, 2011, p. 8). According to Rawson and Richter (2000), Waldorf schools should be supporting educational quality development, which includes teacher learning, generating knowledge about pupils' needs, researching and evaluating practice, creating and articulating shared values (p. 11). Rawson (2011) argues that Steiner aimed at autonomy for all educational institutions on the grounds that the health of society depends on each new generation and their free will to make effort and develop existing social order. This potential of the youth can only be released through education if it respects and fosters that potential as its major goal. This means that neither states or governments cannot decide, what youngsters should study or become. This

would only limit them and put them into already existing framework (p. 8). Steiner's aim was to free spiritual-cultural domain of education from government control by three-fold social order. The power of the government in education would be limited and placed in teacher association's hands and parents could have the possibility to choose the school they wanted for their children. When the impulse for three-folded society did not get going, Waldorf schools kept Steiner's thoughts alive (Steiner, 1998, p. xv).

The first Waldorf school was an elementary school of eight classes, with children from around seven to about fifteen years old. They came from different schools and their levels of achievement varied widely. According to Steiner, during the first years they could not accomplish the ideal in Waldorf education (Steiner, 2004c, p. 91). According to Steiner (2004c), children should be educated so that they stay in touch with society, as it exists today. Steiner highlights the non-stigmatising attitude of education, that it is not school's task to say if society is good or bad; we simply have to live in it and must not isolate the children from it. Most of the advices and ideas Steiner had for the first Waldorf school were ideal and given as an example of how a Waldorf pedagogical school could be working. The ideals were not necessarily working in practical, daily life and therefore teachers need to be active and make their best under the current circumstances. For Steiner, this was a very difficult task to do: carry out an educational ideal without losing contact with modern life (Steiner, 2004c, p. 91).

One of the main ideas was to have one class teacher with the same class for as long as possible, at least for the whole elementary school. Steiner emphasised the persistence of the same teacher. According to him, it is best for the teacher to not change classes throughout the entire elementary school period. Steiner believed that it is best for a teacher to begin with a class on the first grade of elementary school and continue moving up with the same class through the grades as far as possible. Steiner argues that it could create an intimate connection with the students and it outweighed all the problems and disadvantages:

It will counterbalance all the problems that can occur at the beginning because the teacher is unacquainted with the individuality of the class or the students. The teacher and students will achieve a balance over the course of time. They will grow together more and more with the class and will learn in that connection (Steiner, 2001, p. 97).

The original Waldorf teacher training was very brief; it lasted only for two weeks. Waldorf education was to be based upon the continuing self-education of the teacher, and that the two weeks was only the beginning of that process (Steiner, 1997, p. 9).

Steiner appointed himself as the principal of the first Waldorf school. As a principal and the school's spiritual advisor, Rudolf Steiner stated that it is very important for him to know all the teachers individually and intimately, so that it can be decided whether a teacher is more suitable for teaching elementary pupils or higher classes. The college of teachers was intended to be so familiar with each other so that they individually know everyone (Steiner, 2004c, p. 89). The college of teachers was the responsible organism for everything.

Steiner's ideas about the freedom of teachers were something totally new and radical in the early 1910's. Institutions had mostly been organized in a hierarchical, pyramidal manner since old pre-Christian times. This Steiner's three-foldness differs a lot from pyramidal form of decision-making. Karutz (2001) has observed consciousness within state schools and according to him it always works downwards from above. Karutz writes, that in most of the institutions, obeying orders is the name of the game. These pyramids of consciousness are still alive and well e.g. in the political and economical field (p. 51). Also Argyris (1999) has tried to show in his studies that the traditional pyramidal structure tend to place departments and individuals in constant warfare, where "lose or win"-competition creates polarised approaches. These competitive situations tend to get resolved by the superior making the decisions, thereby creating a dependence upon her or him (p. 108). Karutz (2001) suggests that we as humans have become too used to passive, lifeless form of top-down social environment. A pyramidal administration is yet so stable and calm that it is practically impossible to overthrow and that it its strength. But the future needs different kind of administration; there should no longer be sleeping passivity. In the end a natural organism collapses if man loses his consciousness (Karutz, 2001, p. 52). Argyris (1999) also suggest, that there is a revolution needed to replace the traditional pyramidal form in organisations. According to him there are two major causes for the renewal: the new requirements for organisational survival in an increasingly competitive environment and the new administrative and information technology available to deal with complexity. In the educational world the competition and profit Argyris writes that modern organisations need e.g. much more creative planning and increased co-operative action to meet the challenges of the changing world. And these actions are dependable on free, reliable communication and continuous and open access between individuals and groups (p. 107).

### **2.3. Administration in Waldorf schools**

The heart of the Waldorf school was the teachers' meeting. Steiner counselled to have these meetings weekly because they offered the possibility for the teachers to discuss their classroom experiences in detail. These regular staff meetings should effect by making the school into an organism similar to the human body. In these staff meetings, "it is not the principles that are most important, but the willingness of teachers to live together in goodwill and the avoidance any form of competition" (Steiner, 2004c, pp. 93-94).

I also believe it is possible to determine the curriculum and learning goals for each grade in the elementary school out of the nature of the human being. For that reason it is of great importance that the teacher be the genuine master of the school, if I may use the term "master." I do not mean that there should be any teaching directives. Instead the teacher should be a part not only of the methods but also of the plans of the school (Steiner, 2001, p. 98).

All teachers, who are working through inner freedom, would end up in the same conclusion (p. 3). For example in his book "The Foundations of Human Experience" (1996) Steiner emphasises, how important it is for teachers to make compromises, because we are not yet advanced enough to work only through out free will and deed. The Waldorf teachers are balancing between their own ideals and the pressure or rules of the society they are working in. Finding harmony is only possible when teachers work with their full strength.

Therefore, we will organize the school not bureaucratically, but collegially, and will administer it in a republican way. In a true teachers' republic we will not have the comfort of receiving directions from the Board of Education. Rather, we must bring to our work what gives each of us the possibility and the full responsibility for what we have to do. Each one of us must be completely responsible (Steiner, 1996, p. 30).

In Waldorf schools, everything should be depending on the free individuality of each teacher. Rudolf Steiner presented a lot of ideas and designs about ideal Waldorf school but he highlighted that they were only ideas and suggestions. Teachers should create their own system and didactics. Nothing should be given in the form of rules or regulations. According to Steiner, there should not be school director, as we know it, instead each teacher works



independently. Waldorf schools should have teachers' conferences, where the teachers study and work for common progress. There should be a concrete spirit that lives and works freely in the college of teachers. It is not tyrannical and it does not issue statements, rules or programs. The spirit continually advances and improves the teachers' ability to meet the needs of teaching (Steiner, 2004b, p. 113). Early discussions and decisions about the school life were carried out with all the full-time teachers, but in 1920 the first Waldorf school divided into inner faculty of class teachers and some speciality teachers and an outer, extended faculty. The inner faculty was called the "college of teachers," or *Collegium*. In state schools principals made the decisions. Sometimes Steiner would come to the meetings with a proposal, but the teachers could modify or reject it. Steiner was flexible with the possible modifications because the faculty of teachers were the ones that had to make the decisions they would live by. When the faculty had difficulty coming to a decision, Steiner used voting and parliamentary methods. The teachers had complete freedom in how they taught, but not in things connected with administration of the school (Steiner, 1998, p. xxiv). There is also other side to this idealistic thinking. Woods and Woods (2006) write about the negative aspects of Waldorf school's collegial work. Their study shows that many Waldorf teachers take Steiner's ideas and guidelines as "sacred" directions and are too dependent on them. All teachers may not achieve the demanding level of responsibility and creativity. Collegial working may also be slow and inefficient because of possible internal power relations and division of unequal responsibility, researchers state (p. 323).

A Waldorf teacher is a pedagogical leader and a co-leader. All teachers share collectively the responsibility of running the school. Woods and Woods (2006) have studied about Waldorf teachers as co-leaders in a pedagogical community. They state that teaching in Waldorf schools is not far from leadership and governance. The meetings of the colleague of teachers are more than business meetings; they are also a place for collegial studying, activities and decision-making. The weekly collegial meeting could also include shared meditative work like artistic working and studying spiritual verses or mentoring (Woods & Woods, 2006, p. 321). Waldorf teachers are members of pedagogical community. Running schools collegially should effect on at least three kinds of activity: collective attention to certain pupils or matters, shared development in aesthetics e.g. through collective artistic activity and collective decision-making by sharing the information and knowledge (Woods & Woods, 2006, p. 322). There are also didactic questions to deal with: further training of teachers, building up a school year including festivals and celebrations, pupil and student issues like

their needs and achievements, curricula and timetables and legal questions and then of course environmental and technical questions about school surroundings and economical issues. According to Rawson (2011), Steiner instituted collegial leadership. Steiner's original school model was balance to republican individualism. He created a meditative framework, in which the colleague of teachers creates an image and it focuses on the spirit of the school (Steiner, 1996, p. 95). In his paper, Rawson (2011) draws out connections between holistic democracy and Waldorf pedagogy. Rawson compares these two concepts and clears up the similarity between these two aspects. For example, the major values of holistic democracy are defined as seeking for freedom, social justice, equality, spirituality and individual development. Rawson points out that in Waldorf schools these values are the same (pp. 10-11). He also finds a lot of similarities for example in knowledge goals, methods of teaching, and learning. Authority structures in Waldorf schools are described by as "teachers' republican collegiate, non-hierarchical, distributed authority and leadership, self-organisation or -administration, peer-accountability and dynamic delegation". This non-hierarchical nature of Waldorf schools may shape the practice of leadership. There could be differences in the social environment, if teachers see some positions more privileged or dominant than others, for example between new and experienced teachers, between lower grade and upper grade teachers or class teachers and subject teachers (p. 12).

According to Steiner, the college of teachers is a kind of a training academy, and it is because teachers' practical experiences become parts of their own education. Teachers are always going to find something new for themselves and for the college of teachers, if they just educate themselves throughout their years at teaching. They are gaining a deep, psychological insight into the practical side of education and also insights into the children's qualities, characters and temperaments. All the experiences and knowledge that is gained from the teaching should be combined at these meetings. In Steiner's vision, the college of teachers becomes a whole, so that each member knows what the others are doing, what experience has taught them, and what progress they have made as the result of their work in the classroom with the children. Due to this kind of collegial work, the college of teachers becomes a central organ where the whole life of practical teaching flows from helping teachers to maintain their freshness and vitality. It should be "the teacher's constant aim to maintain a youthful freshness of soul and spirit, but this cannot be done unless real life flows through a central organ, just like human blood flows into and out of the heart" (Steiner, 2004a, p. 199). The teachers in the first Waldorf school were creating school surroundings, which are still

influencing educational field today. Teacher leadership and professional learning communities were something totally new at the time. Waldorf pedagogy offers education for the whole child. A Waldorf teacher can represent a consistent alternative to expectations of the economic and the political spheres (Woods & Woods, 2006, p. 324).

However, idealistic decision-making in Waldorf schools has gone through many changes in a century. Although Steiner wanted to have a new pedagogical system, where all teachers would be responsible of the decisions related to school but as seen already with the First Waldorf school the administration did not work as he designed. Steiner himself was working as a principal so there might have been the illusion of unlimited freedom and equality but in reality he was the greatest authority with an enormous influence on everything teachers planned or accomplished. Also the renewals of political and educational systems worldwide have affected to Waldorf schools and their curricula. As Bento (2015) points out, many Waldorf schools have struggled with administrative issues and pressure aiming at them from outside the school in addition to challenges within the school society and decision-making collegially (p. 4). Heijne and Buck (2013) have been researching decision-making in Waldorf schools. They did a qualitative research concentrating on the individual experiences rather than collecting a big amount of data as an evidence, where they wanted to research if the school teachers in Waldorf schools feel that their voice is heard and they can effect on daily decision-making and what are their experiences on Waldorf schools as an organisation. Interviews showed that there is lack of clarity and inclusivity in decision-making. The researchers suggest increased transparency and effectiveness in schools and communities (p. 27).

## **2.4. Republican and democratic leadership**

In Waldorf schools the decision-making has been seen as republican, not democratic activity. Brüll (1997) defines “republican” as “people with equal rights each administer a specific sector of the institutional life and are individually responsible for this” (pp. 42-43). Brüll wonders if Steiner originally based all the decisions in teacher meetings on consensus.

According to Brüll, Steiner terminated this decision because a teacher misused it. By consensus Steiner meant more than not opposing another suggestion. But some of the decisions in schools must be made democratically, like changes or selecting of teachers. Brüll (1997) mentions, that elections and voting are held for e.g. choosing a mandate committee (p. 42). Mandating and appointment of managers seems to become more common in Waldorf schools. This has also been seen as creeping managerialism. Also at school, the given task mandates to certain people might also get too complicated if the job description is inaccurately defined, Brüll (1997) mentions (p. 47). Things can get questionable if authority is delegated for longer periods and mandates become formalities. If that happens the power structures are formed and neither “democratic” nor “republican” decision-making will happen, rather authoritarian management will take over.

Rawson (2011) has researched the democratic nature of school leadership in Waldorf school and also compared it with a concept of holistic democracy. Rawson’s (2011) study suggests that there are strong differences nationally in accepting managers within the collegial system. In general, Waldorf schools have managed to survive in various cultural settings without principals and that is why it can be seen as living example of a certain kind of democratic and distributed school leadership. Rawson (2011) had interviewed around 80 Waldorf teachers in more than 10 countries about the leadership in schools. There is data about Waldorf schools being rich learning environments for the whole school community, but Rawson also points out a difference between holistic democracy and Waldorf schools by writing about so called “Waldorf knowledge”, which means that the “teachers know best regarding to the educational needs of their students”. Rawson uses a concept of *Waldorf body of knowledge*, which includes Steiner’s texts, Waldorf literature and the traditions in schools. It also includes habits, attitudes and ways of doing things. Without critical thinking, Waldorf practices may be uncritically transferred from experts to novices, Rawson observes (p. 12).

## **2.5. Collegiality and congeniality**

Getting along with the colleagues in a community is necessary and congeniality towards others creates fellowship among the teachers. This provides an essential base for a school's sense of community and its work with pupils and students. What it does not provide however, is any meaningful attention to that work or to a culture of growth. Collegiality differs from congeniality in a way that it is de-privatising the work of teaching, it means being able to disagree constructively about professional practice (Evans, 2012, p. 102). Bengtsson (2014) defines collegiality as a new concept for many teachers; it requires structure that goes beyond more than simply sharing ideas and it requires de-privatizing of the work of teaching and to begin to engage critically with issues of practice (p. 2). Hoerr (2013) examined both of these concepts, collegiality and congeniality. He found that they sound alike and are both needed, but still quite different. Congeniality is when teachers are enjoying and having fun together, not focusing on learning or developing new ideas of thoughts. Collegiality however is easier to achieve on the base of congeniality. In this way, congeniality makes way for collegiality (p. 89). Also Evans (2012) writes about these two concepts that schools have congeniality instead of collegiality. This means that everyone is getting along well and they are nice and supportive to each other, but this kind of behaviour does not encourage growth. Evans states that true collegiality requires more than politeness. Teachers should focus on development and performance and be able to disagree constructively (p. 100).

According to Roland Barth (2006), there are four components that collegiality builds up from: teachers talking with each other about pupils, teachers working together to develop curriculum, teachers observing each other's lessons and teachers teaching each other (p. 11). Thomas R. Hoerr (2013) adds one component to these four: co-operation between teachers and administrators. As he writes in his article, collegiality in faculties works against teacher isolation by supporting collaboration and learning (p. 88). Collegial working is also suggested for developing collaboration between the students and the teachers. Noddings (2014) notes that students and teachers could all meet weekly to discuss e.g. the assigned texts. Coming from different starting points they could encourage one another to think beyond their own individual specialities. Collegiality across the disciplines would help sustain a high level of intellectual interest among teachers (p. 16). Lieberman and Miller (2008) define ideal, professional, working communities as follows:

Collegial cultures where teachers develop the capacity to engage in honest talk. There is a big difference between congeniality and collegiality. Congeniality is marked by relationships that are amiable and compatible but, more often than not, are also conflict and risk-averse (...) Collegial cultures on the other hand develop bonds of trust [and] provide a forum for reflection and honest feedback, for challenging disagreement and for accepting responsibility without assigning blame (p.18).

They define collegiality as more comprehensive approach than congenial one, which concentrates mainly on the pleasant areas. The shift from being just friendly to being constructively critical is vital for successful cooperation but difficult to make happen consistently. In Brosnan's (2003) interview Barth is highlighting the importance of collegiality. Barth states that schools should definitely be more focused on collegial work because it is so important to the school's well-being. Barth thinks that the relationships among the adults effects directly on the quality and character of the school (p. 78). A former math teacher Noddings (2014) writes that greater collegiality among the teachers is affecting to well-being. Noddings is emphasising the importance of creativity in teaching and how it has a positive effect on the students. Noddings states that collegiality and creativity are symbiotic. Collegiality can inform creativity, while creativity can enrich collegiality. Those two qualities and continuity (i.e. stability and long-lasting relationships) contribute to strong morale. As its best, schools can be a place where educators break down curriculum boundaries to work together, planning and teaching with creativity (pp. 16-18).

## **2.7 Learning research and teacher isolation**

All around the world governments want to improve their educational systems and invest in teacher learning as a major supporter for academic success. On international measures, the highest achieving countries for example in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMMS) are strongly developing teacher's skills before they enter their professions and throughout their careers. These countries are Finland, Sweden, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the United Kingdom. One

of the key supports for teacher's professional learning in these countries is to allow some time during the workday and week to take part to activities, such as preparing and analysing lessons with colleagues, developing and evaluating assessments with other teachers and observing colleagues during their lessons in the classrooms. In these highest achieving countries teachers spend most of their planning time in collegial settings, in teams or teacher rooms, where their desks are arranged to facilitate collective working (Murray, 2011, p. 18). Murray is also writing about cultural differences in schools between U.S. and PISA leader countries. According to Murray (2011), in U.S. it is a norm that teachers spend most of their time in a classroom isolated from other adults and they do not have time to plan lessons together, share practices or observe each other's lessons. And because of these norms it is very difficult for teachers to open up their classrooms for visitors. Murray states that teachers' meetings are therefore very needed for building up trust between teacher colleagues. When collaboration becomes a norm, it becomes easier to share practice, thoughts, lessons and so on (p. 19). One of the popular practices in Japan and China is to design a research lesson together. In this method a group of four to six teachers develop lessons together, then they observe colleagues teaching the lesson and after that the group modifies it if needed.

Murray (2011) states that the two strongest reasons why U.S. are not succeeding in international measuring studies are the difference in educational thinking and isolation. First, the schools in U.S. should not order external experts to lecture or plan some kind of workshops for the teachers. These sorts of professional development events do not influence teachers or learning. And secondly, schools in U.S. should also bring teachers together and not isolate them to their classrooms. Collaboration and collegial work would increase professional learning and growth (p. 20). On the other hand it is rather surprising that there are no mentions about co-operation in the basic works of didactics in Finnish. Uusikylä and Atjonen (2005) write about the basics of didactics in Finland and in the Finnish education system, but there are no chapter nor word about co-teaching, peer support or teacher co-operation. Their work is one of the main pieces of didactics in educational studies in Finnish universities. The book mostly concentrates on students and the co-operation within the classroom, not on the collegial work or co-operation of teachers which is peculiar because, in short, the relationships among the educators in a school define all relationships within that school's culture. Barth (2006) writes about the importance of teachers' co-operating well together: if the relationships between administrators and teachers are trusting, generous, helpful and co-operative, then the other relationships in the school like between teachers and students are



also more likely to be the same kind. Barth (2006) also writes about the other, reverse side of teachers' relationships: the “nondiscussable” issues. Schools are full of matters that teachers seldom openly discuss about, but are the popular topics after the meeting or at the dinner table in more informal situations. These can be e.g. the leadership of the principal and issues of race. If these “nondiscussables” take too much power over us, school improvements are impossible, Barth (2006) writes (p. 9). The term of *pseudocommunity* was used to describe well working communities based on congeniality by Grossmann, Wineburg and Woolworth (2001). In their article they unfurl the term by explaining, how in the beginning, when community starts to form, individuals have a natural tendency to *play community*, to act as if they are already a community sharing values and common beliefs. Playing community, or pseudocommunity, draws on cultural notions of interaction often found safe, never intruding on issues of personal space (p. 20). These pseudocommunities are supported suppressing the possible conflicts. Groups regulate face-to-face interactions with the “nondiscussable” issues and assume that it is against the rules to challenge others or press too hard for clarification. Understanding this pseudocommunity effect, it unfurls the way for the *illusion of consensus*. Because there is no genuine follow-up in the conversations, colleagues are able to speak at high levels of generality that allow each to impute his or her own meanings to the group’s conclusions.

Collegiality can be improved and practiced already when the new teachers are entering the school world. Hoaglund, Birkenfeld and Box (2014) have observed collegiality, its importance for teachers and how it can be directly linked to effective schools. Therefore the basis for the skills needed to function within a collegial professional learning community must be developed through intentional, supported experiences to overcome teacher isolation (p. 521). Bengtsson (2014) has studied collegiality among the mathematics teachers in Sweden and describes how teachers can feel very lonely in their profession. According to her in U.S. as in Sweden, the teachers work alone and collegiality is the least common form of relationship among adults in schools, even though it seems both obvious and compelling. Instead of collegiality there is congeniality: “there is rather a mutual supportiveness, which is about getting along well and being friendly”, she writes (p. 16). Teachers have chosen to work with children or youngsters, they can see working and dealing with other adults rather inconvenient. Evans (2012) also mentions in his article that teachers are particularly sensitive to conflicts. Teachers want to help, foster and encourage pupils and take their job very personally. According to Evans (2012), everything is personal in schools – and that is also the



way we (as pupils, parents and teachers) want it to be. This matter affects greatly to teachers avoidance of criticism and disagreement. When there is something negative to say e.g. about a colleague, teachers often talk *about* him or her, not *to* person him/herself (p. 102). The idea of decreasing teacher isolation is not a new topic although it seems like the educators are considerably discussing the issue nowadays. Robert M. McClure (1988) had tried out a learning project to increase collaboration between teachers and administrators already decades ago. The goal of this project was to overcome isolation and traditional roles. This project was called The Mastery In Learning Project and it lasted for five years in 26 participating schools. During this time these schools had a new, collegial program that they had to follow in decision-making and planning. The results of this project were increased collaboration between the teaching staff and new way of thinking about own abilities to act. The teachers started to believe that they could make a difference with they own choices and teaching. They also became more collegial in sharing ideas and solving problems together (pp. 61-62).

Evans (2012) is trying to break the traditional artisanal norms by new collegial structures. He finds that many of the teachers think their job is solid and static, but actually they should educate themselves more every now and then. Evans is concentrating on the changing curriculum, how nowadays the collegial skills are as highly rated as individual skills in teacher's work. In every scheme and plan the same phrases are being used, and still according to him, the collegiality is the least common form of relationships between teachers (p. 101). Robert M. McClure's article shares the same thought about teachers' solid and static thinking: teachers and principals accept the so-called status quo and doubt if challenges or changes bring any good (p. 60).

Evans (2012) is mentioning in his article many tips for teachers, how to increase collegiality and well-being in schools. First, teachers should know more about each other's work. Pair visiting during colleague's lessons and sharing those experiments afterwards can easily fix this unconsciousness. Secondly, Evans reminds that no one needs to be the third party in any conflict. And his third tip concerns conflict situations and how in them the issues might be fighting, not the people. The most important thing in disagreements is that they should lead to constructive outcome (pp. 104-106). Collegiality improves when teachers engage to develop and renew their school together. If they constantly refuse to share views or ideas that would help to develop the school, it is very harmful to the whole collegial body. Mindich and Lieberman (2012) have made combined survey data of 33 New Jersey public schools and a case study of two of those schools to discover, what effective professional learning

communities (PLCs) look like. Among their findings they noticed that the move from congeniality to collegiality could be documented. The school leaders switched from blaming the people for problems into language of commitment. Teachers' interactions with each other were deeper than previously and there seemed to be movements toward a greater sense of collegiality (p. 17).

## **2.6.Diverse collegiality**

There has also been critique against the term collegiality. Koehler (1996) has been researching sides of collegiality that are often not talked about. Koehler argues that many schools have been planning enormous processes of collegial supervision without training and engaging teachers in collegial planning. The plans made by administrators can often be unilateral and might offer solutions to problems that are yet undefined. Observing others can be frustrating and profitless, if teacher's own interests are completely somewhere else, Koehler (1996) summarises (p. 167).

A different aspect to collegiality is also found by Haag (2005) where she is suggesting that "collegiality" can be a code for "discrimination" during the tenure review process. Haag (2005) has researched many lawsuits which professors have summoned when applying for an academic post but did not get chosen for indefinite reasons. Haag argues that according to courts there can be as many definitions for "collegiality" as there are colleagues. Historically "collegiality" has been associated with "homogeneity". Schools can define collegiality as "working well with others", "demonstrating good academic citizenship" and "contributing to a collegial atmosphere". For female professors this "collegiality" can be a code for discrimination so that women just "do not fit in" in male dominated departments. So far universities have won almost all the court cases. Haag is suggesting that the whole term of "collegiality" should be removed when talking about tenure review procedures. If it still going to be used, it should be narrowly and carefully defined into something concrete. To avoid accusations of discrimination, collegiality should not mean e.g. "fitting in", "likability" or "cordiality", Haag summarises. Because personality is so close to personal characteristics

such as gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and so on, their use as tenure criteria is always risky (pp. 57-62).

The same issue is pointed out in an article by Orlans (2002). He is sharing Haag's thoughts about collegiality being used as an excuse for discrimination and also mentions how courts have consistently supported the use of collegiality as a permitted factor in faculty evaluation (p. 8). The main problem with this concept is the lack of objective standards to identify it. "Collaboration" and "constructive co-operation" are essential terms needed in faculty evaluation, but "collegiality" should not be as a separate element, Orlans (2002) references (p. 9).

## **2.7. Co-teaching and teamwork**

As the forms of organisations are reshaping from the pyramidal, hierarchical models into more modern ones, new organisations need more creativity, increased co-operations and long-range commitment. Organisations need individuals who are capable of working in groups to maximise the unique contribution of each one and do not fear stating their complete views (Argyris, 1999, p. 108).

The growing trend on simultaneously teaching and sharing lessons is a hot topic also in Finland. After the educational trend from separating the students with special needs to inclusive system where the educational environment would be the equal for every student the need for educators has increased. Co-teaching of one class is unfortunately dependant on the financial circumstances of schools and on state funding, so at least for now it has not been possible to have two or more teachers sharing a class. In state schools there has been successful experiences on simultaneous teaching and teamwork. At the moment there are many studies ongoing about the simultaneous teaching in Finland and already many master theses have been published around this subject. Managing everything by themselves without any help from the others has been the traditional way of teachers' coping. Asking for help or consulting colleagues or other peers can be seen as a professional weakness or lack of confidence. During a school day there might be a little or no communication all with peer

teachers. And when there is some time for collegial work, it is mostly dedicated to a certain issue or planned beforehand (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2002, p. 4).

The renewal of Finnish educational system aims for diminishing isolation of the teachers and turn them more into co-operating colleagues. Morocco and Aguilar (2002) suggest that simultaneously teaching could be one solution for supporting teachers in their diverse task of teaching (p. 315-316). Simultaneous teaching can stand for many significations: for example two teachers working as a pair sharing two classes of students and simultaneously teach the big group (this has also been called team teaching), or two teachers (class teacher and a specialised teacher) sharing one class during one lesson. Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004) present four different ways of simultaneous teaching: supportive, parallel, team and complementary teaching (p. 8-9). Villa et al (2004) also propose that beside this classification simultaneous teaching can be a creative way of co-operation for making schools more efficient and help children to learn.

## **2.8. Peer observation of teaching**

As Barth mentioned peer observation as one of the main methods how to increase collegiality within schools, many other researchers have made studies about peer observation during teaching. (Brosnan, 2003, p. 78.) In Waldorf teacher training in Finland students have the opportunity to get feedback from their observing teachers when carrying out practical trainings in schools. This happens two or three times during the training periods. The mentoring class teachers are the main source of feedback while performing the teacher training. After the graduation there is no supervised observations while working as a class teacher. In the state universities there are also observation of the training lessons by the university professors and peer students. Carroll and O'Loughlin (2013) have carried out a study in Ireland about attitudes and remarks about peer observation to improve and mend teaching quality, key motivators and results detected especially by first-timers in peer observation. However, the study does not cover peer observation in relation to collegiality, but concentrates on the experiences of first-time participants before and after collegial

observation of a lesson. In this report the findings concentrated on appreciation and benefits of peer observation of teaching, or “POT” as the researchers shortened the term. POT was seen as a way to unite and seek valuable information and feedback from beginners and more experienced lecturers. These experiences and feedbacks among other educational tools help the beginners to become more confident and effective educators, Carroll and O’Loughlin (2013) notice (p. 451). Also, POT has been researched in Australia by interviewing the staff at the University of Sydney. Thomson, Bell and Hendry (2015) map out the experiences on POT and they found out that even “just watching” a colleague’s teaching was useful for development. Many of the interviewees had learned at least one new teaching strategy. Peer observing was perceived as inspiring and as a motivator to change something in observer’s own teaching. Thomson, Bell and Hendry (2015) do not deal with peer observation’s effect on collegiality either, but they highlight the meaning of this “just watching” approach to observation. By carrying out this kind of informal observation lessons, the observers can choose their own focus and concentrate on what they think is crucial. Their pedagogical knowledge of practical strategies will be increased and they can experience uniqueness as they see their colleague practicing with the students (pp. 1060-1061). These researchers have also explored peer observation of teaching in quantitative and qualitative ways in another paper. Hendry, Bell and Thomson (2013) have studied academic teaching staff experiences of POT during teaching situations. Their results show that this peer observation can educate, develop motivation and confidence within the observer’s own teaching (pp. 325-327). These researchers also encourage especially higher educational institutes that want to cherish the quality of teaching and learning yield for programme of peer observation.

Trent E. Kaufman and Emily Dolci Grimm (2013) have written clear instructions how to collect classroom data by peer observation and take charge of self-development. They describe how often teachers feel frustrated with the professional feedback they receive. So many issues also get lost between the professional training and the actual classroom. They call for *transparent teaching* by breaking down the isolation and opening up the classrooms for peers. Kaufman and Grimm launch a new term of teacher-driven observation (TDO), where teachers invite peers to collaborate with them in observations to collect data. According to them opening up classroom to the peers helps to create transparency around teaching and learning that occurs there. In the teacher-driven observation (TDO) method observed teachers are in charge of the lessons, meaning that they decide what areas they want peer observers to focus on in their teaching, who is observing and when (p. 4-5). According to the writers this

kind of observation increases professional development and helps to become more transparent in teaching.

On the other hand observing has not always been seen as a positive activity. Steiner stated very strictly about outsiders visiting school lessons, what kind of disturbance it could make. A visit could only take place after thinking about it carefully and discussing about it with those who hope to learn something by visiting the school. These visit should only be for purely pedagogical and methodological reasons, it would not be convenient to have it happen on a more general basis. Steiner emphasizes that anyone coming into the classroom disturbs the lesson. Sometimes there can be a higher goal that could justify the disturbance, and then the teachers should accept reasons that kind of reasons. Steiner does not mention more specifically, what sort of reasons could those be. He highlights how we need to be sensitive to the fact that a lesson requires presence of mind and that is why visits should be avoided unless there is some urgent need for them (Steiner, 1996, p. 98.). In the beginning of the first Waldorf school, there were many curious people wondering what kind of school this new school system was. This well-intentioned and maybe not so well intentioned curiosity had made Waldorf teachers more careful and strict, who can visit the school and who cannot. As Steiner said in his lecture, people have taken advantage of the possibility to visit the school beyond the greatest extent (Steiner, 1996, p. 99). That was one of the reasons they needed to start to limit the amount visitors. The idea of observing in classrooms has been around for decades. Many of these times the purpose of the visit were lacking clarity. Instead of concentrating on learning and growth, it is often seen as something punitive and negative. Carl D. Glickman (2002) suggests peer coaching as a way to improve teaching and learning. He writes that no one can be improving their craft in isolation from others. Teachers should have formats, structures and plans for reflecting on, changing and assessing their practice to develop. Glickman argues that infrequent drop-in visits by evaluators leads to routine and wane. Instead, schools should have a structured program for peer coaching where fellow teachers conduct cycles of supervision. Glickman has written clear five-step instruction, how to make this peer coaching possible (pp. 10-17).

The assessment for learning is one of the main professional abilities for teachers and it happens most of the time between teachers and pupils. Teachers need skills and professional knowledge to plan assessment and observe learning, to analysing it and giving feedback to learners. Gardner (2006) suggests that for making assessment of learning truly effective, it requires a change in thinking about the classroom roles and norms of behaviour within

students and teachers (p. 28). When dealing with peers and not students, the criteria for assessment might get more complicated. A couple of the main principals for assessment for learning could also be adjusted in peer observation situation. For example, while visiting the lessons teachers could think about their learning and progress in relations to their own previous performance and not compare themselves to others.

The interaction between students and teachers is a central feature of assessment in the form of feedback, but the messages given in the feedback session are useless if students are not able to do something with them. Teachers need to understand students' way of thinking and the way which they take in new messages. Gardner (2006) has listed the levels of feedback very precisely and points out, that the observers can only draw conclusions from observed situations if they are familiar with the theoretical models (p. 89). Although there was a possibility for feedback session in this research, I choose to focus on the personal experiences of the observers and not on the procession of the lessons.

## **2.9. Conceptual framework**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) conceptual framework plays a central role in the research process and in the analysis (p. 58). The conceptual framework combines the questions and critique that rises from the existing literature into a crucial part of the foundation of the study. The concepts are included in the conceptual framework. It affects to the meaning of the research question and data analysing methods, to the research design and how the findings are reported.

This master thesis focuses on experiences of teachers during peer visiting. The conceptual framework of this study consists of concepts within the educational field, especially under the themes of Waldorf education and collegial work as presented in the literature review above. School as a living ensemble, continuous possibility for development and teacher well-being are also included in the conceptual framework.

School as a living and working entirety effects on every teacher's daily life. As Gill (2010) represents it, all organisations are functioning as social organisms created by human beings and they can be seen as a reflection or projection of the staff (p. 28). Schools are living working environments that change and convert along their educators. The possibilities for developing and educating oneself and educators as a part of community should be available for every teacher. As Murray (2011) suggests, teachers should be supported in the continuous improvement of their craft (p. 18). The self-development of the teachers is nowadays seen as important as the co-operation and collaboration inside the school community. Professional development of teachers is supposed to contribute to lasting change in the classroom. Therefore I articulate in the discussion chapter of this thesis if the participating teachers relate to collaboration in schools after their peer visits.

The main concepts of this research are collegiality, congeniality, teachers, Waldorf education and peer observation.

The concept of collegiality is one of the main matters schools should focus on. As Roland S. Barth mentions in Brosnan's (2003) interview, collegiality is important to the health of the school and the health of its educators (p. 78). It also means transparency and honesty among the colleagues. The nature of the relationships among the adults in the school modifies the character and quality of the school and it has more effect on the students than anything else. However, working communities in schools tend to remain on the superficial level, in the congenial field where all the social interaction is positive and there is no daring or desire for negative thoughts or opinions. According to Barth (2006) the congenial relationships can develop into collegial ones.

As a Waldorf teacher I wanted to highlight the concept of Waldorf pedagogy, as there are quite a few research projects on Waldorf education. In this literature chapter I have unfurled the structure of Waldorf schools, the leadership in them and the meaning of collegial decision-making. It all comes to the idea of Rudolf Steiner and his lectures about the three-foldness of living systems, for example *The spirit of the Waldorf school* (1995).

The four tasks to increase collegiality in schools are educators talking with each other about the practice, sharing their craft knowledge, rooting for each other's success and observing one another teaching (Barth, 2006, p. 11). In our schools it seemed that we are already able to do the first three things. Observing was something new that has not been made for years.

Breaking down the professional isolation and opening up the classrooms is a necessary part of



moving professional development (Kaufman & Grimm, 2013, p. 5). As peer observation as one of my main concepts and methods of conducting this research, this is a case study, where one's own empirical reflections are at the centre. Because this is a qualitative research and not a quantitative one, I focused on small group's personal experiences and asked them semi-structured and open-ended questions afterwards. This research was about finding out what would be the experiences on peer visiting in school. Does it bring out memories, enthusiasm to study more or to get information, encourage to adapt something new to visitor's own teaching? Or will the lesson be just something exactly what they expected? In this study I researched the visitor's own reflections and experiments during the lesson, where he or she can just observe and take part to the teaching. As Merriam (2002) sets out, qualitative approach helps to bring out and interpret people's understanding of a phenomenon or an action. The research problem is dealing with observing peer teachers and experiences during colleague's lessons. The interview guide for the first round of interviews supports the subjective experiences of the participants. The first interviews focused mainly on the concepts of peer observation and Waldorf education. On the second round the focus was on the collegial and congenial field, because the interviewees could tell freely about their experiences. The concept of congeniality was evolved from the data and that is why it was also chosen as a main concept. The conceptual framework has guided the analysis, findings and discussion of this study. In the next chapter I will go into more detail, how I carried out my empirical case study.

### 3. Methods

In this thesis I gave a say to the teachers who visit their peers' lessons. As a teacher and a researcher I considered this area could have a lot to give to the educational field. As I mentioned earlier in this study, there could not be found any studies that would concentrate specifically on co-operation between subject teachers and class teachers. By this study I enlightened the reflections of peer observation and the experiences teachers had during their first visits. I believed that carrying out this kind of study would encourage teachers for co-operation with each other and give them more information and knowledge about each other's work. This is a qualitative study because I mostly focused on interpreting individual reflections and teachers' experiences by interviewing them. I chose interviews as a method for data collection because of the possibility to have rich and thick descriptions of the observing experiences by interacting with them. Kvale (1996) describes qualitative research interview as "an attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view" and as a method "to unfold the meaning of people's experiences" (p. 1). However, interviews also have limitations as a method. For example they are results of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee bound to a certain place and time. I collected their individual experiments by semi-structural and non-structural interviewing, when they could freely describe, how they experienced the visits. In this chapter I will clarify the methodology and the methods used for this research. For this I used the help of Savin-Baden's and Major's (2013) guide to theory and practice in qualitative research, Bloomberg's and Volpe's (2008) work about completing dissertation and Cornwell's (2007) piece about qualitative research and design. I also studied Alan Bryman's (2008) opus about social research methods. I wished this study to be empirical, partly narrative and qualitative and it is also the reason why my research group was quite concise. As Creswell (2007) defines the unit of analysis in a case study it can be an event, a program or an activity –but more than one (p. 78). The main focus of this study was to collect individual experiences from peer visits and my main research question was how do class teachers and subject teachers experience visiting each other's lessons.

In this chapter I next describe the interviews with the questions involved. After that I focus on my research design, data analysing methods and how I ended up using them. Then I

characterise my participating teachers. In the end of the chapter I focus on the trustworthiness of this study and the ethical considerations.

### **3.1. The interviews**

All interviews were carried out in the school. All of the first round interviews could be made during the same day visiting had taken place. Interviewees were informed with my letter of consent and they could have the questions beforehand if they had wanted to. The first round interviews lasted from 15 to 30 minutes and they were recorded. On the second round there were two interviews, one mutual interview session and one individual one. There had to be two meetings because of the schedules. The second round interviews were also recorded; they were unstructured and more descriptive and made by using the narrative methods. The participants could tell freely about their reflections and thoughts about the visits, what was the topmost on their minds about the observations. These interviews were made in spring 2016. Both of the interviews lasted for 30-45 minutes.

The questions made for the first round were carefully formed to help the interviewees to describe their observed experiences. That was mostly the kind of information I wanted to discover in this research. Through this study I wanted to enlighten the reflections, feelings and thoughts about these peer visits on first-timers. On the second round there were no structured questions and it was more of a narrative inquiry based on the first round. The interviewees could concentrate on telling the parts that were significant or meaningful for them during the lesson. The participants reflected their experiences on the visits in a group interview and one individual meeting.

After the observations I interviewed the visitors about their experiences from the lesson individually. I had five main topics and semi-structured questions in my first interviews. My five main questions were:

1. What impressions and experiences arose while visiting your colleague's lesson?
2. Did you have any preconceptions or presumptions about the lesson or what would be your

experience on it?

3. Was there something during the lesson that surprised you? And if there was something then what was it?

4. Did you have any questions about the lesson afterwards or was there something that left you wondering after the lesson?

5. What are your thoughts now after the visit, do you think this observing will somehow have an influence on something, e.g. to your relationship and attitude towards your fellow colleagues?

The first interviews took place during autumn 2015 and winter 2016 straight after the visits.

On the second round I interviewed two of the teachers as a group and one teacher as an individual. Unfortunately we had to make these kinds of arrangements due to our schedules. On the second round I used the narrative method and open-ended questions. That gave more opportunities for the participants to narrate unlimitedly about their experiences and I as an interviewer had a chance to go in-depth by asking more explicit questions. The participants were very talkative and wanted to share their experiences with each other, so there were no problems in reflecting mutually. All three were generously sharing their thoughts and memories from their visits.

On the second round I asked the participants

1. Please tell with your own words about the visited lesson.
2. How would you describe the visits now?
3. Do you have a concrete or tangible example/situation from your visited lesson that you could share or describe?

By these questions I aimed to give them a chance to talk about their experiences freely and to map out, which were the uppermost perceptions from the visits.

The interviews and were made in Finnish. After having finishing them and transcribing I translated whole data. As a translator of the data I needed to carefully focus on the definitions the interviewees were talking about. Also the adjectives and descriptions needed to be focused on pedantically and precisely. I am not a professional translator and my English is average. That is why I also let a professional English teacher to check my language, the used concepts and definitions.

### **3.2. Research approach and design**

In the qualitative research field this research is a case study, which is bounded to the certain place and time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 80). The most common use of the term “case” connects it with a location (Bryman, 2008, p. 53.). Merriam (2002) defines a case study as an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit (p. 8). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) discuss about different descriptions of case study and they end up combining all previous definitions into a new one. According to them, a case study can be a blend of delimited case, a specific approach to research and the final product of a qualitative study (p. 152). Bryman (2008) suggests that a case study could well be quantitative or qualitative, but there is a tendency to associate it with qualitative research after the methods like observation and interviewing. They enable more intensive, detailed examination of a case (p. 53). A case study is a research approach that examines the relationship between people and structure, which they work, live and learn in. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) describe that in a bounded case study there should be a limited number of interviewees, documents or observations. Merriam (2002) defines a qualitative study as a case study according to the unit of analysis. She argues, that concentrating on a single issue or phenomenon the case study approach could describe the phenomenon more in depth (p. 8). This thesis is a time and place bounded case study. It is focused and intensive and narrow lined. It is also contextual because it is connected e.g. to the historical and political context. One of the most distinct contexts of this study was the educational environment where it was executed. By the observation visits this study is also bound to other educational case studies. Although ability to generalise was not the goal of this study I also thought about the transferability of my data. This kind of study could be re-arranged in the same kind of context and conditions but findings might vary according to the individual participants. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) also describe case study as holistic, particularistic and concrete. It is holistic because it seeks to describe the whole case as well as the relationships of the parts to the case. It is particularistic because it focuses on the specific issue, not the general. And it is concrete in the documentation so that the reader will understand the meaning of the case. From the types of case study research this

thesis is an exploratory case study. In the exploratory purposes there is no need for fixed research questions before the data collection and it can be done simply for exploratory purposes (pp. 154-159). It also has a narrative dimension, as the participants could freely tell about their observations and on the second round about their reflections and memories. These interviews revealed much about the educational contexts and participants making meanings and concepts (p. 241). Merriam (2002) adds a psychological aspect to the narrative analysis. In the psychological approach the stories of the participants are analysed in terms of internal thoughts and motivations (p. 9).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) have discovered steps used to carry out a qualitative research (p. 81). This research design consists mostly on these following steps: collecting literature references based on the concepts, interacting with the participants, visiting and interviewing, data analysing and discuss possible conclusions.

The literature for this research was mainly chosen through the concepts of collegial work, congeniality, teachers, peer observation and Waldorf education. Two kind of literature were used: higher education doctoral theses and professional learning theories. The focus of the literature review was to find examples of peer visiting, experiences on it and rationale carrying out a new case study. After transcribing and analysing my data from the peer visits there were still questions remaining considering my topic of peer co-operation and my references. The answers I got from the individual interviews were extremely positive – especially if they were compared to quite similar researches carried out for example in the U.S. and Ireland. However the starting point for my reference studies and my research were a bit different: in my research all the participants were equal colleagues without any mentoring relationships. Most of the studies that had been made about peer observation were based on unequal working relations like teacher-principal or mentor-novice kind of composition. In some of the studies the participating teachers gathered for a feedback discussion after the visit to share experiences and thoughts about the lesson. Instead of a feedback session I gathered my participants for a new group discussion to answer in more detail to arisen questions from my collected data and to interact with each other. The second round was carried out months after the visits.

As a researcher I was fascinated by the opportunity to look deeply into the co-operation and collaboration that is happening or not happening in our Waldorf school. With my five year experience in the school I could have said that I wanted to get more familiar with the

colleagues working in the same place with me who I did not have daily contact with. After reading papers and studies about the positive influences of getting to know your colleagues, I wanted to focus on the collaborative issues in my thesis.

### **3.3.Data analysing methods**

After the first interviews had taken place during the autumn 2015 and January 2016, I carefully transcribed my data. Then I started to read through these texts and tried to discover if there was a connection between my research questions and what the interviewee kept important or highlighted. This relation I open up more in the analysis chapter. Coding allows to note details and implications of data. It makes possible comparisons and patterns more visible (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 422).

Open coding method was used for the analysis of interviewed data, or maybe it would be more accurate to define it as inductive analysis. The conceptual framework of this study helped me in analysing the data. I did not want to use predetermined categories for coding the transcriptions. I preferred my themes and categories to arise from my interviews and collect them inductively (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 102). The concepts I had been choosing beforehand gave me a lot of assistance in analysing. That was also how I elevated congeniality as one of my main concepts. Although the questions I prepared for the interviews could have given an introductory structure for data analysis, I focused on the content of each transcription and what there was to discover. There was also enthusiasm and energy to go on the field and carry out these interviews in time. On the second round I mostly wanted to discover answers to my research question how they experienced the peer visits. I concentrated on that in my coding and analysis.

I coded my first round data after I had been reading it through several times. I discovered that there were themes that repeatedly came up from the interviews and notes. I started coding by using different kind of marking for feelings and experiences the observed had had during the visit, preconceptions they had before entering the observation situation, questions they had

during or after the visits and things the interviewees mentioned considering the future or what ideas they had got for their own job. Then I could make thematically a raw classification into four different groups: feelings, preconceptions, questions and ideas for the future. After that I collected the quotes under these topics and coded them with different labels. From these themes I carefully gathered together my findings using tables, mind maps and templates. I also coded my second round data with different marking depending on the issue interviewees were discussing about. I marked the experiences, feelings and thoughts with one colour, concrete examples from the lessons with one and ideas according to the future with another. So in a way the coding of the second round data indicated three groups of classification: topmost reflections, example of activity during the lesson and views for the future.

### **3.4. The participants**

The study was carried out in Waldorf school in Finland. There are approximately 35 teachers in the school and 8 of them are class teachers, rest of them teach different subjects. During the autumn semester 2015 I asked three of my colleagues to attend this study and luckily for me they all were willing to take part. Two of the teachers I asked to participate were subject teachers and they mainly work with the upper high school students. The third participant is a class teacher and works on the lower levels with the children aged 7 to 14. Also my own lessons were observed, so there were two observed subject teachers and two class teachers attending. All the participants also agreed for other participants to come and observe during their own lessons. I requested the observers take part in two lessons held by their colleague, so the subject teachers visited class teachers' lessons and vice versa. All the visits were carried out during the main lesson that lasted for 90 minutes. The subject teachers visited main lessons during the morning, class teachers visited at appointed time. Every attending teacher then had two visitors during the semester and observed two lessons him/herself.

For this research I requested the participants by choosing the ones who are not connected to each other by same classes or pupils. I chose teachers for this study that have not daily interaction with each other and are not sharing teaching of the same class. And as an extra



layer, all participants' backgrounds were quite different. The subject teachers had different backgrounds and service years to widen up the perspective and the same thing with the class teachers: one teacher with a long teaching history and another one with a half of it. This diversity in the service years came as a surprise for me as a researcher. Originally I thought of having participating teachers who do not know each other well by sharing classes or subjects. One could also see it as a possibility not having so many preconceptions about the observed lessons, when attending teachers are not familiar with the taught subjects.

I added myself as a challenge participant to the observations since I was also the conductor of this study. My own lessons were observed and I used my own notes as data for this research. However there was no interview on me as I wanted to focus on my colleagues' experiences who were not familiar with the aim or topic of this study. The purpose of these actions was to add the transparency and coherency of this research.

One of my interviewees, Teacher A, has been a Waldorf class teacher for over 20 years, which contains few years of studying not teaching. Teacher B has attended Waldorf school as a child and is now working as a subject teacher in one for over a decade. Teacher C has also been working as a subject teacher for many years but without earlier personal experience with Waldorf pedagogy. I (Teacher D) have been working as a class teacher for five years.

All interviews were carried out in the Waldorf school the same day visits took place. After transcribing and analysing my data from the first peer visits there were still questions remaining considering my topic of peer co-operation and my references. The answers I got from the individual interviews were extremely positive –especially compared to quite similar researches carried out for example in the U.S. and Ireland. However, the starting point for my reference studies and my research were a bit different: in my research all the participants were equal colleagues without any mentoring relationships. Most of the studies that had been made about peer observation were based on unequal working relations like teacher-principal or mentor-novice kind of composition. In some of the studies the participating teachers gathered for a feedback discussion after the visit to share experiences and thoughts about the lesson. Instead of a feedback session I decided to gather my participants for a new group discussion to answer in more detail to arisen questions from my collected data and to interact with each other. The second round was carried out three months after the visits. By this second round I wanted to get more detailed into their experiences, to see if the visits still had some effect after a while. Did they still remember something from the visited lessons? How would they

describe and define their experiences?

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

This research had certain limiting conditions, which were related to the research methodology and design and the timing and existing situation. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) discuss extensively about the ethical issues and trustworthiness of a qualitative research in their work and it was used as a guide to my own considerations (p. 85). As a researcher I was responsible for informing and protecting participants. They were volunteers and informed about the study and its purpose. A letter of consent was presented to them and received from participants. As a researcher I was also engaged to keep identity characteristics confidential (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 85). This research is a qualitative study I made the analysis of data as a researcher. I had to take account my own assumptions, perceptions and interests. I also counted myself into the research as an observer and had the chance to reflect my own feelings in a role of a researcher and an observer. My own lessons were also observed as a part of this study. When thinking about the visiting schedules and credibility of the lessons the question may arise that were the participants invited to observe specially arranged lessons. As an answer to that I can point out that school timetables changed and visits were rescheduled several times. Participants would have been particularly effortful if they wanted peer teachers to observe specific class and lesson. The double role as a researcher and as a participant could also persuade for highlighting the findings especially suitable for a congenial result. The credibility of this study, i.e. how believable are the findings, could have been affected by my own preconceptions and assumptions (Bryman, 2008, p. 34). However as this issue was recognised also the explicit stance towards the interviews, analysis and findings could be taken.

### **3.6. The limitations and trustworthiness of the study**

As for the validity of this study counting myself as a researcher and a participant could well be seen as a reliability issue and one of the main limitations. The analysis ultimately rests with the choices and thoughts of the researcher and qualitative studies generally are limited by the subjectivity of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 87). The confirmability, i.e. had I as a researcher allowed my own values to intrude, could be a question when researching a familiar field of interest (Bryman, 2008, p. 34). To strengthen the interpretive validity of this study I have clarified my assumptions throughout this research. I also doubled my data-collections to make my paces more transparent in this study. By this action I gathered fuller and richer picture of the phenomenon. I had my own research diary that was used for self-reflection during the whole writing process and especially during the visits. It also includes detailed reports how all the data was analysed and interpreted. As I already explained how the participants were chosen, it could have raised a question about the researcher gathering a sampling of the certain participants to have an effect on the findings of this study. Yet I explained my criteria for choosing the teachers for this study earlier in the method chapter to increase the transparency of this research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 88).

One limitation of this study was the different role of the researcher not as a colleague but an interviewer. The participants were also familiar with each other before this study. That could have had an influence or effect on their responses. They may have tried to answer in the interviews the way to please the researcher or what kind of answers would have been more reasonable to her. This familiarity could have also an effect on their behaviour during the observed teaching situations. To deal with this possible problem of reactivity I continued to reflect consciously my own actions throughout the study.

This study was conducted on a volunteer-base and the participants were informed about the research's purpose already in the beginning. As a researcher, I was well aware of my responsibility in informing and protecting my informants. I was committed to keep identities and samples confidential and no one besides me had the access to the interview data. The letter of consent is attached as an appendix in the end of this study.

### **3.7. Summary of the methods chapter**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research methodology of this study. This is a qualitative case study exploring the phenomenon of peer teachers visiting each other's lessons and mapping out their experiences and reflections of those visits. The data was collected through two rounds of individual and group interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions. The data was analysed and dealt with literature and conceptual framework in the discussion chapter. After the comparison conclusions were made. The purpose of this study was to enlighten the experiences of peer visiting and observe the possible use of peer observation. In the next chapter I carefully analyse the transcriptions of my interviewed data and present the main findings of this study.

## 4. Analysis and findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to collect experiences and reflections about peer visits during the lessons in a Waldorf school. In this analysis chapter I enlighten the main findings from the both rounds of interviews and from my own field notes of two visitations. I also open up the connection between my data and my research question. I surveyed and organised my collected data into order and create themes and structures for my findings. As I have mentioned earlier, my main task was to find answers to how subject teachers and class teachers experience peer visits to each other's lessons.

In the beginning of this analysis chapter I first present my main findings, then I go more into detail with them in subchapters and by using direct quotes from my interviewees. In the end of this chapter I summarise and collect a wider picture of my findings into one subchapter.

As my main concepts of this research were collegial work, congeniality, teachers, peer observation and Waldorf education, they all played important roles in the analysis but in different ways. Teachers took part to this study via peer observation. This peer observation can be seen as a part of collegial work that could be evolving from congenial interaction. And while my research is taking place in a Waldorf school, my educational concept is also related to analysis. All the concepts are parts of the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework consists of school as a living entirety, continuous self-development and teacher well-being. In this analysis chapter I focus on the areas of interest according to the interviews and my interviewees' thoughts about the future. As I mentioned in the method chapter, some of my concepts evolved from the data, e.g. congeniality.

Six semi-structured interviews after the visits and second round interviews mostly made this research. I also took notes during my visits to increase the transferability and credibility of this study. I recorded all the interviews and the field notes were written by hand. I also created small templates about my main findings to support my analysis in a more visual way. These tables are added to the subchapters related. By these interviews I wanted to discover the experiences teachers had from peer teacher's lesson. However, I could have included a discussion or a feedback gathering for these two participants, for the one that followed the lesson and the one that was observed and give a voice also to the teaching participant. Yet my

aim was to collect experiences, feelings and thoughts without putting any pressure on the observed one so that the happening teaching event would be as natural as it could. So I decided to define my research to concern only the experiences of the visitor and how they described and reflected their thoughts after visiting peer teacher's lessons. However, they had the chance to talk together and meet up in the second round group discussion. So they actually had a possibility to give feedback or reflections to their peer participants.

After coding my data I found four main themes that unfolded my research question.

Major findings of this study were

1. The participants indicated that peer visits were a positive experience. They thought observing colleagues was useful and eye opening.
2. Peer visits had some surprising elements during every session. All participants were first-timers in visiting colleague's lesson.
3. The participants agreed that they gained something from these visited lessons. For some teachers it was an incentive to self-education or a useful tip for their own teaching. According to the participants, the visits were inspiring, refreshing or fascinating and it was a great to see colleagues at work.
4. The participants suggested that teachers should do more peer visiting in Waldorf schools. They experienced that visits can help out in increasing collegiality and make colleagues more familiar with each other.
5. The findings showed very harmonious and agreeable perception for peer observation and the adjectives used to describe it were very congenial. Negative remarks or critique were non-existent.

In the next subchapters I present quotes that illustrate the findings according to my interpretation of the data.

## 4.1.A positive experience

All the four teachers visiting eight lessons in total thought that the overall experience was positive. The participants emphasise how great it was to observe colleague's work. Like Teacher C stated: "The visit brought up positive feelings in me. In my opinion it was really nice to come there (...) it was fantastic." Teacher B is sharing the same kind of experience: "It was very refreshing and fun to look at the pupils and admire colleague's work and just wonder... like... wow. Amazing. Wonderful."

The work of a Waldorf teacher could be seen as autonomous and lonely task when there are no other adults or co-workers helping or supporting you when you are keeping the classes. Although in this study participants thought it was not somehow awkward or uncomfortable to have their peer around. Maybe this situation would have been different, if I had asked some other colleagues to participate or not make this study as a volunteer-base. These participants seemed to be relaxed and positive about the thought that they had observers in their classroom. I created a small table about the issues mentioned by participants when coding my data. I marked with "x" all the teachers, that mentioned the certain experience or emotion in their interview. It can be found in the appendices.

The positive reflections did not make a difference between class teachers and subject teachers. Teacher co-operation and collegiality was seen in a very positive light. The participants mentioned afterwards that it was a great experience. The visits also increased respect towards colleagues and interest in each other's work.

I found it really wonderful that in the beginning of the class there were poems and music... it was fantastic to see, how everyone in the classroom participated in this mutual activity with their own way and style as an individual but still as a part of the group. That was really, really fantastic.  
(Teacher C)

One of the teachers admired the way a colleague could get the class focus on the teaching and teaching only, like the teacher would be talking to individual pupils all the time.

It was fascinating to see how the teacher drew pupils' attention to herself. If the teaching is intense enough... you could see how the kids felt like they were alone with their teacher, like there was some sort of an invisible thread between them. (Teacher B)

As I interpreted the interviews, I realised how participants put a great value and respect on their fellow teachers even though they have not seen them at work before. The trust on everyone's professional capability is firm. Also peer teachers seemed to be willing to give positive feedback to their colleagues and support them.

I always try to think about my colleagues respectfully and value them and I think everyone in this school is a professional expert. I've always known that my colleagues are good teachers, but it was great to witness it personally and I think the quality of teaching is excellent. (Teacher C)

Same respect could be interpreted in Teacher D's observations: "It is great to see colleagues at their work, how they really seem to be keen on and interested in their own subject. You can really see how they like to teach." Also Teacher B values colleagues' work deeply: "If it still could be possible, these visits increased my respect towards the class teachers even more... for me, you are next to God. Seriously." Teacher A also focused on the personality of the teacher and how unique touch it gives to every lesson: "From both visits I recall, how much the teachers personality effects on the lessons and what is the teaching like... that was really nice to see as a colleague." The lack of critical feedback showed very congenial definition about the visits. The use of only positive adjectives and descriptions about the lessons indicates polite and congenial interaction within the community.

## **4.2. Something new and surprising**

One of the most surprising findings for me as a researcher during this study was that all every participant was a first-timer in peer visiting. Even the teachers who had been teaching in Waldorf school for decades had never experienced this kind of observation before, not compulsory or voluntary-based ones. Although two the participants had been visiting lessons of mutual grade teachers (i.e. high school grade teachers had visited higher classes' lessons), this kind of experiment was new for everyone in the research. The subject teachers had never visited lower grades' lessons and vice versa. As Teacher C put it: "I had very little information



about what you are doing on the lower grades.” So as I found answers to my question how the teachers experience their visits, I also found out that all these observations were unprecedented and fresh for every participant.

Even though this research was a new experiment, participants had some preconceptions and prejudices about the forthcoming lessons. I think it is important for me as a researcher to introduce these mentioned preconceptions in relation to the research question, because they may have an effect on the observer and his or her attitude to the observing situation. Through them I can also reflect the possible changes in interviewees’ thoughts.

Well, I knew that you would have like a morning poem and something like that. I did not know in detail and I did not know for example that you play the Choroi-recorder in the beginning. (...) Almost everything came as a surprise. (Teacher C)

Teacher A had a thought about what the lessons could be like by observing colleagues beforehand: “To see the teacher in front of the class and to see them teaching... it might confirm your preconceptions about them if you have seen your colleagues in the teacher’s room and thought about what they are really like...”

Lack of the working tables in the classroom in our lower grades raised some questions on one teacher’s mind.

I was a little puzzled beforehand like how everything would stay under control, but surprisingly there were not any of those problems that I have thought there could have been because they do not have chairs and tables there, quite the opposite, the pupils were moving very naturally in the classroom. It was really nice to see how the lack of the tables encouraged the pupils to normal physical activity. There was nothing of that chaos or running around that I might have imagined. (Teacher C)

Three of the participants mentioned in the interview that the visited lessons revived old personal memories. The observers recognised similarities with their own experiences on being a student. For example Teacher A described, how “they had their notebooks and textbooks there... and then there was the blackboard or projector... then I thought that things have not changed much since I was a high school student.” Teacher B has a personal background in Waldorf school. According to the interviews Teacher B remembered very little from the early years during the first visit:

I think I have not observed class teacher's lessons before, even ages ago I never visited them... I have my own memories from those years though, but I recall nothing... really. I did get some flashbacks from the lowest grades and started thinking did we actually do fantastic things like this back then...?

On the second visit the lesson activities seemed to be more familiar. As Teacher B recalled: "Well... maybe now I got more of *deja-vú* feelings. Maybe more of those sensations like *oh, yes... this I remember*. Wonderful."

Also Teacher A wonders about not visiting peer teacher's lessons before: "This was really nice because I have never visited Waldorf school's higher grades' lessons, and I have been a class teacher since 1995!" And as I already mentioned before, every participant thought the lessons had some surprising elements. Teacher C summarised it this way: "The visit awoke positive feelings in me. I think it was really nice to come there, I have never observed a whole lower grade lesson before and almost everything came as a surprise for me. It was really great."

There was one issue that both class teachers mentioned in the interviews. They both found it really interesting how their own work differ from subject teacher's position. Teacher D described it as follows:

It is quite amazing how we work with the same children in separate phases of their lives. The teaching on the higher grades seems to be so different and more focused on the special issue. Like you only have the 1,5 hours per day for your topic and that's it. Then the kids run off and then they may have something completely different for the next 1,5 hours... like hopping from one world to another. (Teacher D)

Teacher A also talked about how the physical settings diverge from the lower classes: "It was interesting to see, how different the teaching was on the higher grades than on the lower ones. We do a great deal of rhythms and songs and it is more vivid like that..."

Also some questions developed during the observations. For example Teacher C wanted to ask after the first observation, what parts of the rhythmical section are the ones repeated every morning throughout the year and which ones of the songs or poems vary. Teacher A wondered if they do artistic work with the notebooks any longer on the higher grades.

There is a small table summarising some of the preconceptions of the participants in the appendices.

### **4.3.Refreshing and inspiring experiment**

As one of the answers to my research question, these observations increased experiences on collegial work, collegiality and peer support. The participants expressed that it was really mind opening to see other colleagues at work. Like Teacher C said: “I knew that we had really good teachers here, but it was so nice to witness it myself.” These findings connect especially to the terms of collegiality and self-education to my data. Teacher B described a situation, where she had to take part to the lesson activities and it did not go as well as she had intended.

It was so much fun, so refreshing to observe these tiny human beings and your colleague’s work with them and just be amazed... wow. Fantastic. Awesome. And then it was funny when they gathered around for a morning circle - and I got along too of course – I noticed I should do these rhythmical things more... my feet and hands just went completely to wrong directions... (...) the feeling when you realise you can not do this. It was very refreshing.  
(Teacher B)

Teacher A described the difference between the lessons visited, how the mood and the atmosphere were different because of the different teacher and their style. “It was refreshing to see how much you own temperament effects on your job. Like we must work with our own temperament a lot!” Also Teacher C noticed the difference between visited lessons.

The first observed lesson’s rhythm was slower and simpler than the second one’s. During the first observation the teacher’s temperament and habits differed a lot from the second one, which was more dynamic and active. I think it is very nice for the students to see different professional with their own style and personality.  
(Teacher D)

### **4.4.New ideas and thoughts for the future**

One of my major finding was that every teacher thought it was a good idea to participate and do this kind of peer observing. All teachers longed for more co-operation and working

together. The participants emphasised the importance of 12-year Waldorf school. Three of the participants mentioned, that they would also like to do this kind of visits again in the future.

This visit gave me a lot, I have wanted to know more about what is happening on the lower grades and it is a shame that we work so separately and isolated. Everyone is so busy with their own work that we do not have enough time for things like this. It would be really useful for every subject teacher paying a visit to lower grades the same way it would be useful for the lower grade teachers to visit higher ones. Then we teachers could realise how continuous this school system of ours is! (Teacher C)

Three of the observers agreed that it would be useful to highlight more the continuousness and connection between class teachers' and subject teachers' work. Teacher B thought about the meaning of Waldorf school as a whole and how useful it would be, if we knew what the others were doing. This participant told about the difference between students that come from other schools to our high school and how their attitude differ a lot from our own students, who have been our pupils during the lower classes. In Teacher B's opinion our old pupils do not think about new teachers as threats. Co-operation and collegial work would narrow down this gap between the grades.

Our work is so dependant from class teachers' job. (...) I wonder about the social skills of the pupils, like how do you teachers do your magic? That amazing thing that happens during those eight years... when they begin the ninth grade they have grown into themselves and one can see what their attitude is towards teachers in general. In high school we can compare this own material to the ones that come from outside, you can see the difference. Our own pupils think that we all are on the same side, we do things together and there is no confrontation. (Teacher B)

Teacher B thought the visit would also help all subject teachers in their jobs. It would be useful to know the students beforehand, even if it would be just a small informative session. This kind of activity would increase co-operation, collegiality and peer support between the teachers. It would help teachers in teaching a new ninth grade, if they knew at least some of the students already.

I was wondering how nice it would be if we could do these visits more often, it would help me in my own task. Every autumn is the same situation: a whole class full of unknown students and I have like a few weeks to build up my vision of this bunch, like what they are like. (Teacher B)

Some of the lessons gave new ideas for the observers as self-educational tools. They started to think, if something similar could work in their own class or could it be helpful for other colleagues too.

I paid a lot of attention during the lesson to observe how organised everything was... like could you use this same kind of structure on the higher grades? Especially in cases when there are difficulties to keep the class focused on the subject, how much it could help. (...) Lots of us subject teachers would need help in building a new functional system. Maybe they are not that used to creating a new culture. (Teacher B)

Three of the participants expressed changing in their attitude towards colleagues. For example Teacher A and Teacher D mentioned, how it feels different now after the visit to see these colleagues in the teachers' room that you knew earlier nothing about. Now it feels like there is a new connection between them.

It was interesting to see how much the personality of the teacher effects on the lesson. This observation changed my attitude towards these two colleagues... I think I have more sympathy and love for them now that we share this experience together. I feel like I have seen them bare, real, as themselves in front of the class room and I really appreciate it that they allowed me to see them working. I felt like we have this special connection and I think about them with great warmth. (Teacher A)

I think it was really fantastic to have this kind of colleagues, who allow fellow teachers just to come and visit their lessons. That they have the trust towards peer workers, towards students and themselves like: "sure, of course you can come and observe". I think we really should do this kind of visiting more. It helps bringing colleagues together. (Teacher D)

There is a template in the appendices where I have gathered all the mentioned information considering future and reflections about their own work and feelings towards colleagues into one table.

#### **4.5. The second round narratives**

I gathered up the participants for another meeting 4-5 months after the lesson observations were made. They met for the first time and had a chance to talk freely and open-ended about their experiences. I planned to have a one group meeting with all of us four teachers, but due to our schedules it was not possible. I had to arrange one group interview and one individual one. Yet it would have been more ideal to get everyone to take part into the same discussion but in this research it was not achievable.

In the group discussion the participant started with revising when they had the visits and which classes they observed. That also helped them to remember, where they were and who they visited. Then the participants discussed freely about the feelings, the memories and the experiences they had during the lessons. After the interviews I coded the data by using open-coding method again and I found themes that helped me to categorise my second round findings. I gathered these findings into three themes: topmost experiences, working methods of a colleague, suggestions for development in the future. These three categories arose from the data while interpreting and transcribing it. There is a subchapter of second round findings with these topics.

#### **4.6. Topmost experience of the visits**

I began the interview with a question about a real, concrete example what comes to mind when they think back of the lessons. By asking this I wanted to find out, what the most meaningful event or happening was during the visits and what was the topmost experience that they remember.

Teacher B recalled the embarrassing moment of trying to participate youngsters' morning verse and rhythms. As Teacher B recalls it, " I had a very confusing and distracting experience when I tried to cope with the body rhythms because one does not simply do that sort of activity. And now when I think about it afterwards it was a wonderful thing." Another event Teacher B mentioned was the lighting up the candles. "It was around Advent season and they still had the candles they needed to light up. I was admiring the

way they handled it in order, no one was rushing and everyone did their share.” The happenings Teacher C remembered were also the morning phrases and mathematics, especially the tools they used helping out calculating.

“I was revering the morning rhythms... I think they were marvellous and I was wondering how useful that kind of action would be in the state schools also. The kids do not necessarily think why are we doing this but they are very useful, improving activities. And then it was wonderful when they used chestnuts with their calculations.” (Teacher C)

The most remarkable event during the first visited lesson for Teacher A had been seeing the awakening of the individual thinking among the teenagers. Teacher A especially described one particular student:

“Teacher B had the 12<sup>th</sup> class. They were quite... quiet. Then there was this student who gave me the impression that now they are on the edge of awakening of the individual thinking... he brought up something... concerning the topic they were dealing with... it was one could see the light of thinking shining through.” (Teacher A)

Teacher A also mentioned another episode from the second lesson. Teacher A’s second visit was a bit different because there was also the open house day on the high school level so anyone could come and observe the lessons during that day. That caused a lot of traffic during the lesson: “The other visit was during the day when the class came from P.E. and the lesson was distracted all the time... and at the same time was an open house day when everyone could come and observe the lessons. It was a different experience.”

#### **4.7. Colleagues’ working methods**

After the topmost experiences and examples, participants discussed freely about their experiences on visiting. As I interpreted my data I found out all three of my interviewees describing the teaching on their visited lesson. Teacher A’s second recollection was the sudden change in the lesson’s mood and atmosphere. Also working methods were mentioned and the way students like to test out teachers and their expertise.

“Teacher B used the blackboard and then the students took notes... they had an exam coming up. Teacher C had a projector, gave out handouts, students took notes and they had books also. They had the school desks in groups of four... it was so cramped and some of the students had their back facing the teacher. Teacher C had to encourage them to calm down many times and then suddenly it was very peaceful. It was really nice. (...) Then someone asked something about manufacturing alcohol just to try out if the teacher is capable of answering difficult questions, Teacher C just fairly replied pedantically and everyone was like yeah, we certainly have a professional as our teacher.” (Teacher A)

Teacher C has also had a chance to observe same grade lessons in a state school. According to Teacher C there had been resemblance and difference compared to these Waldorf school’s lessons. The teaching had varied but the pupils seemed to act similarly.

“It was interesting to observe what and how the children at that particular age where taught here and in state schools. I think there were some similarities and differing. (...) In both places the atmosphere was really serene. They were used to school’s manners, they worked hard and listened what teacher had to say... they were already young pupils.” (Teacher C)

The Teacher B had own experiences from Waldorf school, but they seemed to be forgotten over time.

“When I observed the math lesson the working habits and schemes were completely different than ours back then. (...) I think the working habits may vary according to the teacher but lots of it was still the same.” (Teacher B)

Later on during the interview Teacher A retold accurately about colleagues’ working methods and compared the experiences to each other; the first visit had been more ideal because the lesson had not been disturbed by outer factors. Teachers B and C had also used different kind of accessory tools in their teaching.

“ Teacher B wrote everything down on the blackboard and then started to tell and re-tell about the subject. And at the same time they sprang to mind and looked back on the previous matters... at the same time. It worked and it was very clear... and while I was there it went proceeded the whole time, the design Teacher B had. Teacher C gave back exams and the lesson started with emphasising 7 or 8 persons from the history of chemistry... like Marie Curie was one of them... I remember it well because I retold her biography to my last 8<sup>th</sup> grade students... it was quite disorganised but it was not



Teacher C's fault they had visitors. (...) One could see the teacher's personality of course, but for the other one it maybe was more peaceable day." (Teacher A)

#### **4.8. Proposals for the future**

The meaning of a long-term relationship between school and pupils is highlighted in Waldorf schools. The trust between teachers and pupils increases as they grow up together in a safe, familiar environment. Also the themes of the lower grades repeat themselves in the high school curriculum. Teacher A called for this continuum of the lower grades with the teenagers.

"I wish Teacher C would have known what some of the pupils have experienced by being in here from the first grade. (...) It would be good to know a bit more where these themes and motives evolve. Besides that I felt like this was a really good experimentation, we do not get to see each other at work enough." (Teacher A)

According to my references teachers have found it sometimes challenging to let peers into their classrooms. The participants talked about this subject in the interviews. General opinion was that peer visiting is a supportive activity and it was a privilege to be a part of this research. It was seen as an integrative maker between the lower and the higher grades.

"I think it was wonderful and I was privileged to visit your lessons, I think it was fantastic to see what is going on in the lower grades because I do not know. I have not been to Waldorf school myself and it was all new to me. And on the other hand it was also great that you came to visit my lessons. Sometimes it feels like we are so far apart with lower grades and the higher ones and for example this kind of visiting is a perfect way to show everyone that we are on a same mission here and we all work hard for these children, both the young and the older ones. I think it was great and not distressing at all. Quite the opposite." (Teacher C)

The class teacher's responsibility finishes by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. After that, a homeroom teacher is chosen and she or he will guide the teenagers until the matriculation examination. It

is a major reformation in a youngster's life and it has not been made easy for the teachers either. Participants wished for intense co-operation especially in the turn of 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

“Sometimes it is a pity when I start to teach the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and I do not know at all what they have been studying before. Yes I have the curricula but it is still completely different. It would be great if there were meetings during the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for example just to see what kind of a class it is.” (Teacher C)

Teacher B had an experience from these peer visits many years ago but somehow these trials ended up fading away. Teacher B mentioned the overall education we try to put into practice in Waldorf schools and how it easily gets forgotten in high school when you only concentrate on the thinking, forgetting the willing and feeling.

“This was something that I have been missing for so many years. And now that you mentioned it we have had a system, where you would go to observe at least a one lesson per semester, like the lower grade teachers would have visited the upper ones and vice versa. But then it somehow got forgotten. It gradually faded away when I started to work here. I think that it was a good for self-development, even though I have been to Waldorf school. It helps you to get a glimpse of what you do on the lower grades. And I feel it has an effect on me. My teaching is especially on the head area, it would essential to get a connection to the feeling part too. And to the willing too, like what are the things you can and should expect from the students. That as a teacher you demand enough but not too much.” (Teacher B)

Also the potential feedback would be desired from a peer point of view. It feels different when a professional colleague gives input from your work.

“I love it when the homeroom teachers come and observe their own class' lesson. And then if you get some feedback from it... I get a lot of feedback from the students but it is completely different when you get it from another professional. We do not get that much of positive feedback. It would be wonderful to hear someone saying *a wonderful thing, wow.*” (Teacher B)

The effect and meaning of these visits were discussed a lot. All participants longed for new observations. They mentioned several motives, why these visits would be useful and helpful for their job. Teacher C mentioned visiting lessons of one's own field: “It would be wonderful to get to observe on every grade. It would be fantastic to see how and what they have done for example on my special field...” Teacher A would like to observe teachers working with the

same age group on the lower grade. Also the love and empathy towards colleague was mentioned again and how it increased due to the observations.

“It would definitely be useful to have these kinds of visits. Like I told you before, there arose this special bond between the participants and it needs to be nourished... like the love towards your colleague. When I have seen him/her at work. At least I felt it. It does not arise during the teachers’ meetings we have, then we play a different role.” (Teacher A)

Teacher B had the same kind of thoughts about the motive for getting to know all the pupils and how it breeds empathy in the community. It improves the feeling of safety and familiarity in the school.

“It is crucial when you think about the school as a safe unity that all the teachers could see all the pupils. When you go on a break and see the kids running around I think it is just bustle. But now that I have been to your class they are more familiar to me, I can connect them to you and maybe their names like oh, these kids must be Kirsi’s... it makes a difference.” (Teacher B)

Teacher A had experienced swapping classes with colleague for a certain subject before. Teacher A thought it would be extremely important if class teachers would have the opportunity to teach other classes too. It would help them to realise how difficult the role of a subject teacher can be and increase understanding among the teachers. It would also help out building up a relationship to the pupils of another class teacher.

“If I think about my personal development as a teacher it would be fantastic to see colleagues working on the lower levels and what they do over there. It would definitely increase collegiality if peer visiting was made possible. In my opinion the class teachers should have the opportunity to teach in other classes too. Then visits would occur naturally, certain amount of hours per week. (...) And when we have our weekly teachers’ meeting they become **our** students. Then you can help out as a colleague more than now when you see other kids outside, you do not even know what they are called. (...) I know it because I have experienced it. First of all, the compassion and empathy towards the fellow teachers increases when you know what they are struggling with – and yes, sometimes it is a real struggle. Even when we teach in the same school we often wonder: why is it like this with that class or why are they behaving like that? But when you are teaching that particular class you can see why. And then the empathy awakens towards the subject teacher because suddenly you also are treated as a subject teacher. It perpetuates the whole community.” (Teacher A)

Teacher B suggested that we should make a concept out of these visits and try to get them into the yearly school program. There were many thoughts about the future and positive attitude towards repeating this kind of study. Teacher A longed for class swapping and Teacher C mentioned the critical turning point in the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade once more.

“Maybe we could propose this in our teachers’ meetings? Just to get the conversation going that we had this kind of trial and it worked out well so why should we not try it as a collegium? I see nothing but benefitting. When it is carried out not as assessing action but observing, you could just go and watch and learn like oh, he/she did it like that... and then thank you, that was interesting.” (Teacher B)

“I think it would be essential that we had the chance to teach each other’s classes. And if that does not work out at least we should visit. Especially if you are a new teacher, a beginner. One should have a chance to see what is it all about.” (Teacher A)

“I definitely support this kind of activity and I think it was great experience in every way. The only thing that was negative was that it was extremely difficult to organise mutual appointments. I hope the visits would be possible for example on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I think this is very important.” (Teacher C)

The visit on the lower grades brought up virtues in Teacher B’s everyday life and how privileged teacher are to see the big picture in children’s lives.

“It is wonderful to see the change on the upper grades. When the insecure teenagers start to bloom and then you can see how they settle in. How privileged we are to see that change. First they are noisy youngsters and then they become beautiful young adults when they graduate.” (Teacher B)

#### **4.9. Summary of findings**

As my research question I wanted to find descriptions to how class teachers and subject teachers experience visiting each other’s lessons. As I have interpreted in this chapter, all four of the participants, class teachers and subject teachers, thought peer visits were eye-opening and a good idea. They thought that the idea of observing a colleague, to get the opportunity to see what others are doing in their classrooms, was really tempting and refreshing. Even

though every participant was a first-timer in peer visiting, they agreed that teachers should have the chance do this kind of activity more often. Three of them suggested that our school should have a pattern of visits and it would become a yearly habit. One of the participants thought that swapping classes with peer teachers would be even more efficient in increasing co-operation than observing and it should be made possible for voluntary teachers. Observing each other also gave new thoughts for their own lessons or changed their thinking about teaching. The visit also could strengthen or diminish their preconceptions about the colleague. Increased co-operation and collaboration between teachers would improve the whole school as a working unit into more positive direction agreed three of the participants. The collegiality of our working community might not have been influenced by this study as the input seemed to be on congenial level with the positive descriptions and visits happened only once.

This study showed very harmonious and positive side of peer visiting. The participants did not mention negative issues or sides about these observation situations, which was quite typical for teachers as personalities according to my literature, e.g. by Barth (2006) and Evans (2012), but on the other hand it prevents growth and development. The lack of critique or negative feedback could be a sign of congenial relationships in the school, where the community has not developed into trusting and open college of teachers where they could also say about the possible negative thoughts. Every one of them seemed to be pleased they had taken part into this research and gave a great value to their fellow teacher's work. The observed teachers also thought it was nice to have visitors around and did not criticise at all having peers in their lessons. The fact that the teachers were not so familiar with each other could also affect to the congenial feedback and experiences on the observations. There is a possibility that the participants might have been too polite and discreet about their negative experiences to avoid conflicts and to stay in the congenial field (Evans, 2012, p. 101). The specific point of focus could maybe have given them an opportunity to have more neutral aspect from the visits. Also the uniqueness of the volunteers gave a certain kind of nuance to this research. The preconceptions and attitudes of the participants might already have been positive towards this kind of experience and the observations maybe strengthened them.

The possible limitations of this study were already discussed in the methods chapter. However, this was a very small study carried out in a quite concise working community. This harmony and positivity found in the data was also the reason I chose congeniality as one of my main concepts. The literature reviewed earlier in this study showed the possibility of congeniality turning into collegiality in the long run (Evans, 2012, p. 102). There could have

been better timing for the visits so that everyone could have arranged observations they had time to prepare for. We had to reschedule a couple of visits and especially the interviews due to absence of the teachers. Finding mutual time for interviews and visiting lessons seemed to be the most difficult part of this study.

As I have shown, my data is closely implicated to collegial work of teachers, congeniality and peer observation. In my research question I wanted to find out experiences and reflections on peer observation and I used lesson visits as a tool to achieve that. Peer observation was chosen as a method because it was mentioned in many articles and papers - for example by Roland S. Barth (2006), Brosnan (2003) and Evans (2012). In the next discussion chapter I create a dialogue between these lived experiences on peer observation and my reference literature.

## **5. Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to interpret how teachers experienced visiting each other's lessons in a Waldorf school. In the discussion chapter I create a dialogue between the findings of this study and the reference literature as well as the conceptual framework and the main concepts used in this research. I as a researcher will carefully try to interpret and reflect my findings and their connection to the existing data. I will also enlighten how my concepts, research design and research question are related to the findings. My research design consists of Waldorf education, collegial work and peer observation. In this discussion chapter I craft a holistic understanding of this research without proving or discrediting any concepts or theories. The main focus in this chapter is on the experiences of the teachers and their relation to reference literature.

### **5.1. Peer observation and the visits**

I chose the peer observation as a concept for this study to collect the experiences on visiting colleagues' lessons by reading Barth's (2006) and Evan's (2012) articles about gaining collegiality in school communities and because it kept on standing out from many texts - e.g. Graham et al. (2014) and Thomson et al. (2015). It was also a method for the action through which I engaged the teachers to participate into this study.

Barth (2006) clearly suggests four indicators for collegiality in schools:

1. Teachers talking with each other about practice
2. Teachers sharing their craft knowledge
3. Teachers observing each other while working and
4. Teachers encouraging and supporting each others (p. 11).

The observation could be carried out in our school by peer visits. According to my research one of the main findings was that *the participants indicated that this observation experience was fruitful and eye-opening*. Two of the participants mentioned that they have heard this kind of visiting being done in other schools and it had been discussed in our teachers' meetings too about a decade ago but the idea never developed into practice. The promoter of peer visiting had been missing. As Barth (2006) states, there is no more powerful way of learning and improving one's job than by observing and having others observe you (p. 12). This could also be easily a frightening issue for many teachers. Carroll & O'Loughlin (2014) point out that the greatest obstacle in the peer observation process is the fear of unknown (p. 452). Making the teaching mutually visible is never easy because the teachers are never confident that they know what they are supposed to be doing and are they doing it well. And they cannot be sure about the pupils' behaviour either (Barth, 2006, p.12). According to my references, some teachers have felt it really disturbing or inconvenient to have visitors in their classroom, but all my participants were enthusiastically taking part. That could also bring out some questions. For example Evans (2012) reports that most of the teachers are not ideally eligible for collaboration. So according to him, most of my colleagues could have declined my proposal to attend. And all of them were first-timers. However, trained Waldorf teachers have chosen a path where the collaboration and co-operation with adults is more inclusive. The teacher meetings in Waldorf schools can be administrative and the collaboration with parents is presumably more intense than in completely state-funded schools. Most of the Waldorf schools have their own PTA, Parent Teacher Association, and the seasonal celebrations and parents' meetings may be regular (Rawson & Richter 2000, p. 39). Conversely, the co-operation between the teachers during the lessons might be non-existent in the Walford field, as I discovered when searching for the participants for this study -there is no simultaneous teaching actualising by class teachers and specialised teachers.

Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014) suggest that once the school community has become familiar with the peer observation process, they become key advocates of the process are more confident in selecting their next observers (p. 453). As I discovered as one of my main findings all the participated teachers suggested that visiting a colleague's lesson was a positive experience. Why they all thought it was a successful try out? One of the things that greatly affected to their attitude was the enthusiasm and eagerness to take part into this study. I think the starting point for this kind of experiment was already positive, when all the teachers I asked to visit and interview were favourably interested in participating. Maybe their



thoughts and preconceptions about peer visits were positive beforehand and the participants for this research were exceptionally excited about these visits. However, teachers had not done peer visits before, so on the other hand they did not know what to expect on the basis of their earlier experiences. In general, teaching is viewed as a very private and individual exercise and revealing one's own teaching approaches to colleagues could be a challenging experience. Participating teachers may not know what to expect from peer observation and where the gathered information could be used especially when they have not done peer observation before (Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014, p. 452).

## **5.2. Isolation of teachers and their well-being**

One of the main findings was the fact that *the participants were doing these peer visits for the first time*. Even the teachers who had decades of experience behind them had not done experiments like this before. Teaching is such a peculiar craft. As McClure (1988) already suggested decades ago, the structure of schools can lead to isolation when teachers are working independently in their own classrooms. Also Hoerr (2015) argues that schools are too often like “boxes full of silos”, buildings of closed doors and isolated teachers working by themselves. Feedback from other adults, common planning time and collaborative learning are all too rare (p. 88). “The professionals managing everything by themselves behind the closed doors of the classrooms” has been the traditional way of teachers’ problem solving, without any peer support or consulting other parties (Dettmer et al., 2004, p. 4). Through the new design of simultaneous teaching educators are finally beginning to co-operate with each other also inside the classrooms. But this reform is mostly trending in Scandinavia. For example in the U.S, teachers are still working most of the time in their own cubicles and meet peer teachers randomly during their coffee breaks. Even then one can choose if spend that five-fifteen minutes by yourself or chatting with fellow workers. The physical structure in schools can also be supporting independency in teaching. The form of the classroom, unpredictability and social dimensions make teaching involving and individualistic

occupation. Much of what educators do is personal and they develop their own unique instructional repertoire (Evans, 2012, p. 100).

However, the increasing trend of co-teaching and teamwork is constantly growing in the educational field. Teachers are no longer spending their days alone with the class, but there are two or three teachers sharing tasks. Unfortunately this tendency has yet not made its way to the funding of Waldorf schools in Finland. Maybe one of the main reasons hindering it down might be the lack of curriculum supporting co-teaching. Waldorf education might also be seen as quite teacher-led form of education.

Observing peers can also help teachers to get ideas for their own work. Graham et al. (2014) suggest, that staff can learn about new teaching practices from their observation experiences and develop motivation and confidence to use these strategies successfully in their own teaching (p. 325). Peer observation can be a mutual action where both, the observer and the observed gain in e.g. self-awareness, perspective and new ideas (Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014, p. 447). One of the main findings of this research suggested *that the participants gained something out from these visits*. They indicated that it was very inspiring to see colleagues at work; observing might have given them new tips and ideas for their own work or a feeling of increased familiarity with the fellow teacher. As one of the teachers said, visiting fellow teachers' lessons inspired to try and think about new ways of teaching in their own lessons too. As Graham et al. (2014) note about peer observation, watching pupils' reactions and level of engagement in their colleague's teaching situation helps peers perceive which strategies work and are worth trying. Teachers can learn about new teaching practices from their observation experiences and develop confidence and motivation to use these techniques and strategies successfully in their own teaching (p. 325). This could be realised also by this research. One of the interviewees told how the visit encouraged studying more and updating knowledge about Waldorf pedagogy. In Finland the gap between class teachers and subject teachers in Waldorf schools can be significant. The class teachers graduate from Snellman College after four years of studying and are qualified for teaching classes 1-8. For the grades 9-13 the teachers are graduated from universities without any compulsory knowledge of Waldorf pedagogy. This was one of the main reasons why I wanted to carry out this study, to bring co-operation and concrete interaction between Waldorf teachers and subject teachers. As I mentioned earlier, this study was really the first time for every participating teacher to observe a colleague's lesson and they all thought it was a positive experience. One of the participants had been swapping classes with a peer class teacher. This had been seen as an

extremely useful experimentation. The participant thought that this kind of class swapping would be even more useful than observing for professional self-development.

As one of my findings I presented that the participants suggested that *teachers should do more peer visiting in schools*. As Thomson, Bell and Hendry (2015) suggested by peer observation, even “just watching” a colleague’s teaching was seen useful for development and many of the observers had learned at least one new teaching strategy (pp. 1060-1061). So as we do our collegial work in Waldorf school with each other as a teacher community, we could strengthen personal relations by peer visiting. The participants mentioned that this kind of activity and collaboration could help to narrow down the gap between class teachers and subject teachers. Now they also had the chance to observe, even for a small moment, the pupils who will possibly attend their classes in a few years. Two of the participating teachers suggested that it would be very helpful for them and make their teaching slightly easier in the future if they had an idea what the new classes were like.

### **5.3. Collegiality and congeniality**

Why do we need collegiality in schools? After all, it is an organisation consisting of individuals who work almost autonomously in a same building. Most of the teachers work with mutual classes but with their own turn, not simultaneously. But we still need to decide and discuss about shared and mutual issues concerning the school and people in it. Bengtsson (2014) suggests that collegiality is the least common form of relationship among adults in schools. Instead of collegiality there is congeniality, which is about getting along well and being friendly (p. 2). For schools or any community, it might be easier to stay in the congenial level and not take it to the personal level. As Gill (2010) represents it, all organisations are functioning as social organisms created by human beings. For example schools can be seen as a reflection or projection of the people working in them (p. 28). Especially our school staff as Waldorf educators should have the ability to work together as we share the same worldview and look at the human from a holistic perspective. Woods and Woods (2006) mentioned that teaching in Waldorf schools is not far from leadership and governance. The meetings of the

colleague of teachers are more than business meetings; they are also a place for collegial studying, activities and decision-making. The weekly collegial meeting could also include shared meditative work like artistic working and studying spiritual verses or mentoring (p. 321). Rawson (2011) notes that the authority structure of a Waldorf school is peer-accountable delegation; a healthy community that values individuals and individuals value the community (p. 3). As I have pointed out earlier in this research teachers' meetings in Waldorf schools might be more essential than in state schools because teachers have more power in decision-making and more liability on the school's issues. And with the power comes responsibility: as Bento (2015) mentioned, this responsibility may bring struggles with administrative issues (p. 4).

Founding Waldorf school almost a hundred years ago Steiner highlighted the importance of a healthy balance between the idealism and flexibility. The teachers should not adjust to following orders of the principal but to become an active part of problem solving and take full responsibility of the actions. As Karutz (2001) suggested, we as humans have become too used to this passive, lifeless form of pyramidal social environment and the future needs different kind of administration (p. 52). The organisations that are based on the traditional pyramidal structure also suffer from conformity and mistrust. In the long run that design can alter organisations into becoming sticky, less innovative with even less internal commitment (Argyris, 1999, p. 108). Collegial action requires activity, and that always needs an effort. There was also a term of pseudocommunity, which mostly describes communities working well based on congeniality by playing community in the beginning (Grossmann et al., 2001, p. 20).

As Brüll (1997) suggests, handing out mandates and appointment of managers seems to become more common in Waldorf schools. This has also been seen as an action of managerialism if the power accumulates on certain group of people of individuals. The mandates might also get too complicated if the job description is inaccurately defined, Brüll (1997) mentions (p. 47). According to Rawson and Richter (2000) there is a lot of variability in management practices in Waldorf schools. They note that almost all schools that have passed the pioneering stage are working through delegation. It means the individual teachers and groups have their own areas of responsibility. The college of teachers is responsible for the quality of teaching and is collegially in charge of all the tasks that usually concern the job description of a principal (p. 38). On the other hand Rawson (2011) suggests that some of the positions are privileged in Waldorf schools. The separation can occur e.g. between novices

and experienced teachers or class teachers and subject teachers. Even though there is collegial and non-hierarchical structure within Waldorf schools, the informal structures may shape the practice (p. 12). In this study this kind of inequality in peer relations could not be noticed through the observations. There could not be detected any kind of separation between the experiences on subject/class teachers or novice/experienced ones. Maybe this study stayed on the congenial level of interaction, so that the more critical opinions and suggestions were not said aloud.

The difference between *collegiality* and *congeniality* in schools could have been the main issue on my research, because this gap between these concepts fascinates me a lot -how can we define when congeniality in a working community turns into collegiality? Or how to specify an action being significant for increasing collegiality? How and when does the congenial co-operation turn into collegial activity? According to Barth, collegiality is the *least* common form of relationship among adults in schools. Instead they have congeniality. It is about getting along well, being friendly, warm and supportive. Schools are loaded with good teachers who are good-natured and care about each other. Without this kind of mutual supportiveness schools would turn into deeply unhappy places (Evans, 2012, p. 100). However, this kind of behaviour or action does not provide attention to growth or development. True collegial work means also ability to talk frankly and to disagree constructively. As Evans (2012) mentions, this is not an easy task for teachers (p. 100). Heijne and Buck (2013) suggested that there is a lack of clarity and inclusivity in decision-making in Waldorf schools. There should be increasing of transparency and effectiveness in schools and communities (p. 27). Nonetheless this study was about receiving and getting experiences on peer observation and those experiences may not have any or a little influence on a couple of individuals in our school. If I made a research of collegiality or congeniality in general in our school the study should have had to be a lot broader and long-lasting. However, the participating teachers wanted to have their say about co-operation and collegial issues in our school. Like Carroll and O'Loughlin (2013) concentrated in their study on the experiences of first-time participants before and after collegial observation of a lesson. In this report their findings concentrated on appreciation and benefits of peer observation of teaching, or "POT" as the researchers shortened the term. POT was seen as a way to unite and seek valuable information and feedback from beginners and more experienced lecturers. These experiences and feedbacks among other educational tools help the beginners to become more confident and effective educators, Carroll and O'Loughlin (2013) notice (p. 451).

The uniqueness and peculiarity of teaching situations mould teachers into artists who need to be awake and adapt the content of the lesson constantly. That also means that they need to work autonomously and independently (Evans, 2012, p. 102). This starting point already presents a complex relation to collegial work and collegiality. As I already mentioned in my literature chapter, teachers have chosen to work with youngsters and children. I think very few of them have been thinking that the co-operation or collaboration between the colleagues or parents would be the reason for them to become a teacher. Teaching and working with younger ones is mainly the motive. It could be that dealing with other adults is considered as compulsory. Teachers might enjoy spending their working days among children. Collaboration skills with other adults might not be so advanced.

When the participants told about the lesson in the interviews after their visits, they all used adjectives to describe the experience as “funny”, “wonderful” and “nice”. These terms gave specific descriptions to my research question in which I asked about how fellow teachers experienced the peer visits. With these adjectives participants describe the whole atmosphere in the classroom, reflect their own feelings and the rising emotions towards the fellow teacher. I did not ask my participating teachers to evaluate or assess their colleagues’ work afterwards, but as my analysis chapter and data showed, they all described their experiences by positive descriptions, including their colleague’s role as a teacher. So in a way even though we did not have a feedback session in this research the teachers still carried out a certain kind of evaluation by their own congenial descriptions about the lessons. The topic of this study was to map out the experiences of the observers and their reflections of the lessons. The constructive feedback session would have been necessary if the research was about developing the observations or a method for peer visiting. It would have also required another round of visits, so that the observed could have used the given feedback and develop his or her teaching based on the assessment. As Gardner (2006) describes, a good design with feedback opportunities and also the possibility to do something with the feedback would have been needed (p. 89).

For the participated teachers these visits were a unique experience where they could have a glimpse of peers’ daily work. The reflection on their experiences after the visits enlightened the topmost of their observations. If these kind of visits were regular based, I think the focus would naturally transfer more into the observed teacher. Maybe the observed one would also ask for feedback. In the future, this kind of experiments could encourage participants to more versatile feedback as teachers got more familiar with the peer visiting. If the design for the

visits was carefully made, constructed and put into practice it would enable feedback sessions without personal offences or tension.

In my data and findings I interpreted no difference between the reflections and experiences about the lesson if the teachers knew each other well beforehand or not. Or whether they had been working for decades as teachers or a shorter time. So the personal relationship between peer teachers did not seem to have an effect on their experiences on the lessons. As Evans (2012) also wrote in his article, teachers really want to avoid conflicts. They are not competitive or risk takers. Most teachers wish to foster, encourage and inspire children to aim for the best and to become individuals with a holistic perspective of life. Teachers want to love and be loved. As mentioned in the analysis chapter, also in this *study the data showed very congenial experiences*. Congenial relationships are personal and friendly. They represent the precondition for highly awarded form of adult relationship: collegiality (Barth, 2006, p. 11).

Also according to some of my references importance of collegiality can be connected to effectiveness and well-being in schools. For example Hoaglund et al. (2014) suggest that collegiality and effectiveness are closely connected concepts in the educational field. Having a practical and an active role was seen even more effective way of building up co-operation and collegiality than passive part taking and observation. Collegial support and interaction socialise with work satisfaction. Collegial collaboration, like sharing knowledge, assists teacher effectiveness and even student achievements (p. 524). So in all, teachers' well-being and wellness effects on numerous issues and areas in the entire educational field.

As for my concepts I mentioned collegiality and congeniality, peer visits, teachers and Waldorf education. Collegiality could be defined as “working well with colleagues” or “demonstrating good academic citizenship” (Haag, 2005, p. 59). In the study the participating teachers thought that visits were good and refreshing experiences and they could be a helping method in the progress of increasing collegiality. The participants thought visits could increase co-operation and strengthen the connection between the lower class teachers and subject teachers. As one of my interviewees mentioned, the participants could now see each other in a different light than before the visits -they share a special connection and a bond that did not exist before. They also said that now they have more empathy and warmer thoughts towards colleagues when they have seen them at their work, giving their best and all for the students.



However, this kind of a small empirical qualitative study cannot make a huge difference in a long run. This could have been the pioneer work of a slight taste of peer visiting and observation. The participating teachers seemed to articulate on a very good-natured field of adjectives and definitions. In all the findings of this study everything seemed to be very harmonious and positive. There is an absence of critical and developmental opinions towards this visiting experience. To get into more detail in increasing collegiality communities need to make visits regularly and they need to be structured. For example there could be a certain focus that the observing teacher could concentrate on. The idea of teacher-driven observation (TDO) could be interesting to try out as a part of teachers' self-developmental work. Kaufman and Grimm (2013) described the method in their book as a way for teachers to take charge of their own development and effectiveness; it could be arranged the same way as these observing visits. The main difference to this research and TDO was in the starting point: in TDO the focus of the observing comes from the observed teacher and it is mainly on the teaching itself.

In a larger research sample the variability of reflections and experiences could have been broader. This kind of a small study just unfolded four participants' feelings and knowledge of observing. In a larger sampling and long-term researching I believe the findings could be more critical and crucial. Defining this research to focus on the experiences of the observers might have had an influence on findings. If I had included feedback sessions of the teaching participant into this study the outcome could have been way more critical and diverse. Then I would also had to concentrate more on the assessment issues of the observations. There could have been interesting experiences on peer observations with a feedback sessions or a sustained study about collegiality in our school. However, my research question was addressed to observing teachers how they experienced visiting colleague's classroom and focus on their reflections of the lessons. My second round interviews opened up the participants' reflections and experiments more intensively. In the analysis chapter I have dealt with the data I collected via interviews and brought them together as findings of my research.

Collegiality could also be seen in a negative light as Haag has wrote in her article (2005), when the term has been used in a way to discriminate people according to their ethnic background or gender. In my research I did not meet this kind of discrimination of colleagues in any way. Our Waldorf school as a working environment is very homogeneous and unilateral compared to many multicultural or versatile schools or working places. The whole



working atmosphere and starting point could have been completely different if I had run this research in some other school in Finland.

The problem with collaboration projects in general could be that they try to do too much with unsuitable methods. Koehler (1996) suggested in his article that unorganised and unfamiliar programs, which are meant to promote collaboration, often fail to increase collegiality and do the opposite. In my research the sampling and method were so compact that these kinds of issues or problems did not occur. If an outsider or an administrator conducted this whole research, compositions could have been quite different. Maybe the participants who now wanted to attend would have not been so keen to take part if someone unfamiliar to them would have asked to participate in a research. Now the idea and effort came from inside the school and was conducted by an equal. Maybe that also helped out teachers to accept the invitation to participate. On the other hand some may prefer to do this kind of agenda and experiments with outsiders and unknown people. All teachers I asked to be involved in this study agreed for the interviews and observing.

Before I conducted the visits I thought about arranging a meeting after each visits for the both participants where they could discuss and communicate about the lesson. If there were feedback sessions, they would have been constructive. Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014) describe constructive feedback sessions as non-judgemental and detailed, supported by concrete examples and evidence. Peer observers should act as critical friends so that rich, constructive and meaningful insights into teaching practice can be discussed (p. 453). If the feedback session was included in this study it would have been reasonable to have another round of observations too, so that the possible impact of the feedback session could have been studied. However I decided to leave this part out of my study because it could have brought tension and created more pressure for the teaching participant. If the teacher was assessed or evaluated after the lesson it would have required an entirely new perspective into this research. Maybe the excitement and anxiety of a possible fail would have made authenticity vanish from the visits.

When I think about myself as a teacher it would have brought a completely new level of seriousness into this research if I had known to be evaluated somehow after the observation. I would have been more excited and tense and concentrated more on the visitor and his/her thoughts about my lessons. Now when I knew that I do not need to confront the visitor after the lesson I was more relaxed and acted more spontaneously. It could have complicated the

visitor's part too if the observer was expected to give feedback or critique after the lesson. I think concentrating on the personal experiences gave a change for all participants to be more natural and relaxed in the research situation.

#### **5.4. Thoughts for the future**

If Barth's (2006) saying about the relationships is competent about how relations interrelate in schools, then the general atmosphere in our school should be enthusiastic, polite and tentative. According to Barth the relationships between the educators define all relationships within the school. If the participating teachers' attitudes described the whole collegium of teachers through my research, the working environment could be described as enthusiastic and devoted, polite and tentative. But as good as it sounds, of course it is not the whole picture. These teachers took part to this one time experiment and already the enthusiasm of being able to observe colleagues in action might bring out the positive vibe in the participants. This kind of collaboration between teachers should improve collegiality and co-operation in schools and between fellow workers.

It would also be important that colleagues learned to disagree constructively. True collegiality would allow peers to have their own opinions and disagreements. When you have a trusting relationship with someone you can express yourself freely without thinking if others are going to judge you by your opinions or not. If a working place is functioning so fit or correctly that one cannot express feelings or real thoughts, then collegiality cannot evolve. In Evans' (2012) article the writer suggested that generally in schools teachers tend to have congeniality instead of collegiality. This congeniality, like I already set out in the literature chapter, is about getting along with the colleagues, being friendly and supportive towards peer teachers. However, congeniality supports the culture of niceness and privacy, so in a way it also builds boundaries between fellow workers. It is easier to be passive if you keep polite distance to others. But this kind of culture does not sustain collegiality. Like Evans (2012) mentioned in his text, "true collegiality requires more than being cordial and caring. It requires a focus on development and performance" (p. 100). This means that co-workers should be more open

and share their experiences with the colleagues about their work as a whole. Teachers should build up trust in one another. Without co-operation any kind of trust cannot be developed. And as Murray (2011) mentioned in his article about building strong collaborative relationships in schools, teachers should work over the classroom boundaries by observing each other's teaching, plan lessons together, share knowledge and assess students and their effort together (p. 19). This would help to break down the teacher isolation. But this kind of action needs will and time. It all has to start from internal will and urge or it will lead nowhere. If teachers did not have eagerness to change working community for better no external instruction or means will do the trick. Noddings (2014) suggested the collaboration between the teachers and students. According to her, mutual meetings with colleagues and students coming from different disciplines encourages thinking beyond their individual specialities and make connections to the great questions of human life. If high schools practiced this kind of collegiality they would raise the intellectual level and understanding of teachers and students (p. 16).

In the future I would be interested in the idea of teacher-driven observation (TDO). By using that as a method, teachers already have premeditated questions for the observer and they mainly focus on them. The observer and observed work together as a team trying to solve an issue or a problem. The impulse for the peer visits comes from the observed teacher so it is also voluntary-based. Kaufman and Grimm (2013) have been writing a book about the method to help teachers to take charge in their own work and to support self-development.

## **5.5. Summary of discussion**

This study showed that the peer observation was seen as a positive experience. It also suggests that peer observation could be used as a tool for professional development on collegial and individual level. Teachers attended got more interested in their fellow teacher's work. They reflected their care about the place they work in. And as one of the teachers suggested, after this observing it felt like now the teachers have a special connection or a bond, a unique experience they are sharing with each other. Is there a permanent impact of

this study to the participants? I hope this experience gave something to them that they can exploit in the future. Whether it was the new ideas for their own work or a new perspective to co-operate with colleagues. Or a well deserved break from their own daily routine. Did this research change something for good? Maybe it was just a scratch of something greater we could focus on as a colleague of teachers. My own expectations are that I would really like to further peer visiting into our yearly teaching schedule. I hope that my colleagues value collegiality and collaboration so that these kinds of experiments would continue in our school and maybe spread out into other Waldorf schools too. The field of Waldorf education in Finland is so concise that good ideas can easily be shared with others.

I think the major achievement of this study might have been the potential utilisation of this kind of peer support and observing in the future. I will present my research in our teacher's meeting and hopefully it will bring forth discussion around this subject. The best influence of this study for the future would be possible usage of this kind of activity in our yearly planning and schedules. Every teacher should have a chance to observe one another. Another question is that should these visits be on a volunteer basis. I have had a discussion about this already with my colleagues and this matter brings out opinions for and against. Some of the teachers think it would be better if these visits were obligatory for everyone so that every teacher participates, no questions asked. On the other hand forcing might bring out some obstacles and create resistance, when the whole point of gaining collegiality and further collaboration disappears. However if this kind of observing were volunteer-based, would there be any participants? And after the observing, should there be some kind of discussion with the observed if it is no longer part of a research and interviews are not taking place? This idea still needs to be discussed and thought about carefully.

I could say that this study was closely related to my conceptual framework of Waldorf education, collegial work and teacher well-being. Nodding (2013) suggests that collegiality among teachers encourages general well-being and common purpose. This kind of research could have an impact on general attitudes in the working community, but it would require the participation of the whole staff. It could increase the familiarity, teacher co-operation and collaboration. It would also advance self-education. Evans (2012) also supports my findings about the attitude towards peers through visiting. He suggests that visits increase mutual valuation. When teachers observe each other at work, they gain and express new appreciation for colleague's skills. And eventually it will help colleagues know one another better, increase trust and help to discuss about important matters. However, in this research the participants

suggested only positive feedback. Maybe in a long run the visits would bring forth some negative issues or areas that we need to improve. One quick peek to a peer's world did not enable complete revolution on peer observation but opened up a small approach to it. Evans also points out that even a single round of visiting makes an improvement (p. 104). In the research I discovered that observing peers was seen as a positive experience. With my study I can also support Evans' statement about making a difference. I believe that even this one time experiment had a small impact on the teachers and I wish that as many teachers possible could have the opportunity and willing to participate into this kind of research if they only got a chance. Even if it felt like stepping into "uncomfortable zone", I really think that it would be worth it.

In all, this research suggested that the peer visits were seen as a positive experience. Peer visits could be a part of a program for developing congeniality into collegiality in school communities. In this chapter I have shown how my references and my findings can be combined into a dialogue through my conceptual framework and concepts, such as collegial work, congeniality, peer visits and teacher co-operation. The aim of gaining collegiality is a living process. It is an on-going development that needs engaging and commitment of the whole working organisation. All teachers should be determined to gain collaboration and advance collegiality with their own actions. With this study I scratched a little of the surface what communities can work with when aiming for teachers' collegial and individual well-being.

In this chapter I built a connection between the findings of this study and the literature references. There could be seen similarities, correlation and reflections as well as divergences but in all the thoughts and voices of the participants came forth. In the conclusion chapter I will outline the outcome of this research and my own reflections on the research question, findings and discussion. I also present the recommendations for further research around this topic.

## 6. Conclusion

In this research I mapped out reflections on visiting peer teacher's lessons by interviewing Waldorf teachers after the observations in the classroom: how would they describe and reflect on their experiments? Could peer observation be used as a tool for continuous self-development and gaining collegiality in the collegium later on? Would teachers be ready for this kind of experiment again? By this research I enlightened the importance of individual and collegial development in school communities and the possibility of peer observation in assisting to gain that. The findings of this study helped to highlight the positive attitude towards peer visiting and collaboration.

In this research I mapped out reflections on visiting peer teacher's lessons by interviewing Waldorf teachers after the observations in the classroom. The conclusions of the research comply with the research question and the major findings, which were summarily

1. peer visits were a positive experience
2. there were surprising elements during every session and all participants were first-timers in visiting colleague's lesson
3. teachers felt like they gained something through observation
4. participated teachers would like to do more peer visiting in Waldorf schools
5. peer visiting could assist in developing interaction between teachers from congenial into more collegial direction.

In the discussion chapter I conversed on the findings of this study in relation to the reference literature and conceptual framework. In the conclusion chapter I reflect the findings and draw conclusions based on the referenced literature and findings of this research. This chapter will also present the limitations of this study throughout the chapter. First I concentrate on the observation and teachers. Then I continue to my own opinions and reflections.

Recommendations for further research and final reflections can be found at the end of this chapter.

## 6.1. Observation and teachers

I have been given a lot of thought to this study and how I ended up doing research via observation. This was not an interaction based research but focused on personal experiments and observing. Somehow involving peer teachers into this research as observers also fascinated me while researching the area of congenial and collegial relations.

Would the findings have been the same if we had done something else, for example group meetings or something practical together as colleagues? Could that have increased the feeling of collaboration and empathy? This observing method I was more focused on the personal ideas and thoughts the visits arose in the participating teachers.

According to the attendants even without sharing a word or a conversation with the teacher the interviewees were observing, they could feel more connected to that teacher and more empathic towards him or her. Maybe it was some how identifying to see their colleagues at work, to imagine themselves to the same situation and with the same task. If they all had the experience of how demanding it can be, the respect and empathy could already have awoken because of them. To see your colleague at their best, concentrating on the thing they are good in or doing something they love might give an impulse also for the observer to feel the positive vibration. And the teacher's attitude came across to the observer as something real and valuable.

Why were the experiences scored so positive? One of the participants mentioned the arisen love towards the colleague during and after the visit in both interviews. Perhaps the participating into this unique experiment and be part of it already gives a positive starting point to the trial. To be a part of something for the first time, being a new and fresh experimentation might give you a sanguine datum for the whole research. The personal relationship between peer teachers seemed not to effect on their experiences on the lessons. On the other hand, if you do not know the person and you are doing something for the very first time, you want to be polite and maybe slightly correct; in other words you are congenial. If you have met your colleagues in a teachers' room just for a quick "good morning" or "hello" it could feel a little awkward to observe your peer direct or strictly outspoken. As Evans (2012) also wrote in his article, teachers really want to avoid conflicts. They are not competitive or risk takers. Most teachers wish to foster, encourage and inspire children to aim

for the best and to become individuals with a holistic perspective of life. Teachers want to love and be loved. Also taken this perspective into view, teachers who are not familiar each other might tend to stay on a congenial level when giving feedback from the lessons. It would take more time and effort to get into more trusting and transparent level of collegiality where also criticism occurred.

The second major finding was that participating teachers had not experienced peer observation before. During the lessons they discovered something surprising for themselves. When participants mentioned that there were surprising events during the lessons I think it suggests two possibilities; either they had quite precise preconceptions about the lessons or then they did not have any. The participants without preconceptions possibly entered the classroom open-minded and interested. On the other hand the surprising elements may have evolved because they had preconceptions that did not actualise during the lessons.

In this study the fact that participants were all first-times might have affected to the findings being so praising. Perhaps participants were so excited to get the opportunity to enter each other's lessons that they were already very positively charged towards this whole experiment. That is why I suggest that teacher peer observation should be carried out frequently so that it would become more of a habit so that teachers would have to shake off preconceptions and they would get more realistic experiences –maybe that could make way from congenial relations into collegial ones. Would a feedback session have changed teachers' positive attitudes? Or modify their reflections into more critical? This would have been an interesting area also to look deeper into.

After this experiment I had a brief discussion with my colleagues from other Waldorf schools in Finland. I asked if they had done this kind of research or peer visiting in their own schools. None of the schools had done any. I really think that was the revealing and stunning moment for me to realise, that something so simple and widely recommended procedure had never been used in any of those Waldorf schools. Could this be because of the authority and respect, the privacy of the class teacher that no one should ever visit their lessons or the magic will somehow disappear or the pupils will be disturbed? Waldorf teachers have such an authority in their own teaching, they can merely decide if someone can observe the lesson or not. But peer visiting could be helpful for the teacher too even though it can be really exciting and thrilling to let someone observe you while you are doing your job. According to my research the participants indicated that this observation experience was fruitful and eye-opening. I



think it would be worth a try even though it might first feel like it is outside of comfort zone. I think the major reason for not having done this kind of activity before was the lack of time and effort.

Teaching is so individual and personal. Maybe some teachers could take the idea of being observed too intrusively and that colleagues come to their classroom and observe them at their work. When I think about people working in other professions and asking them to participate to a study where not so well-known colleague would observe you at your work, it does not sound so tempting. Maybe it has something to do with the character of teachers in generally.

The new role as an observer could have been refreshing and interesting to the teachers who were used to be in front of the class and run the show. During this study they could just relax, sit back and enjoy. They were the receivers, not the conductors. The possibility to identify in a role of a student could work as an awakening and refreshing experience. The same idea of natural settings was the reason I defined my research to discover only the visitor's experiences.

One of the participants mentioned, that peer visits could give teachers a chance to have a glimpse of the future students beforehand to get the idea, what will the new classes be like. Then it would not be a whole new pack of teenagers at once when the time comes but there are already some familiar faces. However, in my opinion this could advance labelling of students and turn the whole idea into negative confrontation. If all teachers know the students from the first grade the kids might never get the chance to start over or be reformed in the way they could need it. It could happen that certain students have their labelling, e.g. of a noisy or a shy student from the first year on.

## **6.2. My own reflections on observation**

In my personal experience I felt really privileged to have an opportunity to observe my fellow teachers. It was a new and exciting feeling to watch professional at their work. I felt emotional; the amount of empathy, sympathy and respect that arose towards the colleague was

grand. And the pupils and students I never had any relationship with – they all were lovable and likeable. Was it because of the observation and collaboration that I felt this kind of social cohesion with my peer teachers and unfamiliar children? Just because we happen to work in a same place I already felt connected to them? Or because I had the preconception that the visiting will be fun and interesting, did that effect on my experiences? Probably all of these mentioned, but as my research question I wanted to map out experiences on peer visits and so I did –all the experiences that participants mentioned were as valuable. There are no right or wrong answers in a qualitative research; all the experiences were correct and legitimate.

In my opinion this observing situation did not differ from a situation when you have visitors, for example interns or trainees in your classroom -and I think every teacher has had some. As a Waldorf class teacher in Finland, all of us graduated have spent many months in classrooms practicing and observing class teachers at their work. I have had many class teacher trainees following my lessons and classes for a whole semester. So in a way I consider myself and my class as “used to visitors”, and it does not effect on their or my behaviour if we have someone extra in the classroom. Things can be different with the subject teachers. There is practical training also included within the subject teachers’ training but there might be teachers, who have had very few trainees observing them after their graduation if at all. So the only experience on observing might be the practical internship during studying years. And maybe opening up your classroom and lesson for another adult for a visit could be a distressing thought. Maybe one can feel uncomfortable with the subject of the day or feel like someone is there to judge and evaluate your teaching. One could think that am I good enough, is my teaching well prepared, did I mention everything important or forgot something, or things that make you insecure about yourself and your teaching. In general I think that teaching is quite lonely work. You make all the preparations for the lessons by yourself, you are in action in front of the class by yourself, and you normally get feedback from no-one except maybe from the students at the end of your course if you remember to ask for it. And normally if the parents contact you it is mostly because of something has happened or they need information about something. So generally speaking I think it would be more useful for the teachers to have some peer support and visitors even though it might feel weird in the beginning.

Colleagues and peer teachers can cover the same areas and issues in teaching but in a whole different ways. I think that the major part of teaching is highly personal and unique, the teaching situation never repeats itself flawlessly even with the same circumstances. It is a form of art, a one-time performance and the artist must co-operate at least with the

environment, situation, equipment, crowd, atmosphere and time. Considering that plus the whole content and point of teaching is quite a lot to handle. And this kind of “magic” happens all the time in teaching. Every teacher has their own style and habits and compared to other working organisations, teachers *can* work individually. Schools can function and run without teacher co-operation and collegiality. How well teachers feel themselves or they are in that kind of working community is a whole different issue. In my opinion it would be great if these great artists could share their knowledge and information with each other. In a working organisation full of independent individuals, it could make the community as a whole stronger and unite. And that is when collegiality and collaboration is needed, not congeniality.

### **6.3. New ideas and the limitations of the study**

The third one of the listed findings suggested that the participants gained something from these visits. They mentioned for example feeling more empathic towards colleagues and discovering teaching tips for their own lessons. The research gave an opportunity for a quick peek to each other’s lessons. Maybe this kind of action could open up a path for a conversation in a school community about co-operation and peer teaching in general. These visits could help out emerging versatile co-operation. Teachers would get to know each other better and maybe in the long run it would help transforming congenial relations into more collegial ones. Maybe teachers would be encouraged to swap classes, teach together or share knowledge.

I wanted also to find out does this kind of visiting activity have any effect on working environment in general. The visits were seen useful on the individual level and for the future of collaboration and co-operation. The participants felt more connected to each other after the visits. If we really would like to increase the familiarity and the safety feeling among the whole school this is the sort of action we should pay more focus on. The co-operation of the teachers reflects into the whole community. If the teachers are enjoying themselves in their working environment it also effects the children. I recommend that we should not forget this trial as a one-timer but make it a part of our yearly program of gaining collegiality. I will also

present my research in teachers meeting and strongly recommend that we would continue visits even on a small scale.

Deeper and more instructive peer observations emerge when teachers have an agreement before the visits. For example visits are mutual and made both ways, everything is confidential, focus of the visit and time for discussion and feedback afterwards (Barth, 2006, p. 12.) I think there are many good ideas and systems that just never get into practice and it is mainly due to activity and interest of the school staff: some of the ideas find their way and conductor into practice of even everyday school life. It would also be nice to have a trial with teacher-driven observation (TDO) method too to reflect teachers' experiences on it.

The main limitation of this study was the liberty of executing it. As I collected the experiences from the visits by using open-ended questions, the connection to collegial development and observation as a method was taken lesser into account because the main focus was on the experiences. The link to individual and communal development and achieving collaboration between the teachers was defaulted because of the lack of feedback sessions and performance appraisals. The connection to collegiality and professional development could have been drawn if there would have been structured gatherings after the visits with clear topics of discussion. However, the feedback sessions are useless unless the observed teachers are able to do something with them. So if there was a feedback session after the observations it would have required discussions and at least one more round of observations. According to Gardner (2006), after the first round of observations and a feedback session there should be another one based on the interpretation of the responses followed by another feedback session (p. 88). This kind of assessment would require a different kind of research question and method, but the design would be more explicit and coherent.

It would also be interesting to study if peer visiting has any effect on teacher well-being. The wellness of teachers and schools as working communities are very good reasons for gaining collegiality and teacher co-operation. Decisions cannot be made if the members do not get along. And as they say: the whole school reflects the well-being and atmosphere of teachers. If the educators work well together, the whole school works well together.

## **6.4. Recommendations for further research on the subject**

As one recommendation for further research project in the future I would suggest an action research with teachers teaching each other's classes. It would also be nice to discover, if the experiences would be different if class teachers observed each other at work and subject teachers would be observing their peers. Would the reflections and the thoughts from the lessons vary much when the observers are more familiar with the subjects? Could that encourage Waldorf field more into simultaneous teaching?

According to my references like Hendry et al. (2015) and Thomson et al. (2015), many earlier experiments of peer visiting have included the feedback session after the observations. In these studies the layout have been more assessing and mentoring than just equal teachers visiting one another. In the Waldorf field new teachers often have a mentoring teacher to help them out especially in the beginning. It would be interesting to have a research about this mentoring observation and reflections about it.

The fact that all teachers were first timers was a surprise for me as a teacher and as a researcher. It also helps to enlighten up the reality and practice of Waldorf schools. We do not have any organised system for peer visits. Maybe it has not been seen as important or valuable. According to my findings every participant thought the visits were useful and they would definitely like to continue these kinds of experiments and observations in the future. What I know to be true is the limited time and potency of the Waldorf teachers. In my opinion, Waldorf teachers have more responsibility than teachers in state schools because of the administrative responsibilities of teachers' collegium. The arrangements and schedules for the peer visits were already hard to fit together in this research with four participants. Therefore I recommend that schools should have a person in charge of peer visiting as a part of his/hers responsibility task. If someone is in charge of visiting arrangements then the possibility of forgetting is minor.

Nowadays there is a lot of discussion in Waldorf education about peer teaching during the same lesson. Many teachers have studied simultaneous teaching since it is often tried out in public schools when they have funding for it. The course in teaching is going to co-operational direction. Simultaneous teaching is a trend in Finland and it seems like we would carry it out full-time if there were funds for it. Teachers, especially newly graduated ones,

have a tendency to burnout in Finland because of the enormous amount of work teachers have to carry out. Class teachers graduating from state universities are not prepared and geared up for such a burdensome profession. I think it might be partly the structural differences in teacher's training. In Snellman College where Waldorf educators study, they provide longer internship periods and practical teaching apprenticeship than in state universities. In my opinion, graduating Waldorf teachers have more realistic view and vision what the work is really like than new teachers who graduate from universities. Peer visits could especially support newly graduated teachers. What could be more helpful for a newcomer than a peer mentor with years of experience working and supporting the beginner? Peer support could be pioneering for collaborative orientation and simultaneous teaching. The opening for this direction could be the peer visits. The major obstacle for simultaneous teaching is financial. Educational funds are reduced every year, so right now it feels that the timing for this kind of teaching experimentation is not the best one. But what could be a better target for funding than the children? Our future lies in their hands one day.

As I mentioned earlier, this study was really the first time for every participating teacher to visit a colleague's lesson and they all thought it was a great experience. After giving it a lot of thought, I wondered how much we could achieve as a community of teachers if we would do this more often or even on a regular basis. In my opinion we would get more familiar with each other, we would get to know other classes and students better, we would gain general education. The school as a whole would become more familiar to everyone. Is that only a positive thing? At least in general people enjoy their work more if they are keen on the place. How much could we gain as an organisation by teacher co-operation and collegial support when the findings of this master thesis were already quite positive and the participants would really like to revisit their colleagues' lessons? The potential impact to collegial co-operation and teacher well-being could be prominent.

## Appendix 1.

Letter of consent

21.9.2015

I am making a small qualitative case study as a part of my master thesis in Autumn 2015. This case study is about collegiality and co-operation with class teachers and subject teachers.

This research is made by semi-structured, individual interviews. This interview is voluntary-based and recorded. All information given is kept and handed with care and confidentiality, and your identity will be kept anonymous. The collected material can be used in other studies or publications later on and also quotes can be used from your interview.

However if you decide later on to withdraw from the research before publishing, you will have to inform the researcher on March 2016 the latest.

This interview is made and handled by Kirsi Neuvonen. If you have anything you want to ask about, please do so. I'll be happy to answer.

Sincerely,

Kirsi Neuvonen

Questions for the interview round I:

How did you find visiting your colleague's lesson?

What were your experiences?

Did you have any preconceptions? What?

Was there something that surprised you?

Was there something that left you wondering after the lesson?

Do you think you feel differently towards your colleague/s after this experiment? Why?



## Appendix 2.

Table 1

*Experiences and risen emotions and feelings during the visit*

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D i.e. the researcher
E1: positive experience, funny, wonderful	x	x	x	x
E2: surprising	x	x	x	x
E3 &E5: mind-opening, inspiring, refreshing, fascinating	x	x	x	x
E4: shame we do not do this more		x	x	x
E6: reminded of something experienced	x	x		x
E7: differs from own work	x			x

Table 2

*Preconceptions*

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D i.e. the researcher
P1: first time visitor	x	x	x	x
P2: had some expectations	x	x	x	x
P3: knew very little about this			x	

Table 3

*Thoughts after the visit*

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D i.e. the researcher
F1: would like to do this again		x	x	x
F2: activated for professional development			x	
F3: nice to see colleagues at work	x	x	x	x
F4: saw the connection between own and colleague's work	x	x		x
F5: gives greater value for teachers and colleagues	x	x		
F6: inspired own work		x		
F7: more co-operation needed	x	x		x
F8: feel more connected with the colleague	x			x

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