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Taking a child out of Waldorf School

How parents experience it

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three narrative accounts of parents who went through the process of escalating disharmony with Waldorf School, which led them to decision to remove their child from it. It does not attempt to discover historical truth, but rather to chart unilaterally how parents experience and reflect on a challenging episode of their lives concerning their children, with additional focus on the parents' initial hopes and expectation of Waldorf School and how does their decision to withdraw their child from the school resonates when looking back at the events from a distance of time. Two narrative and one written account of parents was obtained and analysed using a two layered method of narrative data analysis. The parents' accounts are presented to the reader in form of reported speech in three individual stories and subsequently, the patterns, commonalities, singularities and discrepancies of their experiences are collated and compared in the summary of findings chapter. The findings are further discussed in relation to contemporary research on the role of trust, institutional power asymmetry, role obligations and territorial overlaps involved in parents' - teachers' interactions. The findings of this thesis indicate that the parents experienced being placed in disadvantaged positions by Waldorf teachers / schools, in regards to an imbalance of power throughout their interactions. Secondly, the findings suggest, that there exist clearly defined territories between home and Waldorf School, whose breach puts strain on both the parents' and teachers' effective collaboration. Thirdly, the findings underscore the irreplaceable role of trust in Waldorf school-home interactions. Outcomes of this thesis open space for both Waldorf teachers and parents to review their expectations and understanding of qualitative aspects of their interactions, in effort to establish and maintain the equality of parents' and teachers' roles in school-home collaboration. Several recommendations pertaining to the established practices of Waldorf Schools in regards to engendering and maintaining a trustful, reciprocal relationship between parents and teachers are made in conclusion chapter.

Keywords: Waldorf School, Rudolf Steiner, parents – school collaboration and partnership, roles, territories conflict, power, trust

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

A morning comes,

One of many,

Your young face, red and wrinkled from the pillow,

School day new – a promise and a threat,

You must

  Go towards

    Friends

     Teacher

      Life

Be good, son

  Be nice

   I will

    He goes.

  I hope

   I trust

    I must.

What do parents experience when their child is unhappy at a school, which they carefully chose as an alternative to mainstream? Steiner/Waldorf School was founded in 1919 by an Austrian thinker and social reformist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). It is the fastest growing alternative school system in the world. One of the foundational premises of Waldorf schools states, that they are open and beneficial to all children, regardless of race, religion or social-economical background. For more than ninety years generations of children enjoyed and benefitted from the particular educational

approach that Waldorf Schools offer. Waldorf School places great emphasis on developing above average collaboration with parents. Its founder Rudolf Steiner spoke explicitly and unequivocally about the key importance of engendering and maintaining parents' trust, rooted in natural, as opposed to formal, authority of the teacher/school and thorough understanding of Waldorf practices, for the teachers' endeavours. Likewise, contemporary research unambiguously and voluminously supports the benefits of effective family engagement in school for the children's academic achievement. More specifically, the qualitative aspects of parents'- teachers' interactions are seen as essential for engendering and maintaining the atmosphere of trust and equal partnership, which in turn yields desirable outcomes for the children. For many parents their hopes for Waldorf School come true. Some are less happy and some choose to take their child out of the school.

This qualitative educational enquiry endeavours to present three narrative accounts of parents, whose experiences at three different Steiner Waldorf schools, led to their decision to remove their child from the school. The principal research question of this thesis is '*How do parents experience and reflect on the process of escalating disharmony with their child's school, which led to their decision to withdraw their child from it?'* with two additional sub questions '*What are the parents' initial expectations of Waldorf School? How does their decision to part with the school resonate over time?'* The aim of this thesis is not to discover historical truth, it is rather to chart unilaterally how do parents experience a difficult period of their lives involving their children, teachers and schools. Narrative analysis of the parents' stories may provide useful indicators for the future prevention, early recognition and successful conflict management at Waldorf schools. They may also help to shed light at the way Waldorf school teachers and parents communicate; on different, ever changing perceptions of their roles, areas of responsibility and expectations both parties have of each other.

The research question of this thesis has been inspired by my personal experiences. As both a parent and a teacher at Waldorf School I have, in the course of my career found myself on the opposite sides of the teacher's desk, at times advocating for the needs of my own children and at other times defending and explaining Waldorf values and methods. In both roles, the force of emotions involved, invariably took me off guard.

I envision myself going to school to see my child's teacher regarding some concerns we had and wishing to dear God he would understand who my child is. The questions going through my mind included: Will he see at him as I see him? Will he appreciate his many talents and personality traits as I do or will he be just another problem child in the classroom, a troublemaker spoiling the ideal learning atmosphere, for whom he feels only frustration and despair? I recall feeling the anxieties in

my stomach upon realizing, just how important the teacher's view of my child is. School is, after all, the place my child spends most of its time outside home, where he forms his thoughts and emotions in regards to learning, people and life. I hoped intensely that the experiences he will have there, will be so much better than I had, that he will go to school with a feeling of going to a place where he wanted to be and looked forward to be in. I desperately wanted to make a good impression on the teacher, believing that if I manage, some of it will somehow transfer onto my child and transform the teacher's understanding of him. Perhaps, by raising concerns, I will draw teacher's attention to my child. Perhaps I am overreacting? Will the teacher see me as a trouble making parent?

What will happen if it will not work out?

There is a rather thin line between the polite formalisms and passionate minefield of parents' teacher' encounters and much skill in listening and empathising with each other's role is necessary to avoid a turn of events leading to irreparable damage of trust (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Parents coming to any school with a mission of advocacy on behalf of their child face an onslaught of emotional highs and lows that have to do with a number of factors, chief one among them being the primeval urge to protect the welfare of the most treasured beings in their lives (ibid.). Parents themselves may not appreciate the full scope of intensity of feelings they hold in regards to their children, until the children report what their parents perceive as psychological or physical injustice. When they do, parents' behaviour may become difficult to predict.

The merging areas of the parental and school responsibility and differing views regarding what is best for the child from both points of view, create a charged field, which teachers perceive as the most stressful factor of their profession; research confirms that the largest number of ethical conflicts of teachers at schools have to do with the teacher-parent relationship (House, 2001; Husu, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Do Waldorf teachers really understand and appreciate the roots and the intensity of feeling, which parents experience, when they perceive that their child is not receiving the kind of treatment it, in their opinion, deserves?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parents - teachers collaboration

Despite prolific academic writing to support and argue for the parents' greater involvement in schools in regards to its positive impact on children's academic performance (Fan & Williams, 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2010; Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Ralph, 2012)**,** and work that investigates, charts and recommends strategies to involve parents with diverse social or ethnic backgrounds into school life (Kearney, Turner, & Gauger, 2010; Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012; Turney & Kao, 2009; Updegraff, Kim, Killoren, & Thayer, 2010; Epstein, 1986), some of the recent papers claim, that the issue may not be as straightforward as it appears. While educationalists, authorities, parents and teachers realize the benefits of working relationship between the family and school, the practicalities of establishing such relationship involve overcoming some deeply ingrained obstacles in form of structural power asymmetries, parents' - teachers' roles ambiguity or intrinsic emotional intensity involved in parents'-teachers' interactions. (Allen, Thompson, & Hoadley, 1997; Holtz, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Serpe-Schroeder, 1999; Tveit, 2009) as well as (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Chang, 2013; Nakagawa, 2000; Pushor, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). In other words, it appears that in practice, not much has changed since Willard Waller in 1931 assigned to parents and teachers the roles of natural enemies (Waller, 1961).

Parents consistently report, that they appreciate good communication skills of the teachers and frequency of parent involvement practices positively influences their opinion of the overall teachers' quality and enhances the teachers' professional standing from the parents' point of view (Epstein, 1986). Furthermore, in absence of good level of communication from school, parents are left to form their opinions about the staff, based on what they hear from their children or their own experiences from childhood (Allen et al., 1997), which may not always be the image, teachers wish parents to have.

Serpe-Schroeder's (1999) dissertation on parents' and teachers' perspectives of their interactions came with findings, that both teachers and parents remain very sensitive when it comes to intrusion into what they perceived as their territory; be it punishment in case of the parents, or grading in case of the teachers and that the parents during interactions often perceived teachers as quick to become defensive. Both parties threw some unrefined adjectives at each other when the role attributes they expected of the other were unfulfilled.

Safeguarding civility of parents' teachers encounters

To safeguard the civility of parents-teachers interactions, there exist patterns or certain modes of behaviour both parties employ when such situations arise. Sykes (1953) and Lightfoot (2003) argued that the formalisms of the parents-teachers associations are directed towards reducing potential conflict. Parents and teachers often behave excessively politely, guardedly or indifferently during their interactions in order to avoid the potential quicksand of articulating unpleasant truths.

Volatile relationship

When parents do venture onto thin ice and voice their concerns, things may get out of hand rather quickly. Any parent who ever went to see a teacher on behalf of her child, knows that these conversations belong among the most difficult ones they ever have to submit themselves to. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) notes that behind all such encounters, there are biographies of the participants colouring the conversation in either positive or negative way. Most of the people went through schooling and have childhood memories from the classroom. Most faced their parents' and teachers' joy when they did well and various manifestations of their displeasure when they did not. Considering the amount of time which people spent behind the school desk, these memories form an integral part of their personalities. Parental instinct to protect the wellbeing of their child further adds to the tension involved in such interactions. "There is something immediate, reflexive and regressive, for both parents and teachers, about their encounters with one another, a turning inward and backward, a sense of primal urgency." (p.4) There are those parents, who due to difficult social backgrounds or diverse cultural roots have often had bad experiences at school, which undertones their perception of and behaviour towards teachers. Dramas of society find their expression in the microcosm of school yards and the effects of different social backgrounds inevitably tint the parental attitudes to all things pertaining to education of their children (p.152). Ranson, Martin, & Vincent (2004) explored the interventions of angry parents at school, and suggest, that behind the often dramatic displays of parental anger, there hides an attempt to find common understanding. Their findings further indicate that teachers are not amiable to parental attempts to challenge their area of expertise.

Shift of educational objectives

Additional element contributing to the difficulty of parents-teachers encounters, is the shift of objectives in both the parents and the teachers view on the purpose of education. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) refers to them as "The Constructions of Capitalism" (p.34). The focus has shifted to achievement of success, competitiveness and expediency, to going faster and farther instead of

going deeper in terms of wisdom and grace. Thus, what Serpe-Schroeder (1999) identified as the expectations parents have of teachers, namely the individual, caring and loving approach to each child, is paradoxically countered by the parents' pressure on teachers to push their children more strictly towards academic excellence, regardless of their individual needs and dispositions.

Role play

Much of what goes on at the meetings between parents and teachers stems from the different roles or perceptions thereof that both parties, often subconsciously, assume. Holtz (2011) in her dissertation named "Partnership between Myth and Reality" argues, that contrary to the official rhetoric, successful parent teacher negotiations are marred by the teachers' effort to maintain their status and protect their role by employing defensive strategies, which brings tension and stress into such encounters. Teachers' status is seen as not equal with the parents' one, as it is rooted in and enhanced by the institutionalized school authority. Hence the question of equality in parents-teachers partnership arises, whereby parents experienced difficulties in overcoming the imbalance of power. Even though the schools claim to welcome parents in their halls, reality is often somewhat different. Tveit (2009) in her text analysis of documents from National Parents' Committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education in Norway reveals, that notwithstanding possessing legal rights, parents are forced to continually legitimize these rights in school. They are expected by teachers to fulfil a passive-supportive role, while the teachers' understanding of their own role is more active. Should the parents' view on the education of their children differ, they tend to withhold it from the dialogue with the teachers. Nagakawa (2000) asserts that parents are, in regards to their engagement with school, involved in a no-win situation, which she calls a 'double blind' (p. 449), drifting between being over or under-involved, both of which is viewed as negative by the teachers . A revealing qualitative and conceptual dichotomy between parents' involvement and family engagement was identified by Pushor, (2007). School is perceived as a closed environment where teachers and government devise rules, strategies, policies and procedures to achieve desired educational outcomes for children. She discerns the parent involvement as complying with and dependant on the teachers' understanding of what is educationally beneficial to the child. In these terms parents are seen as helping teachers to achieve their educational goals. Pushor places the concept of parent involvement in contrast to 'family engagement' (p.3) in that the latter grants the parent a role equal to the one of the teacher in the process of educating the child, where both parties jointly share the profits of both parent and teachers knowledge for the benefit of the child. She speaks vehemently for teachers to develop practices to engender trust in families, a genuine welcoming attitude which would do away with both the explicit and implicit signs of

schools institutional superiority and bring about co-created and non-hierarchical atmosphere of reciprocity.

When a teacher is asked for a meeting with parents regarding a sensitive issue some trepidation in anticipation of a potentially challenging situation is inevitable. The following quote illustrates that it is not only the parents, who find these bilateral negotiations strenuous.

> Even though they (teachers) enjoyed their interactions with the parents and considered them crucial to their work with students, all of them regarded negotiating these relationships as the most treacherous part of their jobs. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 27)

Willard Waller (1961) in his book the *Sociology of Teaching*, first published in 1931, presents a disturbingly penetrating metaphor, according to which teachers and parents are, in fact, natural enemies. Willard speaks of a "particularistic" view of the parents and "universalistic" view of the teachers. This originates in divergent perception both groups have of the same child. Where parents understandably view their child as a unique, often gifted or otherwise special individual, the teacher's perception of the same individual lies more within the context of a classroom group, more defined by objectifying comparison with the peers in terms of academic achievement. Parents therefore tend to behave protectively, sometimes fiercely so, in their attempt to advocate and highlight the uniqueness of their children. Out of these two different perceptions conflict arises.

Needless to say, teachers often feel intruded upon by parents' insensitive ventures into their territory. In his book *Schoolteacher*, Dan Lortie (1975) argued, that teachers perceive the parents' potential to obstruct teachers' work by ignoring the fact that the teachers preserve a rather fragile, workable instructional group by setting and maintaining internal rules in attempt to build a "universalistic social order" (p. 189). There are some parents, who ask for special treatment for their child, thus putting the teacher in difficult situation in regards to the rest of the class. This may be done by frequent visits of the parents in school or a bombardment of requests. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that children "belong" to the parents and the teachers exercise only a temporal and place-specific authority over them. Lortie further argues that parents wield a strong influence, either positive or negative, over the degree with which the pupils cooperate with the teacher. This parental influence may range from a strong encouragement to a complete disregard, even contempt for the teacher's efforts. Lortie elaborates on the issue by asserting that:

> There is a "teacher territory" and "parental territory" and leadership of school affairs rests with the teacher. Teachers, in sum, want the parent to be a "distant assistant." The teachers' concerns are placed at the center of ideal relationship; parents should comply with arrangements which meet teachers' needs.(Lortie, 1975, p. 191)

What teachers may wish for is one thing, however the changing dynamics of today's home-school communication is another. Gone are the days when parents quietly and without a second thought agreed with the directives issued to them by teachers. Middle class parents' perception of their role in their child's education fails to be subdued by the formal authority. Time Magazine's cover story in 2005 includes the following categorisation of parents behaving badly:

> …parents who exceed their boundaries: the eager parent who pushes too hard, the protective parent who defends the cheater, the homework helper who takes over, the tireless advocate who loses sight of the fact that there are other kids in the class too…the hovering parent who is over-involved… (Gibbs, 2005, p.42)

The changing landscape of women's role in society has prepared the ground for an unprecedented feeling of authorisation, which mothers do not hesitate to exercise. Professor Amy Stuart Wells asserts in the same article, that there are many mothers who, in their working lives, held responsible positions overseeing others. As a result, they possess a different feeling of competence and authorisation and perceive active participation in their children's school lives as a part of their job Annette Lareau, sociology professor at Temple University believes that even the social status and insofar unquestionable authority of the teaching profession is undergoing some (un)welcome changes:

> Middle class parents are far less respectful. They're not a teacher, but they could have been a teacher, and often their profession has a higher status than teachers. So they are much more likely to criticise teachers on professional grounds.(ibid. p.58)

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) reflects upon this change of atmosphere and recognises an urgent need to deal with the issues of modern school in regards to meeting the parent. In her view, the child provides the common ground on which both parties meet without conflict. Lawrence-Lightfoot advocates developing the powers of empathy for each other's role in the life of the child. She speaks strongly against formalism during parents – teachers' interactions and advices teachers to have evidence of the child's success or short-comings at hand during frequent parents' – teachers' meetings (PTM's).

Trust

A variable, seen as vital in the good home-school relationship is trust. Adams & Christenson's (2000) findings confirm, that trust plays vital role in good collaborative practices between home and school and is not primarily dependant on frequency of contact, but rather on the quality of it. They define trust in the family–school relationship as "confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve

positive out- comes for students" .(p. 481) A study by Tschannen-Moran (2001) conducted at 45 primary schools, whose findings advocate for significance of trust in fostering collaborative relationships, linked the level of teachers - parents collaboration to the level of trust. Bryk & Schneider (2002) found that the strong feeling of trust between the members of the school community engenders success in education of the student. They identify relational trust as founded on respect, competence, regard for others and integrity and assert that:

> Relation trust diminishes when individuals perceive that others do not behave in ways that can be understood as consistent with their expectations about the other's role obligations. Moreover, fulfilment of obligations entails not only doing the right thing", but also doing it in a respectful way and for what are perceived to be the right reasons. (p.21).

Bryk & Schneider conducted a 7 year survey of test scores at 400 elementary schools and their findings confirmed, that the schools where the test results were improving had high levels of relational trust among the members of school community. Moreover, their findings are conclusive of the fact, that high levels of relational trust provide a bond which holds together all the elements of a school community comprised of students, parents and teachers, thus providing conditions for effective school governance. Chang's (2013) findings indicate, that the teachers' demonstrated levels of care for their work, the children and the parents were the most important contributing elements for establishing parental trust in teachers. Sitkin & Bies (1994) in Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer (1998) assert, that over rigidified institutional structures can also weaken trust, particularly when legal constructions create inflexibility in responses in conflict situations, replacing a more open approach with increased degree of formalization. Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna (1985) conceptualized trust as consisting of three consecutive stages leading from low to high. These were predictability, dependability and faith. They established predominance of each stage in low, medium and high trust relationships between surveyed couples. Adams and Christenson (2000) link the above mentioned three levels of trust to parents – teachers' interactions.

Alternative Schools

Existence of alternative schooling systems grants the population freedom to choose education, for their children, while preserving principles they deem desirable and compatible with their values at home.

> Inherent in school choice schemes is the assumption that parents are rational actors who are knowledgeable about the learning needs and preferences of their child, have clear preferences or criteria to frame their decisions, are aware of the range of options available, and that their child will be admitted to the school of their choice. In exchange for this freedom of choice, parents are expected to assume responsibility

for their good or poor choices of schooling for their children. The idea being that they will advocate for the needs of their child, and if the school cannot address their child's learning needs, they will remove their child from that school and seek one that is more suitable and accommodating. (Bosetti, 2004, p.394)

Only a limited segment of parents exercise the right to choose an educational alternative for their children but when they do, they tend to be more satisfied. (ibid.)

Some contemporary non-denominational alternatives to mainstream school systems are accenting the need for a holistic approach, while others emphasise reduction in size of the schools, thus making room for a more personalized approach to students. Some alternatives propagate greater degree of student autonomy and still others recognise the motivational and educational benefits of natural and non-school environment. (Warwick, 2012)

Interestingly, two of the Europe's oldest, non-denominational alternatives, Montessori and Steiner Waldorf schools, exist relatively unchanged since the beginning of the 20th century, as opposed to the state systems which have been moulded and driven by a roller-coaster of different, often contradictory educational ideas.

Steiner Waldorf schools belong to the alternatives promulgating holistic approach to education (Warwick, 2012; P. Woods, Ashley, & Woods, 2005). Presumably, parents, who make a free choice to place their children in Waldorf School have high hopes and expectations; they care about their children's school environment in the same way they do about their home and identify with the values that the schools propagate. Or do they? Stehlik (2003a) asserts that the unique ideology of Waldorf Schools called Anthroposophy, makes fully supporting the ethos inspiring the schools' endeavours challenging for some parents. Woods (2005) reports that only a minority of "Waldorf" parents in England chose Waldorf School for the reasons of thorough understanding of and identification with its philosophy, whilst greater number of them made the decision based on perceived undue levels of stress placed on children in maintained schools or because they sympathised with Waldorf position on environmental issues.

> It is clear that there is a gap between parental understanding of Steiner education and the informed understanding of teachers with anthroposophical backgrounds. All the schools visited during the research reported in this report were aware of this and, to varying degrees, promoted parent education events which aimed to explain the principles and ideals of what they were doing. Parental understanding can thus tend to develop not untypically after the child has started at the school. In most cases, this seemed to be a positive process. (Woods et al., p.107)

Parents are often influenced by their friends or family and their wish to get involved with their child's education, Bosetti's (2004) work on how parents make their choice of schools indicates, that the largest number of parents base their choice on talks with friends, neighbours and other parents,

while Bomotti's (1996) research titled, Why do parents choose alternative school, suggests, that parents' are well informed and their choice is inspired the school's educational philosophies. In case of Waldorf Schools, where the philosophy is underscored by a particular take on spirituality, this may not be as straightforward. Jelinek and Sun (2003) note that:

> …the range of parent understanding, commitment and/or support of Waldorf methods varies widely. At one end of the spectrum parents know little, if any, about the purpose and methods of the Waldorf approach, and as long as their children are doing well need to know little else. At the other end parents are fully immersed in the intricacies of their children's education specifically because they are drawn to Waldorf methodology. (p. 52)

Rudolf Steiner´s advice on the subject of School – Family collaboration

Waldorf education presents a specific challenge for both parents and teachers in terms of their cooperation. Even though almost hundred years have passed since their founding by an Austrian thinker and social reformist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), Waldorf schools are labelled alternative. (Woods et al., 2005) Nevertheless, demands on mutual trust among both groups of "stakeholders" at Waldorf schools may be, for the reason of their specific philosophical-spiritual underpinnings, somewhat above average (Stehlik, 2003a; P. Woods et al., 2005). Steiner at the time of founding of the first Waldorf School in 1919, expressed his thoughts on the matter of parent school cooperation in a different manner than his contemporaries. He saw the necessity of close collaboration of the parents and teachers as vital for several reasons. To fully understand the urgency of his appeal to the parents and teachers for close co-operation, we need to realize, that the founding of a new, independent Free Waldorf School was for Steiner, Molt and its teachers a transformative undertaking in both personal and global sense. The school was meant to present a true cultural deed and to revolutionize the existing educational system (Steiner, 1996b). In a lecture given on June 11[th.] 1920 at a parents evening Steiner stated: "We must bring about a totally different encounter between home and school than was the case under the old school practices. Either there was a conflict, or the children were thrown back and forth between home and school." (p.50) Firstly, Steiner was well aware of the fact that the new Free Waldorf School needed all the support it could get from the ranks of the parents. He realized that in the absence of formal shield of the state educational authority, the survival and prosperity of the Free Waldorf School depended on the parents' full comprehension of and support for the schools' educational striving. He stated: "…we need to have this school surrounded by a wall of parental understanding like the walls of a fortress." (Steiner, 1996a, p.75) Secondly, Steiner believed that something akin to a learning community must be formed around the school, consisting of not only children and teachers, but also of the parents, and on that condition the school will achieve its educational and cultural task. "We will achieve our

goal if the school's intentions are understood at home and if it is made possible for us to work together intimately with the parents"(Steiner, 1996a, p.202). Lastly, Steiner argued that parents and teachers need to collaborate closely in regards to the children's physical, psychological and academic development; in fact, he stated that: "In running the school, an infinite number of questions constantly arise with regard to the weal and woe of the children, their progress, their physical and mental health—questions that can be solved only in partnership with the parents"(p.125). Steiner insisted that parents should fully understand the motives behind Waldorf School and out of this understanding support the educational striving of it, for if they did not, the children would perceive disharmony between the home and the school, which would in turn have strongly detrimental effect on the process of education.

> In a very subtle way, children pick up on all the nuances that are circulated in their environment. When the children can observe that their parents look at things in ways that differ from what is said in school, the children get involved in a conflict, and it becomes impossible to focus on the children to the intended effect. (Steiner, 1996b, p.50)

In 1920 he asserted that "…nothing reasonable will ever happen in human life as a result of coercion" (Steiner, 1996b, p.75) and argued, that in the absence of harsh disciplinary measures which the mainstream state schools had at their disposal at the time, Waldorf teachers were dependent on a high level of parental support to work in unison for the children's and ultimately the world's good.

Steiner gave explicit advice on the subject of how should this above average collaboration between Waldorf School and home be achieved. In his talks and writings Steiner advocated a relationship of trust between teachers and parents. In 1921 at a PTM he stated: "In this school more that in any other, we need to work with the parents in a relationship of trust if we want to move forward in the right way" (Steiner, 1996b, p.64). This trust was to be achieved, among other things, by frequent parents-teachers meetings where parents would have a chance to ask for explanation and be openly informed of the principles behind the school's methods.

> We attach great importance to our relationship with the parents of children at our Waldorf school. And to ensure complete harmony, we schedule frequent parents' evenings, attended by the parents of children living in the neighbourhood. At these meetings, we discuss the intentions, methods, and arrangements of the school—in a somewhat general way, of course. And, to the degree that such gatherings allow, the parents are able to express their wishes and receive a sympathetic hearing. (Steiner, 2004, p. 112)

Another way to develop trust according to Steiner are teachers' visits at children's homes to enable the teachers and the parents to connect with each other in an informal way. "By visiting the parents at home, teachers build a bridge between themselves and the parents, and this becomes a support that is social and, at the same time, free and alive." (Steiner, 2004, p. 114) He further elaborated on the importance of home visits by stating that:

> Home visits are necessary if we want to nurture a feeling in the parents that nothing should undermine the natural sense for authority that children should feel toward their teachers. The college of teachers and the parents must work hard together to reach an understanding that is imbued with feeling soul qualities. Moreover, parents must get to know the teachers thoroughly and break any tendency to be jealous of them, because most parents are in fact jealous of their children's teachers. They feel as if the teachers want to take the children away from them; but as soon as this feeling arises, nothing can be accomplished with the children educationally. These things can be corrected, however, if teachers understand how to gain real support from the parents (p.115).

Further aid to help teachers to establish and maintain good communication with parents is, according to Steiner a non-authoritarian approach to mutual interactions, taking great care to avoid arrogance or talking down to the parents (Steiner, 2004). Steiner called it a heart to heart relationship.

> We are not dependent on details, but rather on a heart-to-heart relationship between school and home. We are confident that if this real heart-to-heart relationship is present, the right thing will come of it. We long to see this attitude awakened not merely with regard to details, but in full force. (Steiner, 1996b. p.200)

In view of the alternative status of Waldorf School, teachers must make great effort to ensure that parents understand what is going on in the classroom. Parents should support the teachers not out of obligatory respect for formal authority, but rather out of knowing and identifying with the principles that the teachers and the school stands for.

> Thus, we would like first and foremost to establish a relationship between the school and the parents that does not rest on faith in authority. That is of no value for us. The only thing that is of value is having our intentions received with understanding, right down into the details. (Steiner, 1996b, p.192)

Moreover, Steiner indicated that should a disharmony in a child's home become apparent, Waldorf teachers must not criticise it but take it as it is. "Waldorf teachers must acquire the habit of not criticizing the child/parent relationship, but of accepting it objectively, because their acquaintance with the parents can shed light on the child's idiosyncrasies." (Steiner, 1996b, p. 215). The scope and depth of Steiner's advice to the first Waldorf teachers and parents in 1919 leaves little to add.

In the context his contemporaries Steiner was ahead of his time and Waldorf teachers would do well to heed his timeless advice. But do they?

RUDOLF STEINER AND WALDORF SCHOOL MOVEMENT

Rudolf Steiner

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the founder and ideological father of Steiner Waldorf school was born in a Croatian village of Kraljevec in today's Hungary on 21. February, 1861. He grew up in a family of Austrian railway telegraphist. Steiner studied in Vienna, earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Rostock and became a philosopher, social reformer, writer and lecturer (Steiner, 1928; Ullrich, 2008). Steiner's social reformism includes the theory of a Threefold social order, Waldorf education and Special education. Steiner's environmental teachings are foundational to biodynamic agriculture and his medicinal indications laid basis for Anthroposophical medicine and various therapies, such as therapeutic Eurythmy or chirophonetic therapy. Today, there are successful enterprises run according to Steiner's ideas and indications. These include Weleda, Wala, Hauschka in medicine and cosmetics, global Camphill Communities Movement for children and adults with special needs, Waldorf schools and Waldorf Kindergartens, Biodynamic farms and gardens organized in Demeter, Sekem agricultural and pharmacological enterprise in Egypt, Triodos Bank in Nederland, Rudolf Steiner Press Publishing House in London, Anthoposophic Press in New York, many training centres for Anthroposophical therapies, education, farming and an architectural school inspired by Steiner ("Steiner Architecture," 2013).

Anthroposophy

Waldorf education is rooted in and guided by a particular philosophy through which Steiner conveyed the sum of his knowledge to the public and which he named Anthroposophy- spiritual science (Rawson & Richter, 2008; Steiner, 1997; Ullrich, 2008; P. Woods et al., 2005). Steiner himself considered it "a path of knowledge that seeks to lead the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe" (Steiner, 1973, p.11). "For Steiner Anthroposophy is not only (auto)biographical, but also a systematic threefold fabric consisting of the path of knowledge, world view and life reform" (Ullrich, 2008, p.49). "The essence of Steiner's worldview was that a study of the evolution of humanity through various stages of civilization and consciousness will reveal the true direction for the development of society and the individual person in modern times" (Stehlik, 2008, p.232). Central to this view of reality is the acknowledgement of the existence of spiritual

world; man as possessing a spiritual essence as well as a body and soul, karma and reincarnation as developmental path of human spirit and a possibility for everyone to attain direct knowledge of higher worlds by meditative efforts, by phenomenologically observing ones inner world (Oberski, 2011; Steiner, 1973). Anthroposophical view of reality is underscored by a strong moral and ethical motif permeating actions of individuals (Steiner, 1996b). Rudolf Steiner explicitly stipulated that Waldorf schools should not lead the children towards Anthroposophy and that Anthroposophy must not be thought in the classrooms.

> You absolutely do not need to be afraid that we are trying to make this school into one that represents a particular philosophy, or that we intend to drum any anthroposophical or other dogmas into the children. That is not what we have in mind. Anyone who says that we are trying to teach the children specifically anthroposophical convictions is not telling the truth. Rather, we are trying to develop an art of education on the basis of what anthroposophy means to us. (Steiner, 1996, p.79)

Research confirms this premise, even though there exist disgruntled ex-Waldorf parents, who challenge this stipulation. (Jelinek & Sun, 2003; "waldorfcritics.org," 2014)

> The Steiner school curriculum is not designed to guide and encourage young people into becoming adherents of anthroposophy. Indeed, the educational aim of developing pupils to be capable of free thinking and making decisions for themselves is of central importance to Steiner education, as is the distinctive purpose of religious education to awaken pupils to the spiritual and ethical dimensions of human life. The indications from the data gathered by the research team tend to confirm that these are the educational aims that Steiner schools seek to achieve. The goal of enabling pupils to grow into adults capable of making independent judgements is one that is shared by the maintained sector. (P. Woods et al., 2005, p. 97)

Steiner-Waldorf Schools

When after the end of the First World War, Rudolf Steiner met the director of Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory Mr Emil Molt, they spoke of a dire need for a new type of free and independent educational establishment. This school would educate children in a way, which would bring about a humane change in society, a task, which they considered highly desirable in view of the terrible toll of the First World War. In September 1919, following Steiner´s lectures and courses for carefully selected teachers and some fast negotiations with the ministry, the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart opened its doors to 150 children of Molt´s factory workers, including the children of management (Steiner, 1997, p.29). The school was opened as a mixed gender, non-selective, non-elitist establishment (Rawson & Richter, 2008). Steiner and Molt could hardly foresee, that 90 years later there would be more than 712 of these schools in Europe alone, providing Waldorf education for 147,000 pupils and students, totalling 1200 Waldorf schools and 2000 preschool settings in 60

different countries on five continents ("European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education," 2013, "Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship," 2013; Warwick, 2012). While most Waldorf schools worldwide remain dependant on student tuition fees, in some countries, such as New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Finland and, since 1990's the Czech Republic, they are state funded (P. Woods et al., 2005) .

Waldorf pedagogy specifics

Waldorf pedagogy rests fully on Anthroposophical understanding of what a human being is and how it grows and develops. From today's theoretical point of view, parallels and similarities may be found with J. Dewey's Experiential learning, Piaget's and Erikson's Developmentalism, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Bruner's Spiral Curriculum and Gardner's and Sternberg's Intelligence theories (Jelinek & Sun, 2003). Where similarities end is at the source of Steiner's insights, namely his clairvoyant perceptions of realities directly from the spiritual world. Steiner's developmental psychology is based on 7 year phases of distinct developmental steps, during which children need different implicit and explicit approaches and methodologies (Steiner, 1996b; Ullrich, 2008; Warwick, 2012; P. Woods et al., 2005).Waldorf pedagogy strives to introduce the children to subject matter in an age specific way. It believes that too much intellectual work too soon rather harms the children, or in other words, that the children should be given particular subject matter when they are developmentally ready for it, otherwise health, intellectual and behavioural problems ensue (Jelinek & Sun, 2003; Steiner, 1996b). Waldorf education recognizes children as beings possessing willing, thinking and feeling faculties as well as spiritual and earthly bodies and that all these parts of a human being need to be educated and cultivated harmoniously (Rawson & Richter, 2008; Stehlik, 2008). A Waldorf school day begins with a two hour block dedicated, for a number of weeks, to one subject in order to immerse the children in the subject matter (Rawson & Richter, 2008; Steiner, 1996a; Warwick, 2012). To ensure harmonious development, educational process is structured into a breathing rhythms of focus and play. There is a strong emphasis on narrative, poetry, music, arts and crafts as media for carrying and complementing the teaching process. Each grade has its main theme for the year further developed through different subjects. The idea is to nurture children's, physical, imaginative and creative faculties as well as intellectual ones. There is an element of non-denominational Christianity in form of verses at the start of a school-day, religions lessons and celebrations of Christian seasonal festivals (Rawson & Richter, 2008; P. Woods et al., 2005). Waldorf specifics further include very little homework during the lower school years, delayed start with reading and writing, detailed formative written assessments instead of marks based on frequent testing, delayed introduction of science, presence of unusual subjects and

activities i.e. Eurythmy, knitting, form-drawing and non-compulsory religion lessons, celebrating seasonal festivals and others (Rawson & Richter, 2008).

Waldorf education is unequivocally teacher centric in that much responsibility rests on the personality and competence of the class teacher, who ideally remains with one class for 8 years (Rawson & Richter, 2008; Ullrich, 2008; P. Woods et al., 2005). Generally speaking, Waldorf teachers discourage excessive use of internet, TV and computer games, which they see as significantly detrimental to learning process, especially in the lower grades (Rawson & Richter, 2008; P. Woods et al., 2005). Some parents know these specifics, as they form the reason why they chose the school. Some are less informed, therefore informing parents comprehensively is suggested as crucial for prevention of future misunderstandings (Jelinek & Sun, 2003; P. Woods et al., 2005).

Management of Waldorf Schools

In majority of countries Waldorf Schools are private institutions, enjoying relative freedom within the existing educational environment of the particular country. The most notable difference between Waldorf schools and mainstream schools in terms of internal management is the absence of formal hierarchy among teachers (P. Woods et al., 2005). Waldorf schools are managed differently than mainstream schools in that the decision making powers rest on the faculty as a whole and depend on reaching consensus of opinion of all. This concept was proposed by Steiner and is known as the Teachers' Republic or the Republican Academy (Rawson & Richter, 2008; Steiner, 1997; P. Woods et al., 2005).

> The school must be self-administrating; teachers cannot be civil servants. They must be fully their own masters, because they know a higher master than any outer circumstance, the spiritual life itself, to whom they stand in a direct connection that is not mediated by school officials, principals, inspectors, school boards, and so forth. (Steiner, 1996b, p. 78)

The executive powers of the faculty include all decisions in regards to children's well-being, educational matters, hiring and firing of staff, disciplinary procedures, financial considerations, issues of collaboration between school and home. Great effort is made to maintain this non-hierarchical structure of the school management, even though in some countries, due to government requirements, a head teacher and deputies, who liaise with authorities, must be officially appointed (P. Woods et al., 2005). For example, in the Czech Republic, Waldorf schools enjoy the benefits of full government funding and therefore must comply with a standard way of school management,

appointing a headmaster and a deputy. However, decisions are still, in majority of Czech Waldorf schools, agreed upon in the weekly college of teachers meetings.

Teachers at Waldorf Schools

In the first Waldorf School Rudolf Steiner personally selected and instructed the faculty from the ranks of Anthroposophists (Steiner, 2004, p.191). Today, things may appear rather different. Most Waldorf schools struggle to find teachers with thorough understanding of and experience in Waldorf education, as well as the necessary teaching skills (Oberski, Pugh, MacLean, & Cope, 2007). Understandably, Waldorf schools seem to prefer applicants with Waldorf qualifications and experience to those uninformed of Waldorf education and/or holding university degrees only. For example in 2005, high proportion of teachers at Waldorf Schools in England did not have a qualified teachers status (QTS), holding Waldorf qualifications instead (P. Woods et al., 2005). Waldorf teacher trainings exist and continue to churn out graduates, however not all of those actually answer the call of the profession. The reasons for this may be, that much is expected of a Waldorf teacher. Apart of being an inspiring and skilled professional, a Waldorf teacher is encouraged to continually work on deepening of her understanding of the pedagogy as well as to set off on a lifelong path of inner development. Steiner expected no less of Waldorf teachers, then to develop skills to see, in each individual child, the symptoms of healthy physical, soul, intellectual and spiritual development or evidence to the contrary; to become not only inspiring pedagogues, but also able diagnosticians, nutritionists and psychologists, all that in light of Anthroposophical spiritual science (Steiner, 1996b). Most of all, Steiner accented the need for Waldorf teachers to acquire capacity of love for the children, not the sentimental teary kind, but love originating in profound understanding of the development of a child's being (Steiner, 1996a). In this respect Waldorf education was and remains distinctly teacher centric. For the above reasons a Waldorf class teacher ideally stays with his or her class for 8 years.

> In Class One your child will meet their class teacher who will accompany them on their journey through the eight years of Lower School. The relationship between the children in the class and their teacher is one of the strengths of a Steiner Waldorf school. Like any social group the class will face challenges but they find ways to work through differences, share achievements and support each other under the steady guidance of their class teacher ("Michael Hall A Steiner Waldorf School," 2013).

There is some empirical evidence to support the benefits of one class teacher staying with the same classroom for 8 years especially in regards to the long term ability to form relationships that permit learning (Ashley, 2005).

> Whilst the study partially supports greater specialism in primary schools, the most effective teaching observed was by class teachers who operate under the pedagogical conditions formulated by Rudolf Steiner. Class teachers were seen to be effective in Steiner Schools with pupils up to the age of fourteen, and the eight year relationship with a class was also seen to be particularly effective in minimizing bullying and disruptive behaviour. (pg.1)

Criticism and Achievement of Waldorf Schools

Over the decades, Waldorf schools have been criticised for largely the same reasons, reshaped in different semantics. Questions were raised pertaining to originality of Steiner's ideas (Ullrich, 2008). Covert instilment of Anthroposophy into children, keeping parents in the dark regarding Anthroposophy, forced teacher centeredness, close knit community around the school resembling a sect, and allegations of propagating a racist doctrine were put forward (Byers et al., 1996; "openwaldorf.com," 2014, "waldorfcritics.org," 2014). There are reservations as to Waldorf Schools' ideological background Anthroposophy, determining the choice of subject matter seen as incompatible with modern science (Jelinek & Sun, 2003).

> Increasingly, they (the parents and educators) find themselves caught between the extremes in a debate others have long-engaged over Waldorf education: a debate that can be summarized at one extreme as adamant opposition to the peculiar philosophical background of Rudolf Steiner, whose beliefs, critics claim, constitute "pseudo-science;" and at the other extreme as a firm conviction that any shortcomings in student achievement under Waldorf methods is the result of shortcomings in implementation of the Waldorf curriculum as intended – and decidedly not because the curriculum is "pseudo-scientific." (Jelinek & Sun, 2003, pg. 1)

Despite the criticism, the number of Waldorf schools and pre-schools worldwide continues to grow. Research findings support several positives of the Waldorf schools, such as employing pedagogical practices which enable pupils to enjoy school and learning, creating a stimulating and warm atmosphere and good social fabric in the classroom (Byers et al., 1996; Hutchingson & Hutchingson, 1993; Uhrmacher, 1993). Waldorf practices were found to support moral and ethical development through education (Rivers & Soutter, 1996). Wider community outreach involving parents, prompting wider learning community and stimulating transformative learning was recognized (Stehlik, 2003b). Waldorf Schools were documented to be achieving higher development of creative thinking in comparison with state maintained schools and other alternatives (Cox & Rolands, 2000; Ogletree, 2000). Waldorf Schools were found to be achieving above average academic results in inner city and socially disadvantaged school environment (Jelinek & Sun, 2003; McDermott, 1996; Schieffer & Busse, 2001). Ward (2001) documented more frequent and skilled utilising of narratives, movement, poetry and music in the classroom. Some researchers

noted remarkable levels of Waldorf teachers' commitment in spite of comparatively lower remuneration, and recommend adoption of elements from Steiner Waldorf schools and teacher trainings into mainstream schools (Mazzone, 1999; G. Woods, O'Neill, & Woods, 1997; P. Woods et al., 2005). The educational and social benefits of one main class teacher guiding the children for 8 years of primary education were supported by the findings of Martin Ashley's (2005) survey.

METHODS

> The storied descriptions people give about the meaning they attribute to life events is, I believe, the best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people's experience. (Polkinghorne, 2007, pg.10)

In addressing the sensitive and emotionally charged issue, which this thesis undertook to explore, namely, how do parents experience and reflect on the process of escalating disharmony with an alternative school they chose for their children, leading to decision to withdraw their children from it, I chose to employ qualitative narrative enquiry. The aim of this thesis is to explore unilaterally personal experiences of the parents going through a challenging process, involving their children and educations institutions and by doing so shed light on what the parents go through while facing the prolonged necessity to advocate for their child.

> The precise definition of personal narrative is a subject of debate... For now, it refers to talk organized around consequential events. A teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or "world" and recapitulates what happened then to make a point, often a moral one. In qualitative interviews, typically most of the talk is not narrative but question-and-answer exchanges, arguments, and other forms of discourse. Respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society. (Riessman, 2002, pg.4)

Narrative approach as suggested above, lends itself naturally to the aims of this thesis, in that it enables the researcher to meet the respondents face to face in order to establish a kind of open and trustful relationship, thus creating ground for sharing sensitive and often painful memories. In accord with phenomenological qualitative enquiry, methods employed in this thesis follow the pattern of "(1) collection of verbal data, (2) reading of the data, (3) breaking of the data into some kind of parts, (4) organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective, and (5) synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community" (Giorgi, 1997, pg. 11).

I could not exclude or hide my own perspective of a Waldorf teacher and parent of three children in Waldorf School, from the proceedings. Having gone through similar events in both a parental and the teacher's role, I consciously entered into the conversation with an additional angle of personal experience. Bochner (2001) in his response to Atkinson (1997) asserts, that the act of capturing the narratives of people in challenging situations is inextricably woven with our personal perspective i.e. that the researcher approaches these accounts in the context of his own personal experiences, which renders them, among other things, therapeutic. He further states that the moral and ethical

perspectives involved, often seen as trespassing on research proper (Atkinson, 1997), are the very components, which lend such narratives their importance. I share Frank's (1995) as quoted in Bochner (2001) view, that the act of narrating one's story is a kind of recollection in which the past is remade and one's self is recreated out of the narrative wreckage of illness. Moreover, I would argue that this extends to any narratives concerning such intense personal experiences, as are those presented in this thesis. A kind of catharsis takes place, which, through opening the dam of pent up grievances, enables the reservoir to fill up with clean water. By empowering the narrators, by giving them a chance to be heard with an emphatic ear, an attempt is made to give them the credit of search for authenticity as an ideal, which we strive for (Bochner, 2001).

Narrative offers the parents the opportunity to share their experiences with the world, to possibly gain comfort in the knowledge that their story will be heard and identified with by others with similar strife. They may, through sharing their experiences, gain reassurance that there is nothing wrong with them, that there are others like them. As it is with serious health concerns, so it may be with other traumatising experiences. Could I venture as far as to paraphrase Couser (1997) and suggest that an important purpose of these narratives is to teach those who haven't experienced a particular kind of trauma how to respond to those who did?

Ethical considerations and finding respondents

Possibly the most challenging task involved in writing this thesis was finding the respondents. Unexpectedly, it proved quite a lengthy and uneasy mission to find parents, who would be willing to talk about their experiences. I resolved, from the start, to limit the number of respondent families to three. When approached, several possible participants stated reasons of emotional strain involved in revisiting these events as preventing them from taking part. Some were anxious regarding anonymity and still others did not wish to harm the school by their contribution. I approached my acquaintances among the teachers, parents and administrators of different Waldorf schools, with an explanation of the research's intentions and a request to enquire about possible respondents. I felt, from the responses of the people I approached, that the motives behind the thesis had to be made very clear, both to the people contacting the possible respondents, and to the potential respondents themselves.

In the end, about twenty families were asked to consider giving narrative accounts of their experiences, leading to decision to withdraw their child from Waldorf School. The choice of these families was guided by the primary requirements, that they should have a relevant story to tell and be from different Waldorf schools and towns. The other requirement was, that their decision to take

the child out of the school was a result of a process of interaction with the teacher/school over a period of time and not a sudden, out of the blue event.

Save for the above, there was no element of choice involved in finding respondents, and, in the end, I consider myself exceedingly fortunate to have found two families, who agreed to talk to me in person and one mother, who agreed to respond in writing. The reasons for such significant difficulties involved in finding the willing respondents may inspire further enquiry.

Eventually, one mother and one formerly married mother and father agreed to be interviewed in person, and one mother agreed to respond in writing to a list of guiding and supplementary questions. These parents were from three different Waldorf schools in three different towns and two different countries. Ideally, I had hoped for both parents' presence at the interview, however this became possible only in one case. In two cases, it were the mothers. By coincidence, all the stories pertained to children in lower school. The question of providing such conditions to the respondents, which would enable them to speak freely without having to worry about the impact of their stories on other children in their families, who still go to the same Waldorf School and the teachers and schools involved, was of paramount importance. It was clear that the participants would have to be thoroughly informed about the risk involved in the possibility, that in spite of utmost care taken to guarantee anonymity, the actors may be able to recognise the stories and identify the narrators.

On the other hand, I considered a notion, that some of the respondents, who did not insist on complete anonymity, might be tempted to use this opportunity to publicly settle accounts with the teachers and schools involved. It seemed important to make very clear to these respondents that I insist on protecting identities and changing some details of the stories in regards to the parents and children, as well as the teachers and the schools involved. A consent form was carefully made, thoroughly explained and signed, guaranteeing anonymity and explaining the intentions and methods of the thesis. See appendix 1. The participants were given the opportunity to retain considerable control through the repeated process of commenting on and amending the narratives, which provided them with the opportunity to edit out such information they deemed, in terms of their identity, as potentially too revealing.

Interviews

> We use them (interviews) not only because we wish to delve beneath statistically driven generalizations that are made but also because they have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people… (Fraser, 2004, pg. 184)

The mode of the two semi-structured interactive interviews was inspired by the need to gain knowledge from a chronological account of events. The questions were structured so as to lead the interviewee gently through the chronology of the events, while at the same time probing, clarifying and expanding on the content, if necessary. The questions in the interview guide were intentionally the same in anticipation of the later need for temporal collating and categorizing data. The two interviews that took place were set up in a location chosen by the respondents. Interviews were but loosely guided by the interview guide, in which sense they were semi-structured, (Kvale, 2007) see appendix 2., and space was given to expanding on or supplementing the main questions by further probing and clarifying sub-questions in regards to anything which seemed important to both interviewee and interviewer. In the event when the interviewees diverged from the theme of the main question, it was allowed to continue freely until the topic of diversion was exhausted by the interviewee. Throughout the interview, the respondents were encouraged to explore the questions and were not interrupted by the following guiding question until they themselves felt ready to move on. Face expressions, gestures or involuntary movements were not noted, the primary focus lied on content, which was verbally expressed. However the tone of voice and the degree of emotion involved in the response was noted. Secondary and clarifying sub-questions were asked and answered even at a later date, when the need arose for clarification or additional information. Interviews were recorded and later simultaneously transcribed and translated using the Express scribe software.

In one case due to distance limitations, a parent chose to answer the questions in writing. She received the interview guide, which was amended to suit the written response. Written responses present a limitation for the researcher in terms of inability to ask clarifying and probing questions immediately as they are called for as well as inability to observe the tone of voice and the atmosphere. This was partially compensated for by a frequent follow up exchange of additional clarifying and probing questions with the respondent.

Method of analysis

Process of analysing narrative data leaves the researcher with many inviting avenues. The researcher is advised to find an approach which fits the purpose (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). After establishing the aims of this thesis, namely to explore how do parents experience and reflect on the process of escalating disharmony with their child's Waldorf School, which led to its withdrawal, I resolved to find a method of analysis, which would provide both the reader and the researcher with the opportunity to discover underlying commonalities, patterns or discrepancies, thus revealing possible learning points for the discussion. In order to preserve the integrity and

authenticity of individual responses I endeavoured to present the narratives of the three families in a form of three individual stories. However, the necessity to collate and compare experiences to discover their shared responses, patterns as well as discrepancies relevant to the thesis' aims, resulted in the second round of analytical process in form of summary of data, and so following the stories, the reader will find a summary of findings chapter, in which the content of the interviews was analysed using the method of scrutinising the data, finding the main ideas, identifying patterns and formulating findings statements (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The process of creating stories out of the transcripts warrants a more detailed description. After completing the interviews, transcriptions and translations, I set out to write three individual stories as an attempt to present the reader with respondents' stories in a readable and engaging form, whereupon the reader has the opportunity to read as close, topically and temporally coherent account of the events, as possible. I transformed individual sentences from the first person verbatim transcripts into a reported speech consequent description of events from the respondents' lives, and used my voice at the beginning of each story to indicate that I am now the teller of the respondents' stories. This process of (re)interpreting-constructing stories of the narrators with common story elements, positions this method in a hermeneutical cycle (Sandelowski, 1991). The process of writing the stories involved a degree of prioritizing the relevant data to be included, as well as their temporal organization into a chronological accounts, which would broadly follow the process of the respondents' interactions with the teachers/schools from the beginning to the end and beyond. While the basic chronology of events was guided by the interview guide, the interviews were semi-structured, which meant that the respondents often diverged from the chronology and interpretation of events and returned to address the same issue several times from a different standpoint (Kvale, 2007). Varied and non-chronological perceptions of the same event had to be included in a manner which would provide a measure of topical and temporal coherence. Throughout the process of writing these three stories, I strove to preserve factual adherence to the phenomena described in transcripts and withhold my own interpretation and experience, in which sense we could speak of a degree of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997). Inevitably patterns and similarities began to emerge during the process and through transcription and writing of stories, the iterative process of analysis began to take place. The patterns, similarities, differences and metaphors began to emerge from the narratives. These were made note of for their consequent categorization and comparison in the summary of findings chapter. Often, out of these emergent patterns, a need for further clarification arose, which was addressed by asking additional questions.

The three stories were written and sent back for approval to the interviewees in order to validate my interpretation of the data gathered from interviews. The respondents' comments, additions or

amendments were invariably taken into account and included in the second draft of the stories. The process of approval was repeated until all the respondents fully sanctioned their stories, a process suggested and employed by McCormack, (2004). Each story is presented to the reader as a unity in the presentation of data chapter. The stories are temporally divided into the pre-event, the event itself and post-event parts. Content wise they are divided into motives, the first signs of trouble, escalation, decision and after effects. These common overlying motives form a structure according which the data from the transcripts are compared in the summary of findings, which constitutes the second step in the analysis of narratives that are not concerned with individual stories only, but rather form an attempt to look for motives, issues, patterns, commonalities and disagreements across the individual narratives (Cohen et al., 2007). The iterating process of scrutinizing the stories and transcripts led to creation of new sub-categories in the summary of findings chapter, which expanded on the original structure of the three stories, most notably, 'the first sign of trouble' was subdivided to the 'parents' response', the 'teachers'/ schools' response' and 'the results of implemented actions'. These additional categories were explicated, comparisons made, similarities and discrepancies identified across the three stories, and the findings statements presented in the summary of findings chapter.

Validity

The question of validity is inherently a sensitive issue in regards to narrative enquiry. Polkinghorne (2007) asserts that validity requirements depend upon the kind of claims the researcher presents. This thesis does not lay claims to discover the historical truth. Its objective is to explore how three families experienced a challenging event in their lives.

Polkinghorne (2007) asserts:

> Because stories are simulations of participants' meaning, and not the meaning itself, these four threats to the validity of interview-generated evidence cannot be eliminated. The task of the researcher is to produce articulations that lessen the distance between what is said by participants about their experienced meaning and the experienced meaning itself. (p.482)

The four threats Polkinghorne speaks of are that the narratives do not mirror the actual events; that the powers of language cannot faithfully represent reality; that the narratives are always the co-creations of the teller and the listener and finally, that deeper layers of experience remain, into various degrees, obscured.

While recognizing the threats to validity of narrative accounts, namely the fact, that stories do not mirror the full reality of events, I attempted to present the complete stories to the reader, to enable the reader to form her/his own judgements.

Further issue of validity of narratives is that the participants react and respond to the personality of the listener, in terms of colouring their narratives in a way which they feel is expected by the listener, or in order to project a particular image of themselves to conform to the perceived expectations. My attempt to address this issue consisted of clarification of my position as both a parent and a committed Waldorf teacher, prior to the interview. The respondents were informed, next to thorough explanation of the intentions of the research, of my particular experiences in a parental role, when I found myself in a position to advocate for the needs of my children, as well as of those, on the other side of the teacher's desk, when I had to defend the Waldorf methods and ethos. This clarification of the duality of my role has set up conditions for the following interview, where the mutual understanding could take place, originating in the acknowledgement of my role as an informed Waldorf insider from both sides, thus withholding hasty judgements in favour of any of the parties concerned in the narrative.

As in any stories, there are things left unspoken and the respondents are not always willing or able to disclose the deeper layers of their experiences. This was partially addressed, through semi-structured interview format, by giving the space to participants to explore their experiences without any limitation on my part; they were not being interrupted in order for the interview to proceed. Rather, they were encouraged to reflect on any avenues of thought they deemed necessary, relevant or simply fit for the moment. Likewise, when I felt that, at the end of the thought, space was opened for clarification and further enquiry, I asked follow up, probing and clarifying questions. In recognition of the fact that the respondents could have, despite the efforts made to create an open and trustful atmosphere, omitted to mention important details, considerable activity took place after the interviews were recorded. Throughout the process of transcription, translation, as well as storying of the narratives, the respondents were asked and answered additional clarifying and probing questions. They were granted a considerable degree of control over the storied narratives based on the transcripts by frequent, post interview exchange of comments and amendments, which were always included in the draft. This process was repeated until the respondents were fully satisfied with the presented version of their narrative. The reader is asked to enter with empathy into the narratives and form his own judgements on the degree of validity of participants' experienced meaning.

Similarly to Frank's (1995) work with the patients' narratives, the absence of the voice of the doctors, in this instance the voice of the teachers, may be balanced by a recognising that the power dynamics of parents-teachers encounters are always favourably leaning towards the teachers' side through their institutionalized authority and status in society (Holtz, 2011; Tveit, 2009). Correspondingly to the relationship between patients and doctors, what parents experience as deeply personal, unique and intense experience, most teachers may take as one of many, albeit difficult episodes, which they go through during their working lives (Frank, 1995).

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Jitka's story.

Prelude

It is a pleasant, early autumn afternoon in the city. The street in its historical centre bustles with city dwellers hurrying to catch the metro or do some pre-dinner shopping. Only an occasional sound of siren or a characteristic tinkle of trams, break the soothing sound of quiet jazz in a near-empty, hip tea house I am waiting in, when the door opens and Jitka walks in. She is an elegant, middle aged woman, with unruly hair tied with premeditated carelessness into a bun and glasses of shape and colour which suggest style and intellect. She is quick to spot me and after a brief introductory greeting sits down and expertly orders tea from a long menu. Jitka is the first mother, out of several parents I approached, who agreed to talk to me. It is hardly surprising as the topic of our conversation is sensitive and deeply personal. She had read the questions before our meeting and her comments suggested some academic background through familiarity with research methods. Indeed, it turns out, that she was involved in research herself at an academic institution she used to work for. During her narrative, she is making an obvious effort to remain objective, weighing the pros and cons of every situation contributing to her decision to remove her daughter from the school, which she and her husband so carefully chose as most suited to her child's needs as well as answering their hopes and expectations from education. Remarkably savvy when it comes to educational issues, Jitka's knowledge springs from her long lasting involvement in her daughter's academic proceedings, basically since the Kindergarten onwards. She is inwardly active and sharp and it is easy to imagine she is not one to remain quiet and passive when problems emerge.

"My daughter is eleven and three quarters now. She went to Waldorf School from the first to… Err…could we proceed according to questions, please? It would help me." She begins her story.

Motives

Jitka's family motivation to place their daughter in Waldorf School came from their excellent experience with a Waldorf Kindergarten. She would not just pick the nearest one to home for the convenience sake. Before deciding, she visited eight Kindergartens in the city and through looking around and conversations with the teachers perceived and assessed the atmosphere of each one. In some, she says, you could feel the spirit of old times and in others the over amplified spirit of new times. When she first stepped into the Waldorf Kindergarten, she knew it was the one straight away

and later brought in her husband to take a look. She simply liked the atmosphere and she liked the headmistress, too. It was just good for her daughter, who she was at the time.

When Jitka's daughter was due to enter school, she followed the advice of the Kindergarten principal and went to sit in on Waldorf classes. They had discussions with the former head of the school and Jitka's impression, she hesitates to articulate the emphasis on rationality, was that the head was a rationally thinking woman and the school was respectable, so they decided to go ahead.

Hopes and expectations

They hoped, that their daughter will acquire an ability to develop a lifelong relationship with learning and that she will learn in a way, which develops the child in a more complex manner then the mainstream school system, that is through methodology, which is not so much focused on performance, as on learning through experiencing things. That, she still believes today, is the ideal a child can get, to experience things and to learn from that.

Neither in the Kindergarten, nor at the school were they told much about Waldorf specifics, Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical foundations on which the school stands, his child developmental psychology and other ideas, although it is hard to imagine that a woman of Jitka's acumen would not have read on the subject prior to making a decision. They were told, that the process of mastering reading and writing may be somewhat different or slower from the mainstream schools, but that it was individual with each child. She says, that on the parents-teachers meetings they were given some papers by Rudolf Steiner to read, which she taught of as being common sense and never gave it much thought afterwards.

Despite everything that followed, Jitka still considers herself relatively lucky when it comes to her daughter's teacher in the first grade. She was young, inexperienced, but with good academic background, endowing her with certain rational qualities, which Jitka appreciated. She was open to ideas when a group of mothers formed to "assist" the teacher with various teaching tasks, such as preparing handwritten and themed (in line with Waldorf ethos) worksheets for homework. Homework was something the group of helpful mothers persuaded the teacher to introduce in the second grade in view of perceived need for exercising of the children's newly acquired skills. The help extended as far as to suggesting that the teacher used some non Waldorf experimental methods in the classroom. The teacher was at first open to all these suggestions and help and took on the experiment.

The first sign of trouble

At the end of the second grade, the teacher decided to discontinue the experiment and switch back to a classical method. To Jitka this decision was incomprehensible, she had an impression that the teacher behaved irrationally, that children's good stopped being the priority, that the teacher succumbed to - invisible and only suspected - pressure from the Waldorf faculty. Jitka felt, that there were covert reasons for this, which the teacher did not want to share with the parents. She did try to dissuade the teacher from doing this, her main argument being, that the rules cannot be changed in the middle of the game, that the children will become confused. The teacher went ahead with switching back to the classical method.

Hence, Jitka discovered that there are things about Waldorf School, which she could not hope to comprehend rationally or logically, and her trust in the initial level-headedness of the teacher took some battering. For herself, she assigned this event to the teacher's inexperience. It would have been better, if they didn't start with the experiment at all.

Then, sometime in the second grade, Jitka's daughter began refusing to read. She was not able to connect letters into words and consequently stopped reading altogether. This was an impulse for Jitka to start looking deeper into Waldorf method, especially in regards to its universality, particularly after they discovered at home, that their daughter lacked basic orientation in numbers from one to ten, the foundations of mathematical skills, so to speak.

Escalation

Jitka's daughter began, at the beginning of (.) grade, to skip school. It was some time before she discovered it and when she challenged her daughter, she was told, that the child went to the playground instead, played there, bought a donut and went to school after ten. She was told that other children did it and, why should she be on time when they weren't. Jitka was shocked. It just compounded with what she felt, for some time, as her daughter's growing disinterest in learning, mounting distance from the school and its demands, shrugging off homework and over-all refusal to participate in school work.

Characteristically proactive, Jitka, through a consultation with and assessment by a non Waldorf educational specialist recommended to her by a friend, quickly established, that her daughter did not suffer from any form of dyslexia, dyscalculia or similar hindrances and was told, that the Waldorf method of learning to read may not be universally valid for all children. She brought something else from that consultation.

It was the verdict of the child educational specialist, that, apart of the lack of basic literacy and math skills, the children-because two families went there-needed a complete re-education. Hearing this, Jitka did not waste any more time and paid for extra tutoring. This went on for some years even after Jitkas's daughter changed schools and she says today with a wry smile, that their investment was considerable and that as a result they did not really have free education. Interestingly, her daughter reading improved soon after employing a new method and her joy of reading returned.

So far Jitka's narrative has been remarkably unemotional and to the point, obviously attempting to be as objective as possible. This changed, however, in the following passage.

The final straw

Since their first, hands on involvement in their children's educational matters, Jitka's impression that they are substituting the teacher's work and that it will not be possible to sustain in the long term, grew progressively. At the beginning of the (.) grade, a meeting of the helpful mothers group with the teacher took place in order to look at and plan for the coming year. Jitka diligently studied the Waldorf school plan for the (.) grade and had questions pertaining to how and when the teacher was going to cover this and that. Not satisfied with the teacher's vague answers and in absence of materials, Jitka produced a pile of books she had prepared and brought with her and began suggesting the possible ways to incorporate exercising grammar and literacy skills into the year's theme. The teacher, by now possibly frustrated, accused her, in front of the others, of being overly zealous. This accusation-and it was not meant as a jest- struck Jitka unprepared, made her feel unappreciated and out of place. She says it was at this moment when she realized that she and her daughter were in the wrong place.

Until then, Jitka really wanted to change things, which she perceived as dysfunctional, on a class level, having realized through her involvement in the school board and frequent pointless discussions, that changing things on a school level will not be possible. She co-operated with other parents in the class and felt appreciated for the work she and her fellow mothers were doing in lieu of the teacher. The parents saw, that their worksheets worked and the homework actually helped the children to progress. They even noticed that other teachers copied and used their worksheets for other classes.

Inactivity

Throughout this process, Jitka perceived a certain unwillingness to work on part of the teacher. Although she appreciated the teacher's diligent preparation for the lessons, she felt that the teacher's mysterious trust in that "it (skills) will come down" onto the children later was not

entirely justified. Too much emphasis laid on being, she quips, spiritually enlightened, on being with the children emotionally and living through things. Jitka felt, that some real work needed to be done in terms of working on deepening and internalizing the literacy and math skills, that the children had. She refers to this process as learning hard facts and feels that the teacher trusted too much in help of the higher powers involved.

Nine graders Validation

Through her involvement in organizing a grade nine ball, she spoke with a few nine graders and their parents and was shocked to hear the accounts of them needing massive amounts of extra tutoring after school, in order to prepare for high school entry exams. This has further eroded her trust in the school's professional competence, even though she admits she cannot generalize this ineptitude to the whole Waldorf movement, as she cannot compare with other Waldorf schools. She even says, that she heard very positive things about Waldorf upper school in the area and its success in terms of academic achievement. This experience of nine graders was, for Jitka, similar to finding and placing the final pieces of puzzle together.

Façade

During our conversation Jitka mentions on several occasions a certain impression of or a feeling of pretence or falsehood on part of the school. The Waldorf teachers had no qualms using worksheets prepared by the parents, which were, in fact, based on mainstream textbooks and only re-written by hand to conform to Waldorf aesthetics. Moreover, she finds a discrepancy between the teachers' claims of spiritual enlightenment and their unwillingness to do the tedious and painstaking work on revising, re-affirming and internalizing the subject matter. Interestingly, Jitka also regards the teacher's submission to the parent's pressure to introduce homework in early grades, essentially a non Waldorf element, as a sign of willingness to compromise the Waldorf ideal.

The aftermath

When, in the middle of the (.) grade, she and two other families announced their decision to take their children out of the school, they were not met with any persuading on part of the teacher or school. Jitka believes that at first the teacher thought, they wouldn't go. The rest of the parents were shocked. This was, after all, the active group of mothers, those parents, who persuaded the teacher to give homework, laboured over worksheets and sat on the school board. Jitka mentions several significant conversations, in which some of the mothers expressed their belief, that this (Waldorf School) was the best for the children and that the world outside was bad. Since announcing her

decision, she felt excluded from the close knit community of parents and teachers. She says it was like suddenly being out of the system. Jitka believes, that the school did not try to reflect on her decision, did not set up a follow up meeting because they knew her form the board meetings and may have regarded her as too opinionated or un-enlightened by Steiner's ideas.

Jitka mentions, that sometime after their leaving, she met by chance one of the fathers from the class and he told her, that since their departure, the teacher really intensified her efforts, gave a lot of homework and generally put more emphasis on academic achievement. This gave her a feeling of satisfaction, in that all her effort was not in vain. She says, that she has no problem with the school today and she even visits the school fairs.

Following their departure, the parents found a blessing in a shape of a small village school near the city and its strong and charismatic class teacher, who managed to get the child back on learning track. Jitka believes, that it is often the personality, charisma and experience of the teacher, which makes all the difference in children's school lives. She says, that her daughter benefitted from the kind of discipline and order, which the village teacher managed to maintain in his classroom. It was the kind of atmosphere, which she needed to progress. At Waldorf School, Jitka saw, that there were always problems with maintaining discipline, especially in regards to the boys' behaviour in the classroom.

Today, when one asks Jitka about the first thing that comes into her mind when hearing the words Waldorf School, she instantaneously replies:

> "WORK….A great LOT OF WORK…(laughs heartily)…Countless hours, spent over homework, simply, sitting with the teacher, at the parent-teachers meetings, with the parents, sitting on the Board, and really what pops in my mind is nothing but work… which was moreover …really… in its result… Work and three years in partial unconsciousness, unconsciousness away from reality, when I gradually found out how closed the system is."

What Jitka really very much appreciates about Waldorf School is, that it imbued her daughter and the other children as well, with the ability to speak freely, to tell stories, to feel self- confident, not hesitant and shy in front of people. In fulfilling the main goal she had hoped for, which was helping her child to develop a lifelong relationship with learning through direct experience of things, it failed.

Jitka is remarkably composed throughout the first half of our conversation, in the second half she becomes more vocal, laughs frequently and becomes generally more animated. It is evident that she wants to tell the story as it was, makes considerable effort not to exaggerate things or embellish facts in order to portrait the other side in darker colours

Mark and Suzanne's Story

Prelude

It is a sunny Bank holiday morning and I am waiting in an empty teachers' room. Empty school is an odd, eerie place. School halls are meant to be busy, the classrooms full of focused energy and odour of youth. The boiling kettle clicks just as the doorbell sounds and I head for the entrance to let the visitors in. Mark and Suzanne walk in the foyer, curiously looking around at students' artwork on display in vacant corridors. They are not married. They used to be. Both are here to talk about an event from their earlier life, a memory they will always share. Their story is emotionally charged, there is a tremor of urgency in their voices, even though the experience they are talking about happened quite some time ago. Mark and Suzanne are both college graduates, articulate and informed.

Years ago, when Mark first heard a programme on the radio about Waldorf schools, the ideas struck a chord and he talked to Suzanne about it. She moved in educational circles and found a three year course on Steiner Waldorf pedagogy for the prospective Waldorf teachers. She knew that this was what she wanted to do. She became acquainted with the ideas of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. The ideal of harmonious development of the child's body soul and spirit through natural method of rhythm, music, arts and crafts was something she intuitively felt as a mother to be the best thing for her children. She even decided not to put their children in the Kindergarten as they used computers there. The method of mainstream schools, which they both remembered from their own childhood as focused on memorizing the facts, was something they wanted to spare their children from. When it was time for the children to begin their schooling, they moved houses and found jobs in a different town in order to place their children in Waldorf School.

Hopes and Expectations

Mark and Suzanne were hoping that Waldorf School will help their children to develop the full potential of their personalities. Suzanne wished for her children to continue growing without losing the joy and wonder, the fantasy and creativity of childhood. She believed Waldorf School will help her children to grow into self-confident human beings not broken and beaten down by criticism for academic failures. Another thing Suzanne did not like about the mainstream schooling was the grading system, which she considers unduly competitive and not corresponding with the true extent of the child's knowledge, an issue on which Mark disagrees with her. They also liked the idea of above average cooperation of Waldorf School with the parents. She was happy to meet some friends at the course, who had their children in the Waldorf School and spoke well about it.

They made the move and their son entered the (.) grade at the Waldorf School in their new hometown. They were very well informed about the specifics of Waldorf approach to education and so nothing which was said at the entry interview surprised them.

The first sign of trouble

Things went well at first, although the boy seemed a bit withdrawn, the sort of behaviour, which they attributed to the initial inhibition stemming from the new environment. He made friends, especially with one boy, but things did not really seem to improve much. He continued to change as if the joy of life drained out of him and they had the impression he did not like to go to school. Then his best friend left the school and things took a turn for the worse. There were persistent reports of bullying and ostracism. They approached the teacher about it, but he denied any such happenings in the class. He said that the children will sort it out among themselves without any intervention.

Mark let his wife handle this at first, but things did not seem to improve. Suzanne believes that the teacher's antipathy towards her influenced the way the teacher perceived her son in the classroom. The teacher kept marginalizing the issues, did not pay attention to it and suddenly, the frequency of notes of complaining about their son behaviour increased.

The teacher's behaviour became unpredictable, sometimes the boy seemed to excel and was praised excessively one day, only to draw a barrage of written complaints in his book, on the next. They complied with the teachers requests and helped him to prepare for school, encouraged him to do well, but he began to openly display unwillingness to go there and grew ever more reluctant to participate.

Suzanne believes that much of their son behaviour at school originated in boredom. He is a bright boy and she quotes him as saying he didn't bother to answer the easy questions the teacher asked of the children, he only became active at the difficult ones. Suzanne several times suggested that the teacher gives him extra work but to no avail.

Escalation

Before a school event, where all classes show some of their schoolwork, the boy excused himself from attending it. Mark says he got a phone call from the teacher demanding to know why their son was absent. The boy was at home and Mark persuaded him to go. So he went, he was late and the teacher later publicly humiliated him, in front of the class.

When Suzanne heard of this, she was shocked at the teacher's behaviour, especially considering the difficult position her son was in already. But several children from the class confirmed it, so she

resolved to approach the teacher, who in turn invited both parents to school for a meeting with herself and the school's behavioural advisor.

The last straw

Mark says, that the meeting began by the teacher bringing their sons artwork which she used to elaborate at length about their son's problems. These problems, he believed, clearly came from something he experienced at home. It was not himself who had to do something to help the boy at school, the problem was evidently at home. The teacher had a way with words and they wanted to talk about that particular event. Mark says:

> "I asked him openly why my son, when he was in this difficult position in the class, when the children ostracise him and bully him, when he feels pushed aside, why instead of supporting him somehow, and helping him, he put him down in front of the whole class...
>
> Why this?
>
> And he said to my face that it was completely different, that she had said something totally different, and that it was not true..."

Suzanne was certain that the children didn't lie to her and she said it. Still, the teacher refused to admit to any wrongdoing. The parents were now unsure, perhaps the teacher was right and they were mistaken.

Later that day Suzanne ascertained the story for herself by talking with the children from the class and when they realized that the teacher blatantly lied into their faces, they resolved not to have a person capable of doing such a thing and lying about it teaching their child any longer. What also helped them to finalize their decision was their son's clearly articulated wish to leave the school.

Suzanne says:

> I say the biggest thing why I felt he shouldn't be there, was the morals of the teacher, that he was lying and the attitude, that was what convinced me that I don't want my child to be there under the influence of such a person not that he didn't learn etc... but the character of the teacher was important to me.

What else could they do? They knew from experience, that they didn't stand a chance to demand a change of the teacher. His position at the school was such that challenging his competence with the rest of the school faculty was unthinkable. Suzanne and Mark were present at a meeting with the college of teachers in a different matter and Mark commented on a strange feeling of ossified unity emanating from the faculty closed to any discussion knowing, that their pre-conceived stance on the issue was the best, thus preventing any real listening or reflection. They simply knew best.

The aftermath

When they announced their decision to take their son out of the class, the teacher simply wished the boy all the best and gave them his school things. There was no interview, no attempt from the side of the school to get to know the reasons, to reflect on the process, to learn from the events. Mark spoke to several other parents with similar, more recent experiences and in all the cases neither the teacher, nor the school's leadership took steps to follow up or self-reflect. In one case the teacher stated at the parents-teacher meeting, that the reason for a child's departure from the class was, that the other school was closer to its home, which was an obvious untruth. Mark considers this lack of interest a symptom of the faculty's self-regard as being all knowing, unwilling to even consider the possibility of wrongdoing on their part.

Fortunately, they found a class at a mainstream school with an excellent teacher, who managed to motivate the children and their son thrived. Even though they are satisfied with their son's progress today, they realize that by entering a mainstream school he was deprived of some things like arts and crafts, imaginative and creative aspect of education and that if he had had a different teacher he might have been happy at the Waldorf School. Nevertheless, they both agree it was the best decision they could have made at the time.

Mark and Suzanne's two other children attend the same Waldorf School; they are in different classes, perfectly happy there and their parents are happy about them being there. They hold no grudges Mark says; it was their son's path. They don't perceive the problem as inherent in the Waldorf system; they see it as a teacher specific problem. Having said that, Suzanne questions the fact, that the faculty of the school knows about these things going on regularly over the years and does nothing. She says:

> These experiences repeat, they are similar… it has been so many years...but never mind... I am just surprised, no one was interested in the reasons...no one says we are sorry that children leave our school...why... I think that it is into some degree the influence of the personality of the teacher, which is the most important thing, but the fact that such a teacher works there, is the expression of the system, of the college of teachers, which tolerates such a teacher there, it is the picture of the whole school, it is both really, in my opinion, I was put into reality. I realized nothing is perfect and it is good to take it as it is with pluses and minuses.

Mark:

> I don't see it completely black and white. I don't hold any grudge against Waldorf School. I just know, that there are a lot of great things there and a lot of great teachers, who do their job excellently and it has a lot of positives, but at the same time it is not as perfect as we thought at the beginning, it has its faults… It is the

same as everywhere else, there are normal people who are flesh and blood and they make mistakes, they are simply no gods…

Mary's story

Due to distance restraints, Mary agreed to respond to the interview guide questions in writing. Her story is different from the previous two, in that they were prevented from taking their son out of the school on their own accord, by the school's insistence to implement a 'three strikes out' policy to be seen as effectively safeguarding. The parents would have taken their child out of the school in order to prevent the long lasting stigmatising effects of expulsion on a young child. Mary and her husband are educated and articulate people, who both have the experience of having gone to Waldorf School themselves.

Motives

Mary is a parent with a first-hand Waldorf School experience, as she herself went there and is, to this day, involved in Anthroposophical practices. Her choice of Waldorf School for her children came naturally. Mary did not think of other alternatives, as Steiner Waldorf view of the developing child resonates with her own understanding of it.

Her hopes were, that her child would be met as an individual by engaged teachers and that the development of the whole child's being would be considered. Her son went through nursery and the lower school, when his class teacher left.

The First Sign of Trouble

In lower school the first signs of dis-chord appeared when he began to express his dislike for the new teacher. After a series of problems, when her son was reprimanded, he ran away from school and came home. The new class teacher was Waldorf trained female, whereas his old teacher was male. Her son began to disrupt the teaching process, refusing to comply with the teachers' instruction and was frequently sent outside the classroom.

Mary could see that her son's behaviour was difficult and causing disruption in the class and it seemed that this problem lay with her son and his attitude. She could see, that her son's behaviour was related to the breakdown of his relationship with the new teacher as he was not as disruptive in other lessons, although he was always on the "naughty spectrum" of the boys. Mary also felt that the school did not have the necessary tools in place to facilitate the change of the class teacher. Moreover, while the new teacher was undoubtedly academically gifted, her ability to connect with her son not only on the intellectual, but also on the emotional level, was felt to be somewhat

limited. She says the teacher had been 'more inclined towards head then heart'. This was also observed and responded to by other children in the class, some of whom left during this transition time.

It was Mary, who undertook the daily task of communicating with the school in regards to her son's emerging difficulties. Her husband took on a more active role in the process of trying to establish a working relationship with the new teacher. At a later stage, they both attended meetings at school.

Mary and her husband discussed their concerns with the teacher soon after the problem began, which resulted in a mutual agreement, that building a closer relationship was necessary. This aim was facilitated by teacher, son and parent doing an activity together at the weekend. However, things soon got beyond that and Mary's son didn't want to do this anymore.

Escalation

The school did not get involved until the run-away incident. Then the family met with the person appointed by the school to discuss the problem. At the meetings, which followed, it was difficult for Mary's son to open up and articulate clearly the reasons for his behaviour. He left the meetings still feeling somewhat untouched by the approach of 'telling him off' or having to listen to the authority around him, and compounded the distance between himself and the teachers he encountered in that setting. He did express that he was sorry that he was letting his class down. Since that time he has been able to express that he was unhappy and didn't know what to do about it. The school then appointed a behaviour policy group to talk to the family and the boy without the new teacher's presence, but things went as before, which further compounded the feeling that his behaviour was unacceptable. As Mary remarks, it may have been the case, however, the reasons for this behaviour remained un-discussed. The behaviour policy group was there to implement policy – it wasn't able to address any underlying issues with the child.

The situation escalated. Mary's son increasingly displayed disruptive behaviour, for which he was regularly sent out. He was required to sit in another class and 'do his work at the back' on his own. Her son refused to do this, as he felt embarrassed going into another class, which generated difficulties for the school in terms of supervision and responsibility. The school then implemented a policy, whereby three further incidents would lead to immediate expulsion.

The Last Straw

A final incident happened and the family immediately requested to withdraw the boy from the school to prevent expulsion, however, the expulsion was implemented.

The parents felt, that being expelled at such a young age would leave a lasting impression on their son, difficult to recover from and that had they been given the opportunity to take him out, it would have alleviated the trauma of the event. Nonetheless, the school wished to be seen as effectively safeguarding and things happened as they did.

The aftermath

Following his departure from the school, Mary's son experienced a tremendous relief, which indicated, that he must have been living under a lot of pressure for some time. Having said that, he also left with low self-esteem and feeling stupid.

After the event Mary was approached by the teacher and the acting head on two separate occasions, both 'off the record'. They expressed support and sadness. These were helpful and supportive interventions, but because they weren't contained within the school system, felt somewhat invalid. The family received a notification of expulsion and no further communication took place in regards to their son and the experience he went through. The parents requested an 'exit interview', which was granted, where they expressed some of the difficulties with the school and the process that led to their child leaving the school. For them, it was not entirely satisfactory, as the person who spoke to them, was not even at the school at the time when the events took place.

Looking back, Mary has several observations, which she took from the process. She feels let down by the school on two points. Firstly, there was a lack of resources in dealing with the needs of her child. The method which the school and its teachers implemented to solve the child's problematic behaviour was not effective.

There was no one appointed school representative to carry the issue with the family and there was a confusion regarding the responsibilities of the school, the teacher and the family. In the end, she feels, the school's behaviourist top down approach made things worse.

> As a parent I felt there was no process to look after the wellbeing of our family (longstanding parents). There was also no forum for discussing how this came about, i.e. looking at the teacher's responsibility as well as the schools' responsibility, and ours as a family. As an active and responsible parent myself, I would have liked a process to come to mutual understanding, and a consensual picture that we could support. Simple questions were not addressed that would have helped understanding, i.e., why is this child behaving like this? I also wonder whether everyone involved was in fact struggling with 'the system' and not feeling supported, whether this was the teacher, the child or the parents.

Mary's perception of Waldorf School changed after this experience. It seems to her, that the system of class teachers works only when relationships are good and in the event of a breakdown of such

relationship a great deal of damage can be done. She also feels disappointed, that the school was not able to be more child centred. They let her son go because he did not fit. She wonders if Waldorf schools are doing enough to reflect on and adjust their practices to meet 'the unusual and challenging questions of the children of today". While appreciating the bond, which is often formed between the children and their class teachers, Mary questions the fixed structure of closed class collectives at Waldorf School, which makes it harder to address issues from the outside. Mary's other child goes to the same Waldorf School and communication is maintained, but she feels there was no sufficient follow through in regards to the events, which led to her son's departure When her other child struggled at times, they have expressed unhappiness in a different, less disruptive ways then her son. On the whole, the other child 'fits in the system' and is met with more compassion, understanding and meets a helpful approach from the school.

For some time after, Mary continued to feel the effects of these events every time she went to school. Following the expulsion, her son was barred from the school grounds and could not attend school events such as fairs without the family submitting a written request. She asked for this to be changed and partially succeeded. She felt, that this led to further stigmatization. This feeling was further compounded by some parents, who avoided contact with her and her son and would not let their children hang out with him. Later her son was allowed to attend events, but had to remain within her or father's sight at all times. This state of affairs, apart of putting additional strain on the family as a whole, further compounded the feeling that he was a persona non grata, bad, unwanted, a failure.

Mary concludes:

> Since this experience there has been a gradual process of letting go of this picture, and finding a way of understanding, who he actually is. There was an immense danger that my son would be defined by this story, which I as a mother was determined to change. This took a long time, but has led to a rich experience of being able to get to know my son in a very different way, and also for him to know himself above and beyond this picture. We accept he is a young person who will challenge the people and the system around him when things don't fit for him, and this will form a strong image for him in his life to come. I also see there is something bigger at work as to why he had to meet this in his life and will no doubt form something of his future path.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings to the reader in a structured way, which would provide opportunity to gain an overview of the data gathered, sorted and compared according to their importance, through timeline of events. The chapter begins with motives and expectations, which guided the respondent families in their choice of Waldorf School. It moves onto the first sign

of trouble and follows with the parents' and the teachers/schools' response to it. Consequently, it attempts to state what went, from the parents' point of view, wrong during these interactions and the reasons for their final decision to withdraw from the school. The last part outlines what was the schools' response to this decision and what took place, in regards to the children's lives, after the withdrawal. The chapter concludes with the parents' retrospective assessment of the events.

Motives and expectations

Steiner Waldorf schools belong to the category of alternatives offering holistic approach to education. When looking closely at the motives of the three respondent families, we may discern one uniting element, namely their wish for the Waldorf School to educate their child in a holistic manner, the aspects of which were expressed in different ways by all respondents. Two of the families made a very well informed choice based on their thorough knowledge of and identification with the Steiner Waldorf methods as well as the philosophy underlying the schools endeavours. This knowledge originated from a first-hand experience of having gone to Waldorf School themselves or being involved in Anthroposophically inspired activities in their adult lives. This means, that for two of the families, in terms Waldorf specifics, there was very little they could not anticipate. One respondent was guided more by the personal observations of atmosphere, good references of friends and acquaintances and good reputation and impression made by the staff of the school. Two of the respondents spoke to friends and acquaintances and were given a favourable references. One family moved towns and changed jobs in order to place their children to the Waldorf School. Two families gave a great deal of thought, time and energy to the choice of the Waldorf kindergarten and the school itself.

It is apparent, that the choice of Waldorf school for their child was for all respondents not an arbitrary decision, but one guided by careful consideration of the needs of their children and, in two cases, an explicit wish for their child to avoid the environment of the mainstream school, which they judged, based on their own experience, as unduly stressful and competitive. All three respondents belonged to the category of active parents, engaging in the school's activities, either as members of the school board, or helping with various school activities outside, and in one case inside the classroom.

Holistic approach

All respondents placed, in the process of making decision, emphasis on the holistic approach of Waldorf School to development of the child in its various manifestations, which they articulated as

learning through experiencing, keeping alive joy, wonder, creativity of childhood, developing lifelong relationship with learning, developing full potential of the child and developing the child in a more complex manner.

Alongside the emphasis on holistic education holistic in the families' decision to place their child in Waldorf School, we may discern the second foremost motive, which is explicitly or implicitly defined against the perceived practices of mainstream educational system. This includes the parents' wish for the child to avoid education focused on performance only, assessment of which they deem unduly competitive. As Jitka says:

> Primarily it was the expectation such as that she will acquire a relationship with and ability to learn for life and learn in a way, which seemed to me to develop the child in a more complex manner than the mainstream school system, that it is not methodology explicitly focused on performance, but focused on significant experience based form, which I still think is the ideal, what the child can get, i.e. the ability to experience things and basically learn by this, to put it very simply.

Apart from the common motives shared by the respondents, there was a number of individual expectations, such as wish for the child to grow self-confident, not criticised for academic failures, the above average cooperation of the school with parents, rationality of the head-teacher, and own positive childhood experience.

The first signs of trouble

In all three cases, things went well to begin with. In two of the cases, the first alarm was raised when the children increasingly began showing the signs of unhappiness with the school, specifically with the teacher. In one case the child's indicators were purely behavioural, in two cases these were combined with poor or deteriorating academic performance. In all three cases, the children's initial behavioural and academic problems were first attributed to factors external to school, however eventually related to the personality and competence of the teacher. These first signs included increasing withdrawal, truancy, reports of unaddressed bullying and ostracism and increasingly disruptive behaviour at school. Suzanne says:

> The boy began to grow sort of quiet, I don't know, as if life drained out of him, or joy, simply, he behaved strangely... I didn't have the feeling he liked going to school, rather he went there unwillingly, he was saying things like he didn't like it there and so. It was only after some time, it wasn't straight from the beginning...

In one case, this took quite some time and was also related to what the parents perceived as irrational behaviour of the teacher, further complemented by the apparent lack of child's academic skills. In one case the behavioural changes were initiated by a change of the class teacher.

These manifestations of the onset of difficulties may be categorized into the primary indicators, shown in various displays of the children's deteriorating academic performance and (most frequently) behaviour, consequently, as a result of parental response, the secondary indicators perceived by the parents as inadequacies of the personality of the teacher (most frequent) and thirdly those, perceived as shortfalls of the school policies and its ethos. All respondents expressed that they felt shocked at hearing of their children's behaviour during the first stages of the process.

Parents' response

At this stage, parents found themselves in a situation which warranted greater involvement with the child/school/teacher. They invariably responded to this need, which involved increased frequency of informal meetings with the teacher, helping the teacher hands on with preparation for revision and homework, creating worksheets, setting up situations at home to facilitate establishment of a closer relationship with the teacher and ultimately, in two cases, formal meetings with the teacher or school representatives took place.

> We as parents discussed it with the class teacher and in the early stages she agreed to see our son at the weekend and go for a walk. It was agreed that building up the relationship together would be a good thing. It soon got beyond that point and son didn't want to do that. The teacher's response was supportive and helpful.

In one case, in response to the difficulties, help was sought outside of the school, when the family engaged a non Waldorf educational specialist to assess possible learning difficulties and the level of academic achievement of the child. Apart of the direct attempts to rectify the situations with the teachers, all of the parents also perceived third party validation confirming their subjective impressions, namely that of other children/families observing the same problems. Interestingly, none of the families filed a formal complaint to the leadership of the school or educational authorities outside the school.

The teachers'/schools' response to the parental concerns

In two cases, the teachers and schools responded to the concerns expressed by the parents, by setting up meetings with third parties, creating conditions to address the situation. In one of these cases, the school appointed a behavioural policy group to meet the family at first with and later without the teacher's presence. In this case, the teacher was willing to spend time with the child outside school hours in an attempt to build a closer relationship. This was seen as a positive step toward resolving the situation, however the school also implemented a top down approach of behavioural measures in shape of temporary suspension, exclusion from the classroom and

ultimately a 'three strikes out' policy. In one case, when such formal meetings were not requested by the parents, the teacher was willing to accept practical help with preparation for the lessons. In none of the cases was there a refusal to cooperate with the parents.

The results of actions

I may but assert that the measures implemented by the schools to address the emerging issues failed, from the parents' standpoint, in all cases. The conduct of the formal meetings from the schools' side was perceived as unsatisfactory, moreover it was felt by the parents to contribute to the deterioration and escalation of the problems. Regular practical help with preparation for lessons offered to and accepted by one teacher from a respondent resulted in mutual feelings of exasperation. On one hand, the parent felt she was substituting the teachers' work and on the other, the teacher felt scrutinized and imposed upon. The atmosphere at the formal meetings, which were requested by the parents and the school, was perceived as unduly authoritarian on the part of the teachers, who were perceived as unwilling or unable to self-reflect and probe the causes behind the difficult behaviour the children displayed. As Mark noted:

> … She spoke at first for a very long time and spoke and spoke, she is a theoretician simply, she simply said she didn't have the will to do anything about it, simply that the problem is us and my son and that from her side everything was in order, she will not do anything to solve anything...

Resulting from these interactions set up in order to address the situation, further observations were made by the parents in regards to the teachers. They felt that they were not being listened to, that there was unwillingness on part of the teacher to accept a share of the problem and that the teachers/schools maintained a superior attitude throughout the interactions. In one case, they felt that the teacher was biased, and that her view of the child was coloured by the negative perception of the parents. It may be stated, that in all cases, the parents' trust in the professional competence of the teacher was lost.

On the school level, in two cases, the parents reported a feeling of impenetrable unity of a pre-conceived opinion of the faculty, against which they stood no chance to even begin a mutually open and reflective dialogue. This perception was expressed as unwillingness to address the causes behind the child's emerging difficulties as well as the schools' unequivocal support of the teachers' opinion, approach of and attitude towards the interaction with the parents. The parents further perceived lack of school policies to guide inexperienced teachers, and the school's inability to define areas of responsibility between the school, teacher and family.

The last straw

In all three cases the decision to withdraw the child from the school was a result of a chain of events, which took years to crystalize. All of these decisions took place within the first 5 years of primary schooling and within three years of the initial problem. As opposed to the first signs of trouble, they were the result of combined and accumulated child-teacher-school factors. In two cases the final decision to withdraw the child from the school was made following an action of a class teacher, which was perceived as utterly inappropriate by the parents. In one case the child was expelled as a result of the school's adherence to its behavioural policy, in spite of the parents' explicit wish to withdraw the child themselves. In all three cases the decision to withdraw the child from the school was not due to one isolated incident, but rather the incident provided the last tipping point on the scale of positives and negatives. Mark and Suzanne remember the moment they realized, their child was in a wrong place:

> M: After that meeting we decided right? It was the last drop. We saw that a person lies to your eyes, before that, we still hoped there could be a common dialogue,

> S: We had hoped we could agree on something, that she will make a step towards some resolution, maybe she will support our son or deal with it somehow, at least that she would listen and the situation of our son will in the class improves...but after this experience we found out, that there will be no solution...

It is evident, that the decisions were not made lightly. The decision to withdraw was complemented in one case by the child's own expressed wish to leave the school and in two cases, by the child's poor or deteriorating academic performance combined with and ongoing and worsening expressions of disruptive behaviour.

Follow up by the school

The response by the school/teacher to the parents' decision to withdraw their child was invariably perceived as severely insufficient or lacking completely. None of the families were met by any persuading attempts on the part of the school. In answer to the question regarding the school's follow up, Jitka answers:

> No, nothing like that happened…for me, that is interesting, that it didn't happen. And I don't know if this is typical. Maybe because I was on the board of parents before, they said to themselves, and they saw me there in different situations, they said to themselves, it was not worth it, maybe, I believe that could have been one of the aspects, that they simply said to themselves that I am too difficult to deal with …or too rational…or not enlightened enough by the spirit of Steiner… In any way, nothing like that happened and it did not happen from the teacher either, so it remained…in certain way the school didn't learn from…

Only in one case, and exit interview took place, and this was asked for by the family. The total absence of the schools' follow up was perceived negatively by the parents as a sign of the faculty's inability to self-reflect, to learn from the mistakes, to find out what actually took place. Likewise, it was perceived as a lack of simple human interest in the wellbeing of the families, all of whom were long standing and active parents and two of which had other children at the school.

As Mark remarks:

> From the leadership there was no reaction, and the teacher just said gave us his things and wished him good luck. That was all. There was the attitude we are Waldorf school, we are perfect, and if someone doesn't like it let him leave… simply… they (the family/child) are to blame..

In one case a kind of indirect vindication was expressed by a parent, when the teacher, following the child's departure, significantly intensified her efforts in terms of academic work.

The aftermath

Following their decision to withdraw their child from the school, the children and the families experienced a variety of consequences, majority of which were perceived as positive in regards to the child's academic and social wellbeing. The children found and liked their place in new mainstream schools, in two cases were put back on academic track, which was facilitated by a strong, enthusiastic and charismatic class teacher. One parent expressed regret in the sense, that her child was, by leaving Waldorf School, deprived of the creative, hands on approach, typical for Waldorf schools. In one case, the forced withdrawal left, in combination with tremendous relief, long lasting negative reverberations on the child, namely that the child has been left feeling a failure, a problem, which took a long time to mend. This process of de-schooling however, was perceived by the parent as a new opportunity to find a new way of understanding who he is. Two families expressed a thought, that it was their child path, a sort of a learning experience, important for life. In regards to the relationship with other parents from their former school community, all the families experienced a variety of consequences, which included feelings of exclusion and stigmatization. Jitka says: "The mood changes in a sense that suddenly you are out. Like you are out of the system, the community of the parents…"

Parent's perceptions looking back at the events

Looking back at the events from a distance of time, parents made several observations about their experience, majority of which were negative, especially in regards to the failure of the schools to fulfil their initial expectations and hopes. Parents' responses range from possessing no hard feelings

against the school to feeling let down by it. All of the families expressed belief that the problem was specifically teacher related, as opposed to problem of the Waldorf system in general. At the same time, all the families expressed concerns related to the failure of the schools' policies and procedures to address the ongoing problems adequately. It needs to be said, that two of the families have other children at the Waldorf School and both expressed satisfaction with their progress. One family voiced a kind of disillusion in contrast to their high initial expectations, that they were put into reality and realized, that Waldorf teachers only people, making mistakes just like anyone else. As Mark remarks at the end of the interview:

> I think that it is into some degree the influence of the personality of the teacher, which is the most important thing, but the fact that such a teacher works there is the expression of the system of the college of teachers, which tolerates such a teacher there, it is the picture of the whole school, it is both really, my opinion, I was put into reality I realized nothing is perfect and it is good to take it as it is with pluses and minuses.

One informed parent raised questions in regards to the closed class collectives led by the class teacher for many years, which may work when things go well, but proved limiting at times of difficulties in the child's relationship with the teacher. She questions the validity of the school's proclaimed child centeredness, in contrast to behaviourist top down approach to dealing with her child, which the school adopted. She believes that her child was expelled because he did not 'fit in'. One parent questions the discrepancy between the enormous effort, which the class teacher put into building a close relationship with the children and the perceived lack of hard work spent on the admittedly tedious drill of reaffirming, practicing and deepening basic literacy and math skills. She also questions, what she views as the teacher / faculty irrational trust in the help of the higher worlds with the children's academic skills. At the same time she appreciates that Waldorf School imbued her child with the ability to speak freely, to tell stories, to feel self- confident, not hesitant and shy in front of people.

Families wellbeing

All respondents expressed conviction, that the events taking place at school placed additional strain on wellbeing of the family. Apart of the natural, prolonged parental worry for the wellbeing of their children, they experienced consequences of their inability to trust the teacher/school with safeguarding their child's academic, physical and emotional welfare. Additional difficulties in regards to the school's inadequacies involved considerably increased amount of time and work they spent compensating for the perceived incompetence of the teacher, financial cost of obtaining

individual tutoring and considerable emotional strain involved in frequent meetings spent by advocating for the needs of their child.

We have ascertained that all the respondent families chose Waldorf alternative for their children consciously and carefully, due to its perceived and proclaimed benefits in contrast to mainstream education. Following the children entering the school, things went well for some time, before the children began showing various signs of unhappiness. All respondents agreed, that the initial problems pertained to a manifestation of perceived character or professional insufficiency of the teacher. The resulting interaction between the schools and the families did not bring satisfactory outcomes, mainly due to perceived teachers' and schools' inadequacies in approaching and dealing with the issue. The final decision to withdraw their children from the school may have been triggered by one event, but was a result of a lengthy process and variety of complementary factors. Following the notification of withdrawal, none of the school attempted to persuade the parents to alter their decision. None of the schools addressed the withdrawal with what was perceived by the parents as sufficient follow up. The parents' perception of Waldorf School changed after these events, however two of the families still have other children at the school and all the respondents continue to keep in touch with the schools.

DISCUSSION

Cynical as it may be, Waller's (1931) metaphor about teachers and parents being natural enemies still strikes a chord today. Both parties know that there exists a rather thin stripe of the "no-man land", which is very easy to overstep. However, when 'natural enemies' discover that their goal or object of striving is the same, they stand a fair chance to collaborate successfully (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Hence, Waller's metaphor withstands the test of time, but only as one of the poles defining the scope of the problem. On the other pole, there is a full collaboration with the family and the school, defined by the thorough understanding of the roles both parties play in the healthy development of the child. As indicated by Rudolf Steiner, Waldorf teachers need and must engender conditions for full explicit and implicit collaboration of the parents with school in order to work with the children successfully (Steiner, 1996a). In the three cases of this paper, these conditions failed to take place. What are the parents´ initial expectations of Waldorf School? How do they experience and reflect on the process of escalating disharmony with their child's school? How does their decision to part with the school and remove their child from its familiar environment resonate over time? Insofar as I take the premise of Waldorf education being non selective and available to all children, regardless of their religious, academic, racial or socio-economic status as a given, the fact of these three children leaving Waldorf School may be

perceived as a loss, which, in its effect, deprived them of the opportunity to enjoy full benefits of Waldorf educational approach. In the following discussion I will attempt to look closer at the respondents' experiences, through the lenses of the relevant writings, as well as those of the founder and ideological father of Waldorf School, Rudolf Steiner. The chapter is structured around the topical units of territorial division, the roles, the power dynamics and the trust issues. It follows broadly the chronology of events.

Hopes and Expectations

Parents in this thesis clearly expressed their hopes at the beginning of their child's schooling, the chief of which were the holistic approach of Waldorf School to the developing child, as well as the need to spare the child from what they perceived as the negative features of mainstream schooling. Desire not to put their children through the same ordeal the parents lived through as schoolchildren is often the expression of parents' subjective school experiences, which they tend to generalize to all mainstream schools. Lightfoot (2003) calls the subconscious motivations, ever-present in parents – teachers' interactions, the 'generational echoes' (p.5). I suggest that the respondents' childhood experiences contributed, among other things, to their decisions in regards to the choice of the school for their children. The historical socio-political specifics of the two respondents' locations increase the possibility for negative school experiences from their childhood. Bomotti (1996) claims that the parents' choice of alternative schools is consciously made and well informed by alternative schools' particular approach to education as opposed to convenience or social reasons. In view of lack of studies specifically pertaining to the issue of parental motivation to place their child to Waldorf School, it is difficult to ascertain the exact depth of insight parents may possess in regard to the particular aspects of its spiritual and philosophical background, however research indicates, that the parental choice of Waldorf School, if unguided by the thorough understanding of its spiritual – philosophical underpinnings, may later lead to misunderstandings (Jelinek & Sun, 2003; Stehlik, 2003a; P. Woods et al., 2005).

> The necessary support from parents and carers for the Steiner curriculum and its pedagogy which Steiner schools sees in its own terms as essential to student learning, is not only not always forthcoming but also is in part a consequence of the challenge inherent in Steiner philosophy. (P. Woods et al., 2005, p.33)

One respondent in this thesis-Jitka- was, in her choice of school, guided more by the good impression from the Waldorf Kindergarten, favourable references of the Kindergarten head-teacher and rational impressions made by the Waldorf School principal and the class teacher. She was casually familiar with Anthroposophical basis of Waldorf School and falls into the category of the less Waldorf specifics informed parent. Jelinek & Sun (2003) propose that such parents do not have

the need to become interested in the complex intricacies of the Waldorf schools' methods, when they perceive, that their children are doing well. Correspondingly, it was the parental concern stemming from what Jitka perceived as her child's lag in the age appropriate literacy skills, which prompted her initiative to look deeper in Waldorf methodology and triggered her intensified efforts to get involved with her child's education on a deeper level. Two respondents, Mark & Suzanne and Mary in this thesis belonged to the well informed group, which according to Ashley and Woods (2005) constitutes a minority among the parents at Waldorf School. Data from the interviews indicate, that they had deep knowledge of spiritual background informing Waldorf practices as well as first-hand experience of Waldorf School. In this sense, there was very little that could surprise them in terms of Waldorf specifics. They chose Waldorf School consciously and carefully, and their hopes and expectations were inspired by the understanding of what Waldorf Schools offer to their children. The most readily recognisable threat to the relationships between well informed parents and Waldorf Schools, stems from the high expectation these parents have of the schools, in terms of their adherence to the Waldorf curriculum, methods and approach to children. A survey of Waldorf teachers in England revealed, that parental expectations belong to the factors, which contribute to teachers' levels of stress the most (House, 2001). The respondents expressed high hopes of Waldorf teachers especially in regards to the child centred approach, development of the whole child's personality and they also expected above average parent teacher interaction.

Territorial Wars

Waldorf schools are known to emphasise the need for greater parental involvement in the schools affairs in comparison with mainstream school. They expect parents to become active supporters of the schools' activities (P. Woods et al., 2005). This may involve help with school trips, organizing school fairs and celebrations, help with fundraising events, frequent participation in PTM's and other informative meetings. However, Jelinek & Sun (2003) state, that when it comes to parents' attempts to challenge the area of Waldorf curriculum and methods, Waldorf teachers tend to be very reluctant, if not closed to dialogue as they consider their curriculum and methods untouchable. This boundary of exclusive area of school expertise where parents are not welcome may well work when the children's progress at schools does not raise concerns, yet when such is not the case, parents may challenge the Waldorf method sacred to the teachers. Nagakawa's (2000) findings suggest that parents find themselves in a "double bind" (p.448) in their attempts to collaborate successfully with school. On one hand, they are criticized for not being involved enough, when it is suggested that their under-involvement contributes to a variety of negative symptoms ranging from the child's

underachievement to the schools' resource difficulties, and on the other hand they are viewed negatively for being involved too much. Nagakawa asserts that:

> …parents must act in ways validated by the school system, or their participation is not recognized or may be resented. The good parent is constructed as one who takes the lead of the school, who is involved but not too involved, and who supports but does not challenge. (Nakagawa, 2000, p.456)

Nagakawa's delimiting of parental roles at school resonates with the findings of this thesis in that when the territorial boundaries of school's expertise were challenged, conflicts appeared. Anette Lareau in Gibbs (2005) states that middle class parents are far less respectful and more likely to criticize schools, as they perceive their professional status as equal to the teachers. There are mothers, who, empowered by their professional experiences, view their children's education as an area they could and should actively support and become involved in. At the same time Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, (2004) claim, that schools are unwelcoming to parental attempts to express disagreement with the actual educational practice, which according to Jelinek & Sun (2003) also applies to the Waldorf Schools. The potential for conflict arising from different perceptions of parents and teachers role is apparent (Waller, 1961). As soon as Jitka came to conclusion that her child was missing an important aspect of its education, she assumed a more active and assertive approach to her role in her child's school life. She offered a practical help to the teacher with creating materials for her to use to enhance and improve a specific area of the teacher's work. This help was initially welcomed, but later resented by both Jitka and the teacher. Jitka's proactive response to the perceived teacher's insufficiencies relates to the role she assigned for herself as an active participant in her child's education. Her experiences corroborate the above assertion, in that her ongoing attempts to compensate for what she perceived as the teacher's professional inexperience were met by the teacher with increasing disdain due to what the teacher perceived as invasion of her area of expertise. Jitka was allowed to cross the boundaries of the teacher's territory as defined by Lortie (1975) to be consisting of leadership of school affairs. She refused to be content with her role of a "distant assistant" (p. 192). Such crossings of boundaries have the potential to give rise to negative responses, when parents and teachers strive to protect their territory. Correspondingly, Jitka acknowledged that her role in substituting the teacher's work was not, in the long run, sustainable. By offering hands on help to the teacher, Jitka ventured on to the teacher's territory, a fact which Jitka herself later commented on as inappropriate.

> …well, the time we spent on this, it was simply vast and suddenly we were in a position, when the responsibility of …….the teacher was partially on the parents and at the same time, already at the end of the (.) grade and at the beginning of the (.) grade,…I saw that it cannot go on like this in the long term. Either the teacher knows

it and does it and may consult some things with the parents at most, if she wants to include the parents view, but the parents cannot substitute the teacher...

Hence, the crossing of territorial boundaries of roles and responsibilities between school and home was later viewed negatively on both sides of the school gates. (see Table 3) Nagakawa (2000) argues, that the parental role as a protector of its child's interests in school, locates the parent in a situation where his or her interests are placed in opposition to the school in terms of time and financial limitations. Jitka's frustration, which she expressed in relation to the vast amount of time spent on discussing and preparing the educational materials for the teacher, as well as considerable sum of money the family invested into getting prolonged individual tutoring for her child, corroborates the parent/protector bind situation, she placed herself into. Jitka reflected on the fact that her child did not, in fact, receive education as was guaranteed by the state. She says: "If I summed it up in terms of money, it was quite a large sum we had to invest into this and so basically we didn't have free education… is what I want to say…" Jitka's perception of herself as an active agent in her child's education, which is assumed to be an exclusive area of teachers led to conflict.

Lightfoot (2003) advocates clear definition of roles, which both school and home assume in the education of the child. While she unmistakably speaks for the teachers' frequent, open, welcoming and inclusive approach to the parents, she, at the same time, emphasises the need to delimit the parental role in classroom to a status of a welcome, yet unobtrusive observer, who does not interfere directly with the educational activities. This setting of boundaries remained, in Jitka's case, unaddressed, which from the very start of Jitka's practical help to the teacher, caused mutual feelings of apprehension. Jitka expressed a sentiment of derision at the teachers' initial readiness to accept help with schoolwork, in regards to a particular issue, viewed in Waldorf educational circles rather unequivocally Steiner (1996a). Waldorf teachers see the area of curriculum and methodology as untouchable and were found to be very apprehensive to parental attempts to interfere in this area of expertise (Jelinek & Sun 2003). The fact that Jitka was initially allowed to interfere directly with Waldorf methods, may be attributed to the teacher's inexperience, however, the teacher gradually submitted to the pressures of faculty to end experimental non-Waldorf methods and grew exasperated by parents' attempts to help with the hands on preparation, which left feelings of bitterness and depreciation on both sides

While teachers' view their area of expertise as exclusive of parental interventions, parents also retain a clearly discernible territory, which consists of a more individually child centred 'particularistic' take on their responsibility for the child (Waller, 1961). It is the realm of their child's emotional and physical wellbeing seen by the parents as their responsibility, be it at home or anywhere else. The parents are willing to temporarily 'lend' their child to the school for the

socialization and educational purposes, however remain vigilant for the signs of what they may perceive as mistreatment. For Mark & Suzanne and Mary, the teachers' behaviour constituted a breach into their territory by suspected instigating and consequent failing to effectively address issues pertaining to their children's wellbeing, thus overstepping the demarcation line of what the parents viewed as their responsibility. The subsequent punitive humiliating actions implemented by the school/teacher to address the behavioural issues in a way deemed by the parents incompatible with Waldorf ethos, further challenged parental instincts to protect their children's welfare. Consecutively to the teachers' efforts to maintain and defend their role of experts in educational maters, parents will not give up their responsibility for their child's wellbeing. They will behave protectively in an attempt to safeguard their child's interests (Waller, 1961). Hence both sides protect, safeguard, defend, advocate and fight for different things. (see Table 3) During interactions addressing parental concerns, teachers were found to employ strategies to defend their status and role as educational experts and parents defend the wellbeing of their child. What the parents perceived as the teachers' failure to place the child's interest in the middle of the interactions led to further escalation of disharmony between school and home.

Power Play

Data form the interviews indicate that the two Waldorf informed families, Mark& Suzanne and Mary, held a more school centric understanding of their role in the school home interactions, which would correspond to the Tveit's (2009) findings, that the parents expect teachers to set the form of parental co-operation with the school. Tveit suggests, that while the parents wish to build and maintain an equal partnership with the school, they assume, that the form, frequency and content of this partnership to be established by the teachers. This raises questions about its equality, whereby the teachers are seen as the more active partners, while the parents assume a more passive, in need to be educated, receiving role.

Even though parents leave the role of the choreographer of the school-home collaboration to the teachers, it does not mean they relinquish unspoken expectations, which they, due to perceived power asymmetry, tend to withhold from the conversation with school. Tveit's findings raise concerns pertaining to the form and content of the interactions, where the more active definition of the teacher's role opens space for misunderstandings or conflicts, when the parents' clear, albeit unspoken expectations of the required degree of frequency and quality of school-home interactions fail to be fulfilled. Addressing the increasing concerns for their child's wellbeing with the teacher, both Mark & Suzanne and Mary (informed parents) expected to meet the kind of dialogue which would entail Waldorf approach to these interactions. By Waldorf approach I mean a child centric,

heart to heart attitude that Waldorf Schools propagate (Steiner, 1996a). This kind of approach places parents in a position of equal partner in the process of child's education. Supporting of equal status of parents is essential as Tveit (2009) asserts that parents, as opposed to teachers, lack the professional foundation on which they could build their case. They are forced to (re)claim their rights in schools, in which they are, in terms of power distribution, disadvantaged. In all respondents' cases, the unspoken expectations the parents held for the teacher's ability to create conditions for successful and equal collaboration remained unfulfilled. Parents cooperated with the school in ways defined by the schools which, by maintaining its superior status, failed to provide conditions for successful parent – teacher collaboration on equal terms. Mary's perception of the events was that the teacher and school did not reflect on the possibility of wrongdoing on their part, but left the responsibility for the child's difficulties to the parents. To Mary it seemed, the school placed the weight of institutional requirements in regards to safeguarding children above her child's good. Mary writes:

> As a parent I felt there was no process to look after the wellbeing of our family (longstanding parents). There was also no forum for discussing how this came about, i.e. looking at the teacher's responsibility as well as the schools' responsibility, and ours as a family. As an active and responsible parent myself, I would have liked a process to come to mutual understanding, and a consensual picture that we could support. Simple questions were not addressed that would have helped understanding, i.e., why is this child behaving like this! I really wished for a more systemic understanding.

The parents may have at this stage justifiably questioned the discrepancy between Waldorf School's ethos inspired by its philosophical-spiritual underpinnings and reality. The school's uncompromising policy of 'three strikes out' unavoidably led to its sad conclusion. The learning atmosphere and safety of children was secured. The child that did not fit, was expelled. As Mary observed, that in the effort to appear diligent, the school did not even give the parents the opportunity to withdraw the child themselves, even though this was explicitly asked for. For the parents, the fact, that the school only took its own institutional needs into consideration, and left out the needs of the child and its family, who were, after all, long standing and committed parents, left a bitter aftertaste. It may be argued that, when procedures are employed by the school unilaterally to safeguard its interests with disregard for the wellbeing of both parties involved, they serve as a tool for maintaining the institutionalized status of the school, in other words, they preserve the power advantage of the institution over individual (Holtz, 2011). (see Table 3)

Mark and Suzanne felt that they were placed in a position where it was their word against the teacher's. They observed a particular atmosphere emanating from the school's faculty, when they tried to approach the issues at the faculty meeting. Suzanne says:

> I was at the college of teachers meeting once and I met with ...I don't even know
> how to name it ...something like ossified... one is invited to a meeting...and I met
> with that there was no negotiation...everything was decided beforehand... it will be so
> an so... we are the school, we are unity, the best, and simply you have no chance...

In light of such experiences, they felt that they stood little chance of fighting the power structures of the school and chose to withdraw. Data from the interviews are conclusive in that the form, tone and content of the parents' interactions with their child's teachers/ schools established and maintained the power imbalance advantageous to teachers/schools throughout the process leading to the child's withdrawal from the schools. I further suggest, that in the case of Waldorf Schools mentioned in this thesis, the power imbalance, which in mainstream schools originates from and is enhanced by their institutionalized authority of a state establishment has been replaced by the authority stemming from its particular philosophical – spiritual underpinnings, Anthroposophy as well as from what is perceived by Waldorf teachers as almost a hundred years of good practice. As it is at mainstream schools, when this authority is underscored by good results, parents do not have the reason to challenge it. However, when it was not the case, and the parents became critical of the schools practices, Waldorf teachers/schools in this thesis used strategies to preserve and guard the schools' coherence as well as and their own status as the bearers of Waldorf expertise. These strategies involved excessive formalism and reserve in interactions with the parents, impenetrable unity of the schools' faculty's opinion, attempts to refuse accepting a degree of responsibility accompanied by assigning blame for the child's behaviour to the family. Further indicators of the schools' attempts to maintain their status involved blanket lack of unsolicited schools/teachers' response to the parents' decisions to withdraw their children, which suggests an attitude of complacency and self-righteousness. The parents found the process of trying to assert their rights against the unfavourably distributed power futile. (see Table 3)

Breach of Trust

> In this school more that in any other, we need to work with the parents in a
> relationship of trust if we want to move forward in the right way. Our teachers
> absolutely depend on finding this relationship of trust with the children's
> parents…(Steiner, 1996a, pg.64)

The essential role of trust in a successful collaboration between individual and institution has been well established in research. (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Rousseau et al., 1998; Sitkin & Bies, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, 2001) A definition of trust which has been suggested by Adams and Christenson (2000) for school home relationship describes it as "confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive out-comes for students." (p. 481) A study by Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna (1985)

came with a three level concept of development of interpersonal trust deemed by Adams &
Christenson (2000) applicable to parents-teachers relationships. These are predictability,
dependability and faith. Teachers carry professional credentials to inspire the initial level of
parental trust. However, Holmes and Rempel (1989) caution that when trust relationship is badly
damaged it may easily lead to its failure. Achieving higher levels of trust requires opportunities to
establish it, by personal contact, which would enable partners to exercise the process of acceptance
and exposure (Adams and Christenson, 2000). The authors propose, that it is not as much the
frequency of such interactions as it is the quality of it that makes the difference.

The process of realization that something is wrong in their child's school is seldom a question of a
sudden, one off epiphany, yet all the parents expressed a feeling of being shocked upon hearing the
first serious news of trouble, which had invariably to do with various displays of the children's
difficult behaviour. It undermined the first prerequisite for a trustful relationship, namely the
predictability element (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). The first response is, that there is
something wrong with my child. As Mary writes: 'I was very shocked, and immediately felt my son
was at fault with 'bad' behaviour, and that what was happening was a lot to do with him being
'difficult'.' While parents may have some natural and inevitable doubts, especially when the teacher
is new and inexperienced, their primary wish is to trust and believe that their child is at school,
which they carefully chose, in the best possible hands. Their initial level of trust is guaranteed by
the teachers' professional credentials (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Waldorf Schools place
emphasis on the fact that there is one teacher to guide the children through to the end of the middle
school (Rawson & Richter, 2008). Who that teacher is, then becomes supremely important, as he or
she will have a direct influence a child' life for many years (Ashley, 2005). Steiner highlighted the
importance character and personality attributes of the class teacher as an inspiring authority,
continuously working on his inner life, competent educator enlivening the subject matter and an
expert on what different children need in different stages of their development. Steiner (1996b)
explicitly states: „However, it is absolutely necessary for a teacher to have the same degree of love,
although possibly in a somewhat different way, for the children in his or her class that parents have
for their children…" (pg.68). Ashley's, (2005) findings confirm that the long term influence of a
good class teacher on the academic and social wellbeing of the pupils are beneficial. The
knowledge of the high requirements Waldorf Schools place on the personality of the class teacher,
lay basis to the initial informed parental trust to the teachers' professional credentials (Adams and
Christenson, 2000). Therefore, even when parents have doubts or notice something is amiss, there is
a period of time during which they may tend to supress it or rationalize it by various explanations

and leave their concerns unvoiced (Tveit 2009). When things at school began to gradually deteriorate, Suzanne observed:

> The boy began to grow sort of quiet, I don't know, as if life drained out of him, or joy, simply, he behaved strangely... At the beginning we thought, he came new there among unknown children, he knew no one, so it will take some time before he'll fit in, find some friends, find his way around…

However, this did not improve and Suzanne's son grew increasingly unhappy with the school, reporting events like being subject to physical aggression and ostracism by classmates. Suzanne spoke to the teacher. Suzanne says: "The teacher marginalized this and didn't pay attention to it, simply there wasn't any will to attempt to solve it… on the contrary...she began to complain about him, notes in his book, complaints..." The teacher's disinterest and side-lining of the events, eroded her initial trust in the teacher's personality and professional credentials. (see Table 1) After this Mark and Suzanne entered the stage of low trust relationship, which lays path for the expectation of negative behaviour of the other and a tendency to interpret such behaviour as a sign of a 'deeper character flaws' (Adams and Christenson, 2000, p. 481).

Duality between School and Home

When parents do not fully identify with and inwardly support the schools' educational practices a feeling of duality of between the child's home and school ensues. Data from the interviews indicate that all respondents felt increasing concerns in regards the teachers/schools professional and personal role requirements which supports the possibility, that they explicitly or implicitly expressed these concerns at home. Steiner (1996a) warns that children do pick up these parental sentiments and it does have a deleterious effect on how they cooperate with teachers at school. Lortie (1975) asserts, that parents wield a strong power over the way the child responds to teachers at school. Through their support for school or absence of it, parents have the possibility to both strongly support and completely undermine teachers' effort. The duality between school and home further accents the need to establish and maintain a trustful relationship with the parents. It is hard to determine into what degree this duality contributed to the issues the respondents experienced, however its presence cannot be overlooked. Upon observing the signs of her daughter's increasing unwillingness to read and learn in general, Jitka resolved to contact a non Waldorf educational consultant to find out, what was going on. The visit confirmed and amplified Jitka's concerns, as well as refuting suspicions of learning disorders. Jitka remembers the visit:

> She tested them (there was another child) by some standard methods and found out, that the outcome of that meeting was, that it was a case for a complete re-education because these

> children did not have, so to speak, she said, math skills of the type needed to orientate in numbers like, math thinking, complete basics.

This, in conjunction with the perceived irrational behaviour of the teacher, when she suddenly and inexplicably changed her method of teaching, thus eroding the predictability condition of the first level of trust relationship, confirmed Jitka's suspicion that the teacher's professional skills were not up to the task she was entrusted with. Jitka says: 'For me, this was, apart of other things, this was for me a totally irrational step, which I could not understand, because, suddenly I had the impression, that it was not about what is best for the children…' Whereas Jitka initially suggested the opportunity to be directly involved in her child education, the teacher's acceptance of hands on help further eroded her trust in the teacher's credentials as a competent professional, acknowledging and standing by Waldorf methods. In an attempt to rationalize the teacher's conduct, Jitka suspected, that she submitted to some form of unspoken and never explained pressure from the school's faculty, possibly inspired by the school's spiritual ethos, which further undermined her trust in its practices and motives. Adams and Christenson (2000) quote Holmes and Rempel (1989) that "Individuals in low-trust relationships expected negative behaviour from their partners and little interaction in the relationship" (p. 481). Parallel to the increasing behavioural and academic difficulties of her child and decreasing levels of trust, Jitka perceived the teacher as irrational, secretive and passive, which would indicate that, Jitka reached the low level of trust relationship with the teacher. (see Table 1)

After the initial shock, the parents aimed to establish whether there might be something wrong with their child and not having found the reasons to believe this was the case, their trust in the ability of the teacher/school to ensure their child's wellbeing was weakened, their attention turned to the personality and professional credentials of their child's teacher as a possible cause of and the child's behavioural, as well as academic difficulties. Their trust was breached and they began to look at the issue with the more critical eye directed at what was going on in the classroom. Mary writes:

> I could see the breakdown of the relationship with the class teacher was a big part of these issues. He wasn't difficult in all lessons with all teachers. I also felt there were issues with the new teacher whereby she was acclaimed academically, but lacked certain warmth with the children. This is a lot of what my son (and also other boys in that class) reacted to.

Through the subsequent interactions, that took place between the parents and the teachers in attempts to deal with the situation, the cracks in the wall of trust could have been repaired. After all, the teachers and the schools did not refuse to communicate, when communication was requested, and responded to the parental concerns by measures, which could be perceived as forthcoming. Why then were the following attempts at mending the damaged trust unsuccessful, when the

teachers had a wealth of indications and advice by the founder of Waldorf Schools at their disposal? For Steiner (1996b) trust between family and home was irreplaceable and essential prerequisite to the successful work of Waldorf teachers with children. He noted that in the absence of mainstream measures used to maintain authority, Waldorf teachers depend on the parents trust and support for their endeavours. This mutual trust was to be established and maintained by teachers' visits at home, frequent parents' – teachers' meetings (PTMs), at which teachers would openly and without arrogance explain and answer the parents' questions and concerns, but especially by the teachers' efforts to build a 'heart to heart' relationship with the parents, the kind of relationship, which would open space for the parents to become to know the teacher and accept him as a natural authority for their child Steiner (1996b).

For the respondents in this thesis, the initial trust in Waldorf teacher was severely damaged and at its lowest level, which predisposes partners to view the actions of the other in negative light, and as relating to the deeper attributes of character and personality (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). Having established the principal reasons, the scope and depth of this thesis does not allow for a deeper exploration of the parents' motives for the loss of trust in their child' teachers. There were probably additional elements involved in the process, such as personal feelings of antipathy, subconscious comparisons of the new teacher with the old one, reservations to the spiritual background of the methods or other undiscovered and difficult to temporalize bias.

The Power of Speech

After the initial concerns reached the level which required further action on both sides, meetings took place to address the parental concerns. Parents regard the area of mutual interaction with teachers in order to advocate for their child's needs as stressful to say the least. The intensity of parental emotion involved in these encounters may well escape the teachers' attention. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) writes:

> To parents, their child is the most important person in their lives, the one who arouses their deepest passions and greatest vulnerabilities, the one who inspires their fiercest advocacy and protection. And it is teachers-society's professional adults-who are the primary people with whom the parents must seek alliance and support in the crucial work of child rearing. They must quickly learn to release their child and trust that he or she will be well cared for by a perfect stranger whose role as a teacher gives her access to the most intimate territory, the deepest emotional places. Their productive engagement with the teacher is essential for the child's learning and growth, and for the parents' peace of mind. All these expectations and fears get loaded on to encounters between parents and teachers. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, pg.21)

Adams & Christenson, (2000) claim, that "The nature of parent-teacher interaction was a better predictor of trust than was the frequency of interaction" (p.491). What would be the teacher's attitude? Would the teacher see the problem from the parents' perspective, listen with empathy and regard the child's wellbeing as the priority? Or would he, as Holtz (2011) puts it, maintain his status and defend his role by employing defensive strategies?

Mark says:

> She spoke at first for a very long time and spoke and spoke, she simply said she didn't have the will to do anything about it, simply that the problem is us and my son and that from her side everything was in order, she will not do anything to solve anything...

This was not the kind of approach the parents expected. They perceived this attitude of the teacher negatively, felt blamed for the situation and observed no signs of willingness on the part of the teacher to admit or even acknowledge her part of the responsibility. In their view this was not the kind of authenticity which engenders trust by not avoiding responsibility for actions (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). Similarly to teachers perceiving parental ventures into their territory with disdain, parents, when their childrearing comes into question, feel attacked in a manner which, in a difficult-to-define way, infuriates them. It is hard to defend ones' family life. For the parents, this sort of approach to the problem does not leave many avenues to proceed. The door is closed and the situation reaches dead end. I will repeat, it is difficult to argue when accused of being a bad parent. The difficulty in finding persuasive counterarguments results in hostility. 'We do it right' sounds flat and self-justifying. Childrearing is a complex field, for which, there are no blueprints and no universities offering degrees in parenting. There is no state institution of parenthood or parents' unions. This fact contributes to Holtz's (2011) finding, that the parent is always positioned unfavourably in his relationship to the powers of institution of school and the status of teacher. The care for the child, the child's parents and commitment to work as demonstrated by the teacher to which Chang's (2013) findings assigned the primary trust building function, were absent.

Jitka's and Mark and Suzanne's stories indicate, that even at the lowest (predictability) level of parents' teachers' trust relationships, there were concerns arising out of what they perceived as random and confusing patterns of behaviour of the teacher, be it the widely fluctuating frequency and tone of the written notes in Marks & Suzanne's case, or inexplicable and undiscussed change of teaching method in Jitka's case. Arguably, on such infirm foundation, higher levels of trust relationship cannot be built. Adams and Christenson (2000) further propose that "a failure to use personal attributes makes trust in the relationship extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in behaviour by either the teacher or parent" (p. 481). Data from the interviews suggest, that the respondents did

not find such opportunities for quality interaction with their child's teacher, as would enable them to repair the damage, which their trust for the teacher has sustained.

In Mary's case, formal conditions were created by the school to address the behaviour issues of her child and persons were appointed to meet with the family with and without the presence of the new class teacher, whose approach was felt by the parents to contribute to the child's difficult and disruptive behaviour. Mary writes:

> The appointed person asked for a meeting with me as parent the class teacher and our child to talk about what had happened. My son (at young age) couldn't articulate his needs/thoughts, and felt further told off/punished/a problem by these meetings. The school also delegated the behavior group to talk to me, father and our child. (This time without class teacher present). I experienced, as previously, that my son wasn't able to engage with this kind of conversation, and compounded the feeling that his behavior was unacceptable. Which on one level was true, but it wasn't possible to work at why this was happening.

From the formal standpoint, the school certainly made an effort to resolve the situation. It implemented a procedure, appointed people, called meetings. At the same time, from the parents' perspective, the conduct of those meetings failed to enquire about, probe and address the cause of the child's difficulties. Instead, the school chose to implement an uncompromising top down approach to the issue, rather in contrast with the proclaimed child-centred approach of Waldorf School, which the parents expected. Excessive formalism, rigid adherence to procedure or legal requirements are attributes which, according to Sitkin & Bies (1994) wield damaging effect on trust during conflict situations. Respondents indicated, that in their interaction with the teachers, personal antipathy, unnecessary formalism and preconceived fixed opinions were present. Such characteristics of parents-teachers' interactions may have prevented the repair and formation of higher levels of trust relationship, as they did not provide the necessary degree of positive and relaxed atmosphere, in which deeper personal attributes of participants could have been revealed and used to increase the levels of trust. Parents reflected that the meetings were led in a manner, which was not conductive to openness and honesty. According to Tschannen-Moran (2001) "Authenticity of behaviour is linked to trust. An acceptance of responsibility for ones actions and avoiding distorting the truth in order to shift blame to another characterizes authenticity" (p. 314). Mark & Suzanne's and Mary's reflection on their encounters with their child's teacher indicates, that the focus of these interactions was misplaced. The child's needs were laid aside for the sake of a discourse aimed primarily at assigning responsibility for the child's difficult behaviours at school, which was accompanied by a degree of formalism from the teacher(s), thus establishing an unequal starting point for discussion, where advantage was, from the beginning, shifted to the side of the school and the teacher as a representative of institution. Jitka reflects on her feeling of being

powerless in view of her experiences of interactions with the schools representatives. She says on the subject:

> So I had the opportunity to communicate with the leadership and I saw that it simply… I think it was like a story in that I said to myself it's pointless to continue with this on the class level, or in other words, my thinking was such that I found out that I will not be able to change anything on the school level… I believe that could have been one of the aspects, that they simply said to themselves that I am too difficult to deal with …or too rational…or not enlightened enough by the spirit of Steiner…

This attitude of the school's faculty towards dialogue was perceived by Jitka as unconstructive, in terms constructive communication, whereby issues could not be addressed for reasons of perceived one sided and incontestable view of the school's representatives. While being prepared to sustain extensive practical support of the teacher, she realized, that she cannot be supplementing the teacher's role in the long term, particularly as the teacher grew scornful of her interventions. Jitka's trust in the school's methods and ethos was definitely shattered, and characteristically of her proactive approach to problems, she made a quick decision to withdraw.

I venture to propose, that it was the unfulfilled expectations in regards to the qualitative nature of the parents' teachers' interactions, as it was experienced by the respondents during their attempts to address the primary concerns for the wellbeing of their children, which further contributed to the loss of trust in the teachers'/schools' ability to address successfully the emerging difficulties of their children. In such situation of low trust relationship, which has been damaged beyond repair, a single incident has the potential to trigger off the decision to withdraw the child.

Table 1 Erosion of Trust[1]

PROCESS OF EROSION OF RELATIONAL TRUST BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Initial level of parents' trust supported by teachers' professional credentials, schools reputation, references of friends, identification with Waldorf ethos

Children's initial indicators of emergent difficulties, loss of predictability element
Behavioural & academic deterioration, withdrawal, disruptive behaviours, loss of enjoyment in learning, feelings of isolation
Parental efforts to rationalize emerging difficulties by non-school influences
Blaming the child, assessment for learning disorders, attributing difficulties to unfamiliarity with new environment
Duality between home and school ensues

Children's initial indicators persisting and worsening
Truancy, running away, aggression, disruptive behaviour, lack of literacy and math skills
Increased interaction/efforts to address the issues with teacher/school
Informal/formal meetings, practical help to teacher
Further loss of trust due to qualitative aspects/outcomes of interactions
Teachers perceived as: unwilling to self-reflect & accept a share of responsibility, assigning blame to parents, rigidly adhering to procedures, displaying impenetrable unity of opinion/approach. Mutual exasperation
Low level of trust relationship characterized by tendency to look for negative behaviour of the other and attribute it to character flaws
Teacher perceived as passive, secretive, dishonest, unapproachable, not diligent enough, lacking warmth, indifferent
The last straw = withdrawal

Generalizing subjective experience to the whole

School viewed as: academically lacking, wanting efficient procedures to address grievances, tolerant of bad teachers' excesses

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[1] Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, (1985)., Adams & Christensen, (2000)., Bryk & Schneider, (2002)

Table 2 Power Asymmetry[2]

Strategies indicative of teachers' / schools' effort to maintain and defend institutional power asymmetry
Strategies employed by teachers

Reluctance to accept a share of responsibility for the child's difficulties, blaming parents, dismissal and/or marginalization of child's difficulties/parents' concerns, inability and unwillingness to self-reflect, reserved, self-opinionated attitude

Strategies employed by the Schools' Faculty

Impenetrable unity of preconceived opinion in support of the above strategies, adherence to rigid policies and procedures, dismissing the child's/family's needs for those of the school

Follow up

No unsolicited attempt for an investigation of /reflection on the reasons for the parents' decision to withdraw their child from the school

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[2] Tveit, (2009)., Holtz, (2011)

Table 3 Roles & Territories[3]

Roles/Territories

Home	Conflict	School
Jitka		Teacher

Trespassed on teacher's territory by failing to fulfil role obligations (Distant assistant)
Trespassed on parent's territory by failing to fulfil role obligations
(Competent professional)

Mary		Teacher

Remained in her role

Trespassed on parent's territory by failing to fulfil role obligations
(Personality attributes, child centred approach)

Mark & Suzanne		Teacher

Trespassed on teacher's territory by failing to fulfil role obligations (Distant assistant)
Trespassed on parents' territory by failing to fulfil role obligations
(Personality attributes, child centred approach)

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[3] Bryk & Schneider (2002)., Lortie, (1975)

The Consequences

When taking a child out of its school, parents face a number of complex questions regarding their child's wellbeing. The pros and cons of the decision to withdraw are difficult to assess in view of its uncertain and unpredictable outcomes. Such decisions are not made lightly and parents weighed the reasons carefully before resolving to take the final step. Will the child do well in a mainstream school? Will it find new friends? Will it not be ostracised by other children on account of its ex-Waldorf status? What about the initial motives for not selecting a mainstream school, its competitive assessment, its teaching methods and attitudes? It was the parental concern for the wellbeing of their child, which guided their choice first to enrol and then to withdraw the child from Waldorf School.

Following the announcement of their decision all respondents report experiencing various expressions of suddenly being out of the close-knit community of parents and teachers around Waldorf School. Some parents expressed their disbelief and surprise upon hearing of Jitka's decision, suggesting that Waldorf School was irreplaceable and that they (Jitka's family) were making a mistake. As Jitka noted '…and some perceived it like dogmatically in the sense, that this was the best and the world outside is bad and you are leaving our closed world and going into the world, which is bad…' Mary experienced that 'even today, a certain group of parents will avoid us, and have 'labelled' (her child) as problematic and Suzanne remembers teachers as expressing disbelief in regards to her decision as they were of the opinion that Waldorf School was the best option. Interestingly, these judgmental expressions of surprise were the only unsolicited responses to the parents' decision to withdraw. They noted no attempts from the schools to hold follow-up meetings, or any other forms of communication, in order to find out what actually took place or how and why did the respondents come to their decision. From the respondents point of view the absence of ability and will to self-reflect or to show concern for the well-being of the children and families from the schools, constitutes a sign of the schools' impregnable belief in their own flawlessness. Suzanne expressed it as 'there is the attitude we are Waldorf School, we are perfect, and if someone doesn't like it let him leave… simply… they (the family/child) are to blame…' These experiences further confirm that the schools maintained their superior institutional status to the very end of their interactions with the parents (Holtz, 2011).

Looking Back

Considering all that took place, it is noticeable, that all the parents concerned, view the personality and professional abilities of their child's class teacher as the primary contributing factor in the

process of the escalating disharmony in their child's school life. At the same time, it is hardly surprising, when we consider the vital role a class teacher in Waldorf School plays in the lives of his or her pupils (Ashley, 2005) and yet it is this close relationship which, while bearing within itself unquestionable benefits when it works, may turn into an unsurpassable obstacle when it does not. Looking back, Mary poses some valid questions to consider. What happens when the relationship between the class teacher (who is expected stay with children for 8 years) and a child/children in his or her class does not work? She perceives the school's policies as insufficient in providing support for such turn of events. Mary also feels let down by the school's failure to live up to its ethos of being child centred, implementing a disciplinary top down approach to the situation with a child, who behaves in a difficult way, instead of trying to ascertain and deal with the causes for such behaviour. As Sitkin & Bies (1994) assert, applying rigidified institutional structures in conflict resolution has detrimental effect on trust. And yet this was the approach the Waldorf School implemented. The schools' child centeredness was, after all, one of the family's reasons for choosing Waldorf School. Mary questions the fact that her child did not 'fit' the school's blueprint and was cast away, especially considering the fact, that she has another child there, who' fits in' better.

Jitka feels, that the Waldorf approach was not the best suited for her child, as the teacher's emphasis on developing the relationship with, and the creative faculties of the children took priority over the unattractive but necessary drill of the academic skills. Jitka's concerns pertained to what she perceived as her child's academic 'lag'. While she appreciates the ability to express herself freely and tell stories in front of others, which Waldorf School imbued her child with, the lack of literacy and math skills is something, which she feels will take a long time to compensate for. The tension originating in her effort to substitute for the teacher's work, resulted in mutual trespassing in what Lortie (1975) named the teachers' and parents' territories, due to which she found herself in the parent/protector bind Nakagawa (2000), contributed to the large degree to her loss of trust and consequent withdrawal. When Jitka looks back at the time her child spent in Waldorf School, she remembers many hours of work at meetings, preparing work sheets and living 'away from reality'. She expresses regret that alongside so many great things at the Waldorf School, the necessary presence of teacher's 'hard work' is not maintained.

Mark and Suzanne also state, that it was the personality of the class-teacher which contributed to the large degree to their decision, especially in regards to what they perceived as the teacher's arrogant, indifferent and untruthful attitude displayed in interactions with them as well as in dealing with their child's issues. The qualitative aspects of interaction, which Adams & Christensen (2000) and Chang (2013) state as trust building prerequisites with their child's teacher played the key role

in their loss of trust in the successful solution to their concerns. Having said that, they both appreciate the good work done by Waldorf teachers and agree, that had there been a different class teacher, their child might have been happy at Waldorf School. I other words, they do not see their child as not fitting or ill-disposed for the Waldorf approach and regret losing some of the more creative aspects of Waldorf approach to education. Their other two children are attending the same school and are perfectly happy there. The data from the interviews are conclusive that it was not the parents' disenchantment with Waldorf School as such, rather it was the failure of the individual teachers to fulfil their role obligations, that the parents expected them to possess. While Steiner's indications provide a wider framework of ethos and values which Waldorf schools stand for, it is the teachers, who are the carriers of its daily practical intricacies. It is also the teachers who are the sanctioned bearers of the schools' attitudes towards family engagement. What the respondents experienced as schools' faculty tolerance of bad practice raises parental questions pertaining to the more systemic inability of the schools to be open and honest in its view of itself. The respondents' perceptions of false collegiality and unwillingness to address repeating displays of ineffective approach to family engagement open doors to further research into how Waldorf Schools construct their role in the contemporary school-home landscape.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to explore how parents experience and reflect on the process of escalating disharmony with their child's school leading to their child's removal from Waldorf School, what are parents´ initial expectations of Waldorf School and how does their decision to part with the school and remove their child from its familiar environment resonate over time. Three respondent families (one couple and two mothers) agreed to provide narrative accounts of their experiences. Data from the two recorded interviews and one written response were analysed and discussed. The respondents placed their child in Waldorf School for the reasons of its holistic approach to education of the child. Their expectations of Waldorf School included developing the whole of the child's personality and potential, lifelong love for learning and implicitly, the schools' adherence to Waldorf child-centred approach to children as well as above average collaboration with parents. Two of them were very well informed of the Waldorf specifics, one was less informed. All the respondents experienced a process of prolonged interaction with the teachers at Waldorf School where they advocated for the interest of their child. Their need to become involved in this interaction was triggered by their child's behavioural and, in two cases, also academic deterioration pertaining to the perceived unfulfilled personal and professional role obligations of their child's class teacher (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In all three cases, a necessity to venture into the teachers' territory arose for the parents, caused by the emergent issues pertaining to the child's wellbeing (Lortie, 1975; Jelinek & Sun, 2003). This resulted in intensified interactions between the parents and teachers. Respondents experienced these interactions as unsuccessful in addressing the issues of their children due to perceived inability or unwillingness of the teachers/schools to maintain qualitative aspects of discourse, which would restore the parents' trust in them (Adams & Christensen, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002) The nature of these interactions is viewed as indicative of the fact that the teachers / schools implemented strategies of discourse which maintained power asymmetry and defended their status enhanced by the schools institutional authority (Tveit, 2009; Holtz, 2011; Pushor, 2007). The commonality of the parents' experiences of encountering power asymmetry between home and school suggests that the mainstream schools' institutionalized and self-preserving status has been in case of Waldorf Schools cited in this thesis replaced by the need of Waldorf teachers/schools to preserve and defend coherence of their specific Waldorf expertise rooted in Anthroposophical underpinnings. The respondents experienced that these strategies placed them in an unequal position to the teachers/schools. The use of these strategies, had a deleterious impact on the parents' trust in the personal and professional competencies of their child's teachers/schools. Neither the teachers nor the parents were successful in re-establishing mutual

trust, which led to the respondents' withdrawal of their child from the school. Looking back, the parents view their experiences as specifically relating to the teachers' perceived failure to fulfil their role obligations and simultaneously question the schools' internal policies and procedures in regards to their efficiency in providing adequate support for the new teachers, as well as for the families during processes of conflict resolution. Two of the respondents have other children in Waldorf School and expressed satisfaction with their progress there.

Listening to parents, questions inevitably arise about their perceptions of interactions with teachers. Waldorf Schools aim to provide above average opportunities for parents – teachers interactions. There are many PTM's, fairs and talks that the parents are encouraged and welcome to attend. However, are these occasions providing space for a real, close person to person encounter, which would enable for the formation of trust through getting to know the real person behind the role front? Or are they structured in a way which pays dues to the formal requirements for frequency and necessity of sharing the information about the child's progress? These questions open space for further research into how and if the Steiner-Waldorf form is filled with the substance of its original content.

In light of the parents' experiences, the following recommendations for the practices of Waldorf Schools may be proposed.

Recognise the motives

Waldorf Schools may consider the need to recognize the wide variety of parental motives for choosing this alternative and implement procedures prior to admission to clearly establish the motivation and the expectations of prospective parents. The need for this is even more necessary in countries and schools, which are state maintained, i.e. free, as this opens space for parents, whose main considerations in making the choice of school may have little to do with the ethos and spiritual underpinnings of Waldorf School and are ranging from uninformed through overly simplified to naïve. I do not intend to imply that Waldorf School is suitable for a certain type of parents only, on the contrary, I believe that it should firmly maintain its foundational prerequisites of being open to all children regardless of their social, racial or religious differences. However, I suggest that especially in view of these differences, parents need to know the full scope of Waldorf School's differentness.

Inform parents

It would seem unnecessary to state, that Waldorf Schools not only explore the parental motives, but also inform the parents openly and thoroughly, prior to admission, about the specifics of Waldorf educational approach and particularly of its spiritual background Anthroposophy, which forms the basis for Waldorf educational methods as well as the pedagogical attitudes of its teachers. Ashley and Woods, (2005) state that not only parents need to be informed at the beginning, but also that throughout the school year frequent talks need to take place in order to remind them of the degree of differentness at Waldorf School.

I am aware of the fact, that the art of explaining Waldorf methods presents the teller and the listener with a considerable challenge. To be able to explain something as intricate as the Steiner Waldorf method requires a degree of understanding, based on classroom experience of what works and the knowledge of why it works. It would be ill-considered by the school to expect new teachers to be able to convey the meaning and justification of methods, they have never used before, comprehensibly to the parents and yet Steiner asserts that:

> Thus, we would like first and foremost to establish a relationship between the school and the parents that does not rest on faith in authority. That is of no value for us. The only thing that is of value is having our intentions received with understanding, right down into the details. (Steiner 1996a, pg.192)

The authority, Steiner speaks of in this sense is the formal institutionalised authority of school. The specific spiritual-philosophical underpinnings of Waldorf School call for a degree of explanation, far surpassing that of mainstream schools. Waldorf teachers would be naive to expect that the parents' accept all that their children experience at school without questioning. Therefore, the schools' sustained and proficient backing of new teachers may be seen as essential. Reducing Anthroposophy and Waldorf education to explainable form may appear to be a daunting task, as it is with any spiritual – philosophical teachings, nevertheless, in my opinion, it cannot be omitted or marginalized. Parents need to know they are entering not only and an alternative school, but also one, which finds its roots in the particular spiritual-philosophical teachings of a particular man. A thorough explanation and ample opportunity to ask questions prepare ground for building a trustful relationship unmarred from the beginning by grey areas, which leave space for doubt.

The expectation that the school provides the conditions for an inexperienced teacher to be supported and guided by an experienced colleague may seem obvious, however, at Waldorf School, this support should extend to the mentor's presence at PTM's as well as at individual meetings with concerned parents, where the intricacies of Waldorf method need to be explained and parents'

questions answered in such a way as to engender the parental understanding, trust and support for practices of the school. As Jitka noticed:

> The teacher, I was asking whether there were sources she could draw on and she said, 'they might give me something, I don't know…' If she could take resources from something, because she…many times it is only about an idea, and when the teacher then is inexperienced, so then I think it is of great importance for her, or to have some mentor, who goes along and says: 'this is good because simply, this the children always enjoyed.. or something like that…or in this way they got into the story best, learnt to narrate, etc… describe…work with letters ….could be done like so, so and so…

Apart of Anthroposophy, there are methodological things like the morning verses, the nonexistence of textbooks, the delayed start with some aspects of literacy and science, differences in assessment, the celebrating of Christian calendar festivals and many others, which need to be explained also. I remember a parent taking a child out of Waldorf School, as he was not at all prepared for the fact, that at Christmas, children sang carols, not only in their mother tongue, but also in English and German at that. The parent was horrified. What multilingual indoctrination! And yet, to an atheist, uninformed of Waldorf spiritual underpinnings, this may justifiably seem utterly inappropriate.

From the fact, that those parents, who did not choose Waldorf School primarily for the reasons of its particular ethos and methods, are not given the opportunity to fully comprehend the nuts and bolts of what happens in the classroom, a duality of understanding between school and home ensues. Teachers are doing something in the classroom, which the parent does not fully understand and when problems, such as those with delayed literacy appear, they may become alarmed and loose the all-important trust in the competence of the teacher. What impact does this duality between home and Waldorf school have on the child's inner attitude towards school has been clearly articulated by its founder.

> 'When the children can observe that their parents look at things in ways that differ from what is said in school, the children get involved in a conflict, and it becomes impossible to focus on the children to the intended effect.'(Steiner, 1996a, pg.50)

The change in the child's behavioural responses to teacher's instruction usually indicates that such duality is present, and it is in teachers' competence to take notice of it and address it appropriately with the parents. I suggest that when teachers fail to address this duality with parents in an effective way and secure genuine parental support for their endeavours, the parents should take the wellbeing of their child into consideration and articulate their concerns openly with the teachers or take any other steps necessary to address the causes for such duality.

Offer support to both sides

Alternately, the schools' faculty cannot anticipate all that may conceivably go wrong. What it can do, however is to establish and implement internal guidelines for meeting concerned parents and communicate those clearly to teachers. It is good to keep in mind, that no one in any school can guarantee a smooth path to the parents, their children and teachers. People and circumstances change over time, problems arise and vanish. A carefully designed and clearly communicated procedures to address the formal aspect of dealing with concerned parents, exist in many schools, however I will argue for the need to complement formal procedures with a means to safeguard particularly the *qualitative* aspect such encounters. It may be claimed, that while all standardized procedures disregard individual specifics of each case, they can also be viewed as presenting a last resort safety net which could slow down and stop the emotional time-bomb. The respondents' reflections indicate, that while they willingly granted the role of designer of parent teacher collaboration to teachers, they expect these interactions to involve specific qualitative aspects as predefined by Waldorf ethos. It is the manner of inner attitude, with which the interaction between the school/teacher and the parents is approached, that places the weight on the tipping point of the scales, which decide for or against the successful resolving of grievances and renewal of trust. Steiner reflects on the limited value of fixed formal procedures:

> The principles are very clever, the statutes and paragraphs are very clever, but you cannot do anything with them in real life. The only way to do anything in real life is to feel life itself pulsing within you and to create out of this pulsing life. (Steiner, 1996a, pg.222)

I suggest, that the schools consider providing unbiased, experienced and knowledgeable facilitation for both parents and teachers involved in conflict interactions, in order to balance the schools' institutional power advantage and provide equal opportunities for the dialogue to both parties concerned.

Heed Steiner's advice on interaction with parents

When, during interactions with parents the teacher appears formal, reserved, refuses to acknowledge a problem or criticises the home circumstances of the child, a great deal of damage of trust may ensue. Steiner advocates for a non-interventionist approach of the teachers to families. He asserts that 'The social situation and the circumstances of the children's lives are accepted for what they are, and everything that is to be accomplished through Waldorf education is striven for on the basis of the inner spiritual foundations of pedagogy itself.' (Steiner, 1996a, pg.212) and that 'Waldorf teachers must acquire the habit of not criticizing the child/parent relationship, but of

accepting it objectively, because their acquaintance with the parents can shed light on the child's idiosyncrasies.' (Steiner, 1996a, pg.215)

The informed parents, who know, how things should be at Waldorf School, expect these things to happen. What they expect from their child's teacher, is the 'heart to heart' relationship, a relationship based not on faith in (institutional) authority, but rather on knowledge of and respect for the teacher's personality and character and consequent ability to develop a feeling for his or her natural authority. As Steiner asserts "Waldorf teachers should never pass up the opportunity to show themselves to the children's parents in their true colours, so that the parents know who they are dealing with." (Steiner, 1996b, pg.221). Parents expect to find in the Waldorf School a place which would practice the child centred approach by dedicated teachers, not only when things go well, but also when difficulties between the child and the teacher arise. Unavoidably, when the school's approach is perceived by the parents as differing from its proclaimed values, disharmony between home and schools ensues with the consequences pertaining to the child's feeling of whether its parents fully support the school and vice versa. This explicit or implicit duality between home and school may influence the child's behaviour at school, which in turn creates further tensions. The self-perpetuating circle is difficult to break, unless both parties consciously place the wellbeing of the child in the centre of their interactions (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Thus in terms of parental engagement, Waldorf Schools are involved in a dilemma. On one hand, the less informed parents who are content when all is well, but are likely to become critical of Waldorf methods when difficulties emerge, on the other the well informed parents who expect too much and have somewhat idealistic picture of reality. Mark and Suzanne conclude:

> S: I don't see it completely black and white, M: me neither, S: I don't hold any grudge against Waldorf school, I just know that there is a lot of great things there and a lot of great teachers, who do their job excellently and it has a lot of positives but at the same time it is not as perfect as we though at the beginning it has its faults. It is the same as everywhere else there are normal people who are flesh and blood and they make mistakes, they are no gods simply…

Concluding words

The fact that parents remove their child from Waldorf School is, in my opinion, always a questionable occurrence, as it implicitly suggests, that Waldorf School is not suitable for all children, which is contradictory to its original foundations. However, behind every child there stand his or her parents, and it is their trust that successful collaboration between home and school depends on. Difficult situations appear and it is up to the teachers' ability to inspire and maintain parents' trust and support for their hard work when all is well, but also when difficult situations

emerge. Teachers may not be able to fully appreciate the possibility, that the concerned parents spent endless hours at home, after children's bedtime, discussing the situation, weighing the pros and cons of speaking out, arguing about possible ways to approach the issue, or whether to approach it at all. When parents see their child enduringly unhappy as a result of school, their daily lives are influenced in a profound way, not incomparable to a chronic illness of a family member. The beginning of each school day brings with it an anticipation of hearing bad news from school and the end of it brings relief when nothing happened. Each piece of bad news either from the child's teacher or the child itself eats like acid into the trust, which parents desperately need to feel confident that their child is in good hands. Thus the children's experiences from school have the potential to colour the atmosphere of the whole family for long periods of time. When parents finally resolve to go, or are summoned to see their child's teacher about a problem they are experiencing in regards to the wellbeing of their child, they are not alone. Beside them, there walk earlier versions of themselves with a load of many years' experience from their school desks, all the feelings and emotions, the praises and reprimands they lived through as children (Lightfoot, 2003). They feel trepidation similar to the one they experienced as children when facing a teacher with a potentially troublesome issue as well as primal instinct to protect their child's interest. Teachers would do well to heed the complexity of parental emotions involved in meeting the parents advocating for their child, and take it into account during their interactions. In a busy day, often at the end of several hours spent in the classroom, teachers may not be ideally disposed to fully realize, just into what extend are such meetings charged with the potentially explosive mix of parental emotions, often only barely held in check by conventions of polite behaviour. Even when the parents walk into the meeting with angry words, what they really seek is to find an empathetic ear and mutual understanding (Ranson et al., 2004). They need reassurance that the teacher knows what they are going through, knows and is interested in their child's wellbeing and is able to find the way towards resolving the issue and resuscitate damaged trust. What the concerned parents do not need to meet is formalism, assigning blame and conceit. Such approach lets them know, that they are unwelcome trespassers on teachers' territory. Parents' unspoken appeal to teachers sounds: Listen to us, do not disregard our experiences and accept us as equals for the aim we both share, for the good of our children.

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APPENDIX 1. CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Anthony Tun

Master Thesis research, Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo

Duration of research: September 2013 – June 2014

Research Supervisor: Arve Mathisen

The Thesis title: How do parents experience and reflect on the process, which led them to withdraw their child form Waldorf School

Sub-questions: What are the parents' initial expectations of Waldorf School?

How do parents experience escalating disharmony with their child's school?

How does their decision to part with the school resonate over time?

This research attempts to obtain and analyse biographical narratives of three different families, who decided to withdraw their child from Waldorf School as well as to obtain and analyse data based on the direct observation and note taking prior, during and after the interviews. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and translated. Data will be coded, sorted, categorized and analysed.

The findings may provide useful indicators for the future prevention, early recognition and successful conflict management at Waldorf Schools, as well as at schools at large. They may also help to shed light at the way Waldorf school teachers and parents communicate, on different, ever changing perceptions of their roles, areas of responsibility and expectations both parties may have of each other.

This is an informed consent form for quoting and/or publishing data obtained in the above mentioned way. Character of the data, which we are interested in does not require their use under your name. Unless you wish otherwise, we will publish and quote data obtained in the process of this research, anonymously without reference to your person.

The sum of data which originate from this research presents a valuable resource for research in the field of education. Should you give your agreement, we would like to archive these data and enable their repeated use. Should you sign this consent from the above mentioned sum of data will be archived in the archive of the RSUC in Oslo. These data may be made available for research purposes only and under supervision, in accordance with legal requirements and observing the rules, among which there is an obligation to respect anonymity of persons, that these data is concerning.

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I am aware, that even though utmost care will be taken to safeguard anonymity of the respondents, due to the specific nature of the events in question, some persons may recognize the identity of the respondents.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Anthony Tun. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the researcher Anthony Tun, anthonytun@hotmail.com, 00420605113366

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

 YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher Signature: _____
Date: _____

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview guide. Master thesis, A. Tun. RSUC. 2013
Following the full explanation of the aims of the research and signing the consent forms…
What motivated you to place your child in Waldorf School?
What were your hopes and expectations of the Waldorf education? (if not clear from the previous answer)
What were the first signs of things going awry?
What was your response to these signs?
At what point did you decide to articulate and voice your concerns?
(Who decided to act?)
What was the teacher's / school's response?
How did the situation escalate?
At which point of the process did you to come to the final decision?
Was it a decision you both agreed on?
How did you weigh the impact of your decision on your child's well-being at the time?
Did the school / teacher attempted to talk to you about your decision post-factum?
What is the resonance of your decision for you and your child today, looking back?
How did your perception of Waldorf School change as a result of this experience?