

Rudolf Steiner University College

Master Thesis

Waldorf School and Parent Involvement in *Sloka*

The Case of Hyderabad Waldorf School

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Oslo, Norway - May 2010



Rudolf Steiner University College

Master Programme in Education

Oslo, Fyresdal - Norway

This work is dedicated to my mother-in-law for her parental involvement without which I couldn't have achieved any of my goals in education.

Abstract

The present study aimed at understanding the parental involvement in establishing the Sloka School (a Waldorf School). It had three aims- finding out the reasons for choosing the school, the expectations the parents brought with them and the experiences of their association with the school. The reviewed literature showed multidimensional aspects and positive effects of parent involvement. Qualitative interviews were conducted with six parents who had ten years of experience with the school. To create internal validity focus group discussion was used. The results were descriptive and exploratory. Results showed that parents chose the school as they were dissatisfied with the existing schools which were regimental and academically focused from the lowest grades. They were attracted towards the Sloka School which was offering a holistic education that was given through music, arts, and creative discipline. Parents were appreciative of the teachers who interacted and communicated with them to accept them as collaborative workers in their child's education. The parents were closely involved with the development of the school. Study showed that parents were concerned about administration lapses and took an active role in bridging gaps when they felt that the communication was inadequate. The parents preferred the ethos of the Waldorf method of education as used in Sloka School.

Key words: parental involvement, Waldorf curriculum, orientation, academic education, holistic education.

Foreword

My acquaintance with alternative education already started when I was a child. My mother went to an alternative school. Unconsciously I had learnt about her school experiences which were my earliest memories of an education that was special. In my 10th year I joined the Rishi Valley School, a school-based on alternative education working on background philosophy of Jiddu Krishnamurthy who in his early life belonged to the theosophical society of India. My schooling was filled with joy and I enjoyed the freedom of the mind. There was no fear in learning and arts were given great importance in the curriculum. After my post graduation in nutrition I took up teaching in a conventional school in Hyderabad. However, teaching in a conventional school created dissatisfaction. There were around 50 to 60 children in a class. Books and syllabus needed to be completed within a set time frame. It was only fact feeding that was done by teachers. I noticed that lessons chosen were not age appropriate. The teachers were not allowed the possibility to be creative. In other words, nothing inspired me. I longed for something more. I left this school as I had no job satisfaction. I spent the next few years assisting my children in home-based school work. A few years later I got my post at Sloka by sheer chance. Joining Sloka School was a turn in my life which gave deep satisfaction. The initial days saw me struggle to understand the Waldorf method of education. I noticed that it was different from other alternative education initiatives, but in what way? I had this burning curiosity to learn more about this education. As a new teacher when I spoke to the parents, I noticed that they knew more about this form of education than I did. I felt this deep need to learn more. Since then I progressed in the school doing my personal research gaining confidence day by day. I soon became involved with the school's developmental programme of dovetailing the Waldorf curriculum to suit the examinations of the Indian board that students took in grade ten. As a part of my personal development it was satisfying, but this was not enough for the needs of the school. The school needed continuous teacher training that could only be given by a specialist. This need of the school brought me to this Master's programme. I noticed that one of the differences in Waldorf education and other educational alternatives was the role of parents in school. This role that the parents played is the enigma which I set out to investigate through this thesis. The journey through the last few months has revealed several important aspects of significance for the school's developmental programme. As a token of my appreciation for the opportunity given I would like to thank the following people.

Acknowledgements

I thank the school management and the pedagogy for giving me this opportunity. I especially thank Arve Mathisen my guide who made the long distance to India seem shorter through his mentoring. I am ever thankful to Aksel Hugo, Bo Dahlin and Geir Oyen for the guidance and support they gave me through out the course. I cannot thank my husband enough for tolerating and accepting my long absences. A warm thanks to the parents I interviewed, for their cooperation and enthusiasm without which this study would not have been possible. I thank the children of the school who are the real reason for this venture. My thanks to my family, friends and Shailu for believing that I could do this. I thank Mrs. Nagalakshmi for sharing her expertise in the field of sociology and proof reading. I use this opportunity to thank David Brierley, Ellen and Wolfgang Kottker for recommending this study and extending their hospitality in Norway. I extend my warm thanks to my co-students who taught me that work could also be a pleasure with its light moments.

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Waldorf School and Parent Involvement in *Sloka*

1.2 Introduction

We have to regard collaboration with parents as the foundation for everything we undertake in the Waldorf School... (Steiner in Langhammer, p.234)

As early as 1922 Rudolf Steiner saw the importance of involving parents in the running of the Waldorf School. He wanted parents and teachers to work in harmony with each other with the child at the centre of their collaboration. He believed that it was the parents who send their children to the school, having great trust in the teacher, who would educate the child. Without this trust the teachers' work was not possible.

Sloka – The Hyderabad Waldorf School started with just such a support and trust from some parents. These parents were pioneers in this field and had great courage.

I joined the *Sloka* Waldorf School with past experience in teaching in a conventional school. This was the time when *Sloka* was growing into its upper grades. In the past five years, my past experience came in handy when I took on the journey of participating in creating the school curriculum, making what was a European curriculum into its suitable Indian perspective. I was also deeply involved in administration thereby having a greater knowledge into the workings of the school. Parents asked many questions and needed satisfactory answers. I was associated in providing these answers at several occasions both in the role of a class teacher and a member of the school board. The school had a parent council that met periodically to discuss issues of interest that were concerned with the school's developmental programmes and the educational suitability of Waldorf education in the Indian scenario. On the request of the parent council, I was involved in explaining the curriculum to the parents with the help of a few other teachers. Some of the parents whose children had been longer in the school spoke in detail about their expectations at the time of starting the school and their understanding of the philosophy. This was what showed me that these parents were in possession of valuable knowledge that could guide the school into its future. In the present position the school was slowly

becoming more organised with a set frame work for future development. Over the years the school was evolving in setting a precedent in its curriculum, orientation programmes for the teachers and parents. These orientations consisted of explanations of the curriculum, the general working of a Waldorf School and its background philosophy.

Sloka School is the first Waldorf School established in India and at present there are five other schools that are growing with this philosophy as their guiding star. All these schools are naturally looking forward to gain from Sloka School's experience as the lead school. This research is a part of the school's developmental needs as the pioneer school. The school spent a great amount of money and time to dovetail the Waldorf curriculum to a curriculum that co-relates with the existing board of examination for the 10th grade. Valuing the sense of transparency, the parents were kept informed at all times regarding the school's development. In doing so it became evident that the pioneer parents were knowledgeable and had information which was crucial to this developmental programme. Once their children leave the school it would be difficult to talk to them about their experiences and reflections of being a part of the Sloka School. As a part of this research I was interested in understanding the beginning of the school through the voice of those parents who were part of the school when it started. In doing so as a teacher of the same school it would give greater understanding of the parents' choice, expectations, their faith and journey with the school. Their journey could further direct our future in the Waldorf School.

Are there no other schools that were similar to a Waldorf School in contemporary India?

1.2.1 Historical development of Indian School system

India has a long history of schooling that dates back 3000 years. According to Ananthnath Basu (1944) not much was known before the advent of the *Aryans* about the Indian education system, but it was well established that the *Aryans* had a well developed higher education system. *Gurukula* was the characteristic educational institution of ancient period. They were also known as the *Acharya kulas* (both guru and acharya mean teacher) which were created for the educational needs of the students according to the role they had to play in the society. This ancient Indian system of education belonged to an oral tradition. In this system the student was sent around the age of 12 years to the

home of the *guru* (teacher). He then continued to live in the teacher's hermitage being a part of the daily life and learning from his teacher.

After this came the Buddhist schools where they lived in their *viharas* (places where students or ascetics stayed). Here they learnt Buddhist scriptures and doctrines. These universities were well documented by Chinese travellers. Then came a period of Indian history where English missionary schools were established. These schools had an underlying principle which was to produce clerks and administrative staff for the colonial rulers (Mehrotra, 2007). In 1931 Gandhi commented about the new school systems of colonial India, "Today India is more illiterate than it was 50 to 100 years ago. British administrators had scratched the soil and begun to look at the root, and left the root like that and the beautiful tree perished." (Gandhi, in Mehrotra, 2007, p. 27). This was his reaction to the educational policy of Lord Macaulay. In any of the above mentioned systems, involvement of parents or shared zone of influence was not seen. These types of educational institutions hardly gave scope for parent involvement even in contemporary India.

Rising from this background which gave no scope for parental involvement in school activities, the Sloka School was unique. It not only encouraged parent participation but followed the view of Steiner to invite parents as collaborators in educating their children.

1.2.2 About Sloka and its connection to Waldorf schools

In a foreword by Henry Barnes (1996) the conditions that existed during the starting of the first Waldorf School were given. Emil Molt who was the owner of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory requested Steiner to start a school for his factory workers. In response to his query, Steiner agreed to guide and direct the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart. The school was started in the autumn of 1919 after two weeks of intensive lectures by Rudolf Steiner. Steiner gave the following opening address:

The Waldorf School will be a living proof of the effectiveness of the anthroposophical orientation toward life. It will be a unified school in the sense that it only considers how to teach in the way demanded by the human being, by the totality of the human essence. We must put everything at achieving this goal (Steiner, 1996. p. 29).

During its inception Steiner indicated that it was his conviction that parents would be deeply satisfied if teachers could work together with parents. He said that his “reason for this is that I really believe that this understanding, this working together of the parents with the teachers and others involved in the leadership of the school is something extraordinarily necessary and significant.” (Steiner, 1996. p.122).

Sloka was started on July 3rd, 1997 on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. It started with 19 children. The school is organised around the impulse which gave rise to the first Waldorf School. Before its inception a series of events were organised by Mrs. Nirmala, Mr. Suresh and Mr. Satish, the three founder members. These events included activities for parents and prospective teachers. Ms. Tina Bruinsma, a Waldorf teacher from Holland gave a commitment for five years to set up the school and help in teacher training.

The school promised all its parents to provide their children a loving caring environment, conducive to free imagination, independent thought and learning. As teachers are crucial in such a venture they were given intense in-house training as well as training from external Waldorf teacher trainers periodically. The financial support for teacher training was given by the money generated from the Christmas bazaar organised by the parents. The school welcomes students of different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Its Board of trustees consists of equal representation from founders, teachers and parents. Except the founders, the other trust members are subject to change every two years. All members have equal representation without a structure of hierarchy. The teachers carry the responsibility for pedagogical direction. They meet once a week to discuss child-concerned issues and administrative issues. The parents give their expertise in the financial directives. The founder members hold the spirit of Waldorf education that guides the school.

School admission follows a process involving a two step programme. At first a teacher or the co-ordinator talks to the parents about the school’s philosophy and curriculum. They show them books on Waldorf education and also the books made by the children for their lessons. They answer any queries from the parents and also explain the role of the parent in the school-based activity as well as home-based activity. The second step is child assessment according to age appropriateness. These activities are termed as *orientation*.

The school organises three parent meetings every year to keep in touch with the parents. Two of them are held separately for each class and one is a combination of a parent evening and a parent meeting. This meeting is termed “*jharoka*”, which literally means a peeping window. The children perform different activities like plays, songs, gymnastics, or any other activities that are related to their current year’s curriculum. This practice enables parents to have a peep into the school activities through this window. The content of the parent meetings consist of the child’s consciousness, the year plan for the child in terms of the subjects learnt and also the mile stones they are expected to reach. News letters are sent out monthly with information about school events and student achievements. Once every year the parents are spoke to in the one-to-one meetings. These meetings are held to discuss child’s social behaviour, emotional needs and any other learning needs. Child assessments are given twice a year in a detailed written report. The marks are given once every year in the grades above 7th. The school has a parent council which meets once a month or when the need arises to help in school management and in fundraising activities. The school is currently in two different locations. The kindergarten which has 89 children has a play group, nursery and kindergarten classes and is situated in the city of Hyderabad. The main School is on the outskirts of Hyderabad with 237 children in the classes from one to ten. The school is in the process of building an eco-friendly structure to house its students catering to aesthetics, peace and safety. (Information gathered from Sloka web site and school office).

1.2.3 Observations of the meetings of the Parent council

In recent days the parents have formed an independent council, to meet at regular intervals and have created a web site at which opinions can be voiced. They have been in touch with the teacher body and work in a positive supportive way. This is in their words:

“We want people who have issues to have a voice that is heard, but there are moderators who filter the essence of issues after many discussions amongst themselves”.

After that the essence of issues are brought to the website and then to the teachers concerned for any further clarification. They suggested that parents were confused about the curriculum of the school and were proposing to meet separately without the teachers

to discuss the issues from their perspective and would wish teachers to be present to help solve problems when parents cannot solve them. They have been welcome to participate in the teacher training sessions which occur on every alternate Friday. Parental involvement is born out of an interest in helping to understand and support their child's performance. The members of the parent council have also expressed the wish to organise a programme to raise funds for the building. Parents also offered to help in school gardening, pet care and School building. Parents are part of the festival celebrations that take place in the school. Does all this make Sloka School an enigma?

1.2.4 Alternative schools in India

The starting of a new school which worked on a background philosophy was however not new in India. In India there are several schools apart from the government schools that are run by private organizations. The education sector is both public and private owned and caters to the large population. Some of the private sector schools are conventional and others are alternative educational institutions. Alternative education aims at developing the 'whole' human being. According to Mehrotra (2007) mainstream schools generally socialise children to fit into status quo structures, while alternative education is a pathway to alternative visions and possibilities. The earliest pioneers of such schools in India were Swami Vivekananda, Dayanand Saraswati and Syed Ahmed Khan etc. Indian educationists of significance in the twentieth century were Jiddu Krishnamurthy, Sri Aurabindo and Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi. (ibid, 2007, p. 29). All schools run up to class VIII with individual curriculum and then fall into a common syllabus of central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) or state board examinations such as Secondary School Certificate in Andhra Pradesh which are taken in the year X. These are private schools and are quite popular as a choice for parents. The National Centre for Education Research and Training (NCERT) guides the government in forming the standard curriculum which acts as a skeleton framework for all the schools. Sloka School started in accordance with these traditions to follow the Waldorf education up to class VIII and then to integrate with the official board of secondary education as the country demands. The teachers organise a meeting with the

students after 8th grade to give them the choice of staying on in a Waldorf school or find alternatives.

When parents choose a school they generally look for a place in proximity to their home, for affordability or even for its name and fame. But the parents of this study have ignored these factors and made an 'active' choice of seeking an educational institution for their child's growth in a holistic way. The parents behaved like 'young radicals' going against the normal grain of the society. They looked for a school that was different and their choice led to the circumstances that gave the school its beginning. With such a background and parents who actively supported their choice, Sloka the Indian Waldorf School started in India. These parents are reasonably well to do and can afford to send their children to any existing school of repute. Still they chose to be pioneers in setting up an alternative school, running it and seeing it through the teething problems. Being a teacher in this school, it is of great interest to me to know more about the initial thoughts that shaped these parents' choice to be pioneers of an alternate philosophy of educational system, the brick on which Waldorf education was built. I also wished to know what it meant to them to have an association with the school that has lasted as long as 10 years for some. After all these years it is supposed that they have not regretted their initial choice but they would have valuable information regarding our school and this would be useful to us in shaping the future development of the school.

1.2.5 Statement of the Problem in view of the background

Studying in an alternative education system made me appreciate the possibilities that a school can create for children's education. Later, working in a conventional school heightened my senses to the lack of these possibilities in most schools. I was sensitised to the subtle differences between the two types of schools. This led to my departure from the conventional school education. Joining Sloka six years ago and teaching in a Waldorf School helped me revisit the possibilities that a school can create. The school I studied in was a residential school which did not give much opportunity for both parent-school collaboration and parent-child association. Being a teacher at Sloka created ample opportunities wherein parental involvement could be used as a collaborative practice.

When I noticed the parental involvement in several school activities at Sloka I realised that this was one of the differences that made Sloka what it is.

At Sloka parent participation is not superficial. It goes to a deeper level and on various dimensions. Parents help by sending food for the whole class once a month or baking eggless cakes for the child's birthday party. They organize Christmas bazaars and field trips. The Christmas bazaar generates money for teacher training and sponsors some of the students. Parents who are specialists in different fields have conducted workshops for children. During the construction of the building they provided their technical expertise. The parents played a major role in funding the school. Financial help was given in both cash and kind. Some have taken on the responsibility of maintaining the garden and grounds. They have worked in collaboration with teachers to support student academics. They were active in organizing private transport to the school. They also participate in the school governance as Trust members. Even when the school split into two separate schools under a different management, and a crisis was imminent seven years ago, the parents were instrumental in seeing the school through troubled waters. All this calls for many man hours of time and labour, rendered voluntarily. In a city atmosphere where parent involvement usually starts with paying fees and is limited to supervising homework it is important to understand how parent involvement can seep in deeper to nourish the institution.

This study proposes that there are parents who were not satisfied with all the options that existed in various schools in Hyderabad, and that these parents found an endearing school culture at Sloka that attracted them into supporting it. What was their reason?

1.2.6 Aims and Research Question

The main aim of this research is to understand the view of parents and show areas for further improvement in their relationship with an educational institution. Very often the Sloka School parents have played an important part in school development. As I consider a school to be only a part of a larger community it is interesting to know how this community exists through the voice of the parents. Ultimately it is the aim of any education to place the student in the existing social system either to fit into it or to change it as the need may be. To be connected to the reality of the social set up, it is interesting

to know parents' views. It is not my intention to generalize the view of a few to the whole population but it is an endeavour to give a voice to these pioneering parents, as they were instrumental in setting up a school with a very different philosophy.

I understand that a school has three sectors of individuals, working with each other constantly - the students, parents and teachers (figure1). When these bodies co-exist for a common purpose many of the objectives of the school will be realized.

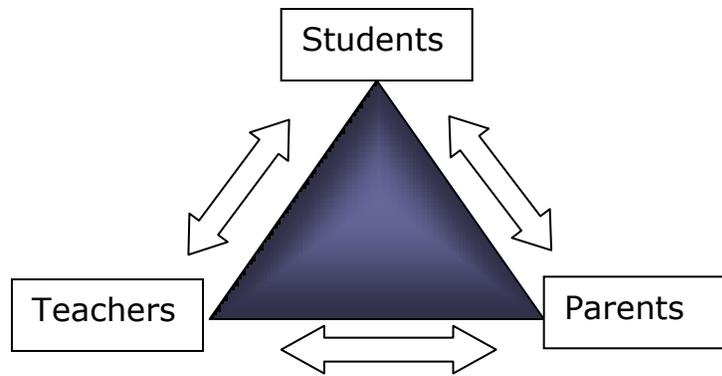


Figure 1

This study could create a platform for the parents to voice their individual opinions which could direct us, as a school, to shape the future orientation of new parents. This research would also help the school to look into the problems that were overlooked at different periods in its development. It is expected that this research would illuminate parent involvement, and ultimately assist teachers to develop good practices to serve the students as a better educational institution. Parents place their children in the school trusting the teachers, when this trust is lost they choose otherwise. Teachers work in collaboration with parents to educate children, if teachers fail in this aspect children do not benefit. Children who do not perform for any reason cannot benefit from the education and thereby cause dissatisfaction in both parents and teachers. This relationship is an interdependent one with the development of the school at its centre.

Therefore I set out to study the experience and reflections of the founding parents along with their association with the Sloka School. I was especially interested in the following themes

- What were their reasons for choosing Sloka?
- What expectations did they bring with them?
- How was their journey in the last ten years and the association with the school?

In answering the above questions it can be understood that the essence is the depth of parental involvement in nurturing a school.

In the next chapter the relevant literature regarding parent involvement and Steiner's views are reviewed and analysed.

2. Review of related literature

Reviewed literature for this study spans available papers and books on levels of parental involvement and categories. The literature also reviews the positive effects of parent involvement on student achievements. The literature also gives variables such as ethnicity and socio-economic differences as its influences on parental involvement though this was not the area of particular focus in the study. Researchers found several variables that can be identified as effective parental involvement at different levels of schooling. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for these studies. It is notable that Steiner's suggestions on this aspect are the earliest. But it is surprising that in India there are very few studies in this field.

2.1.1 Parents and Choice of School

School choice has become more expansive in today's world. People may be treated as citizen-consumers in the given choice. In an internet based survey and study on parental preferences, Schneider and Buckley (2002) compared their findings with existing literature to give suggestions that unfettered choice may lead to undesirable outcomes. Large number of parents do not value appropriate schools, but base their choices on how close the school is to home or whether it has a good foot ball team and less on academic quality of schools (Moe in Schneider and Buckley, 2002).

In their study the evidence on what parents want from schools is varied. Most surveys show that parents care and endorse the right academic values of education. According to Armor and Peiser in Schneider and Buckley (2002), there were three most often cited reasons for parents' choice. These were high academic standards, curriculum and facilities.

2.1.2 Parent involvement – Levels and Activities

Parental involvement in children's education is not a new concept, but one that has been a concern for achieving optimum development in students. It has different levels to it from the first years of school to its later years (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). There

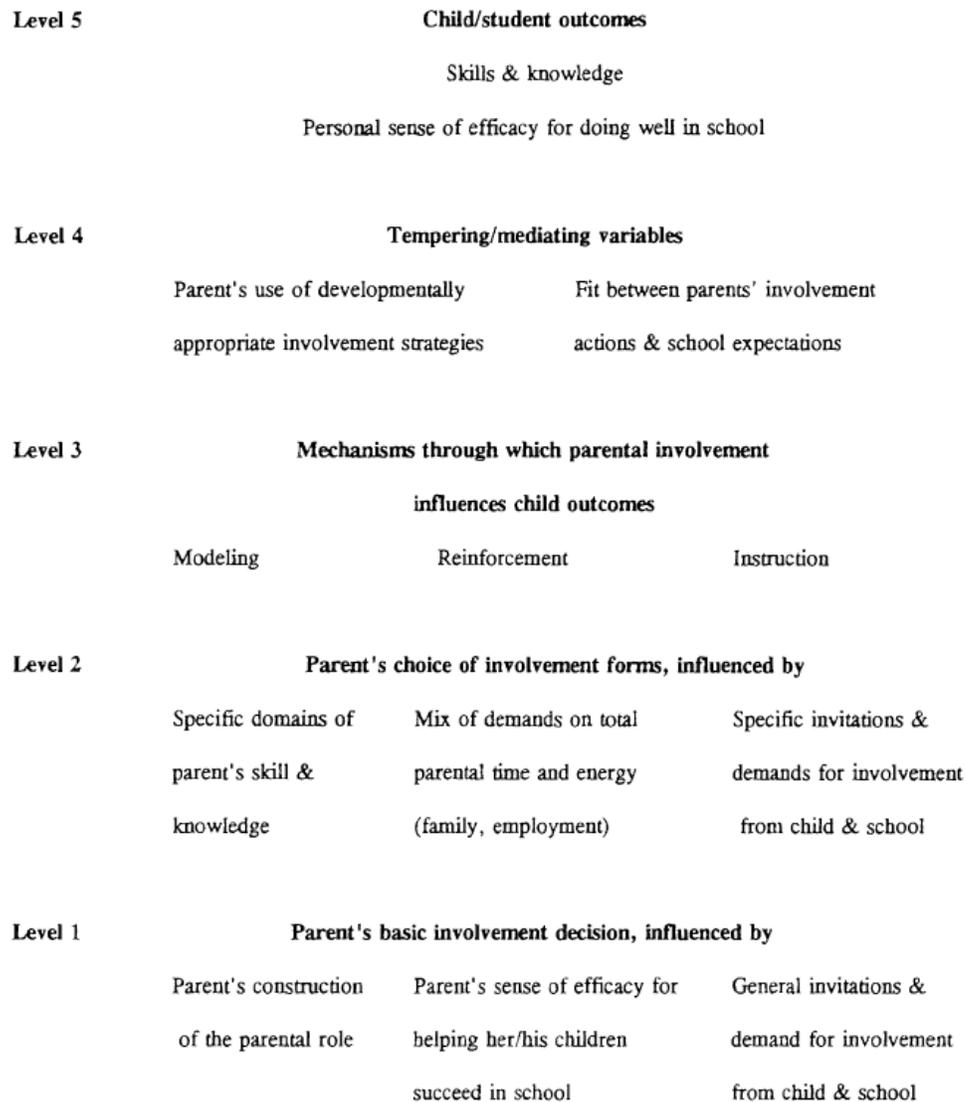
have been many studies which provide a detailed analysis of parental involvement in child and adolescent education and the positive influence it has on children's learning abilities with success in school (e.g., Chavkin; Eccles & Harold; Epstein; Hess & Holloway; Hobbs et al.; U.S. Department of Education; in Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Parental involvement incorporates a wide range of activities. These include home-based activities such as supervision of homework, monitoring child progress reviewing child's work, discussing school events and providing enrichment activities for school academic success. The school-based activities comprise of organising field trips, staffing a concession booth at school games, attending school oriented programmes, volunteering at school or serving in the school advisory board. (Baker & Stevenson; Clark; Comer & Haynes; Dauber & Epstein; Epstein; Epstein & Dauber; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Burrow; in Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Most contemporary schools encourage parent involvement in home-based activities and restricted school-based activities. Parents are often invited for PTA meetings which are monthly or once a term.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) believe that parental involvement is both explicit and implicit. Even when it is implicit it affects the children's achievements. Parents are sometimes explicitly reflective, active and aware of their decision about their involvement. At other times they respond to external events to become involved in their child's education. They believe that there are other factors which can influence parental decisions in involvement. They also suggest that;

Knowledge of parental involvement and its influence on educational outcomes for children is likely to be enhanced as researchers and policymakers focus on the benefits it may create for all involved in the process-child, parents, school and the community as a whole (ibid, 1997, p.6).

Figure 2.1. Model of the parental involvement process



Note. From "Parental Involvement in Children's Education: Why Does It Make a Difference?," by K. V. Hoover-Dempsey and H. M. Sandler, 1995, *Teachers College Record*, 95, p. 327. Copyright 1995 by the President and Trustees of Teachers College. Adapted with permission.

The parents chosen for this study fell into the above mentioned level 1 in Figure 2.1. Their attributes may be similar to the categories of the model given above but yet retain a characteristic individuality. This individuality is the focus of this study.

Many observers have noted that it's the mothers who are mostly involved with children's education. This is a pattern related to social, traditional beliefs, of the role of genders in general (Hoover- Dempsey, 1997).

Mutual support and healthy co-existence are the components of balance in ecology that nature needs for healing. For a healthy education the co-existence and inter-dependence of school and home is imperative. Comer and Haynes (1991) studied the positive effect of such ecology in two schools in USA. Their study showed that parents could be utilised for providing perspectives to complement and enhance educational processes. They indicate that for such a programme to become effective the flexibility of schools is necessary. They summarise that both families and schools have important influence on the child's 'psychoeducational' development.

Families provide the social, cultural, and emotional supports that children need to function well in school. Schools must provide the opportunities for children's positive interaction with significant adults and other children in a way that enhances their home experiences and supports their continued development and related learning (Comer & Haynes, 1991, p. 276).

Their programmes were most effective when they were based on child development concerns.

2.1.3 Types of Parental Involvement

Epstein (2004) have distinguished six types of parental involvement reflecting different types of cooperative relations between schools and parents:

1. **Parenting.** Schools must help parents with the creation of positive home conditions to promote the development of children. Parents must prepare their children for school, guide them and raise them.
2. **Communicating.** Schools must inform parents about the school programme and the progress of children's school careers. Schools must also

present such information in a manner which is comprehensible to all parents, and parents must be open to such communication.

3. **Volunteering.** The contribution and help of parents during school activities (e.g. reading mothers, organisation of celebrations).

4. **Learning at home.** Activities aimed at the support, help and monitoring of the learning and development activities of one's school-going children at home (e.g. help with homework).

5. **Decision making.** The involvement of parents in the policy and management of the school and the establishment of formal parental representation (e.g. school board or parent council memberships).

6. **Collaborating with the community.** The identification and integration of community resources and services with existing school programmes, family child-rearing practices and pupil learning (Epstein, 2004, p. 21).

According to a study conducted by Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) the parent involvement was multidimensional and the child was an active participant in constructing its school experiences. The positive consequences of involvement follow a process of ego development in the child and increase in self esteem. They recognised the collaborative effect of parents and teachers in educating the child. “There is increasing recognition within developmental, educational, and sociological theories that *both* school and home are important institutions that socialize and educate children.” (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994. p. 237)

Multidimensional aspect of parent involvement was also noticed in a study by Fan (2001). Though the effect on academic achievements was more influenced by parent’s educational aspirations for their children than others, the plausible reason given for this effect could be that this aspiration may translate into many educationally beneficial activities of the parents. This same study also researched on ethnic differences for parental involvement amongst 4 groups. The study showed that certain groups had more home- based involvement and others, school-based involvement. The present study did not take these variables into consideration.

Early adolescence marks several changes in humans which are biological, social and cognitive. In respect to these changes academic performance declines, but at the same time it also shows increased long-term implications for occupational attainment (Adams & Berzonsky; Barber & Olsen; Eccles & Harold; in Hill & Tyson, 2009). According to them the confluence of these changes is a crucial time in the life of a student and there is increased necessity to identify sources of support for reaching their potential. On doing a meta-analytical assessment the strongest positive effect was gained from academic socialization.

2.1.4 Collaborative Practices and Student Attendance, Educational Achievement

A study conducted by Epstein (2002), for improving student attendance recommends collaborative practices with parents. Research on truancy and absenteeism suggest that students with better attendance perform better than more frequently absent peers (Lamden in Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). Accordingly attendance not only affects individual students but also affects the whole school's learning environment. School characteristics and practices influence the rate of absenteeism or truancy among students (Finn and Voelkl in Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). Students are also said to cut class if class is boring, class room environment is chaotic and also when teachers don't listen to them (Duckworth and De Jung in Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). Epstein recommends that by following 6 types of involvement (suggested earlier in this text) schools can implement programmes that focus on attendance.

According to Epstein and Jansorn (2004), students who succeed are supported by parents while unsuccessful students struggle due to lack of parental support. Partnership programmes should work according to plans which are designed for school improvement programmes. They suggest that schools should have an 'action arm' which is responsible for creating these action plans and seeing to their implementation.

In a study conducted by Epstein and Sanders (2006), on prospects of preparing schools and community partner ships results were conforming to earlier findings (positive outcomes on education due to parental involvement). New American federal laws (no child left behind) indicate that teachers should communicate with parents on test scores and

quality of teachers and schools. According to this act schools require to organise and implement programmes to include parents in child education programmes to increase skills.

In a research presented by Driessen et al. (2005) on parental involvement and educational achievements it was noted that parental involvement was seen as an important strategy for advancement of quality of education. According to them parents and schools along with society form partnerships that are mutually beneficial. These partnerships they view as mutually overlapping spheres of influence. In their study they also indicate different levels of involvement and differences dependent on ethnic groups.

2.1.5 Parental Involvement in India

Under the title of 'Parental awareness and involvement in primary education', Nair (1999) has explored into how the rural education in India can be improved in both quality and quantity. According to him even though compulsory education for all Indian children up to the age of 14 was laid down as a rule by the government, it does not show expected results. He has divided these 10 years of education into elementary, lower primary and upper primary levels. He recommends that in all these three levels of education the effect of parental involvement is important though not effective in the same way. The parent involvement has more impact in primary school level than in later years.

This underlines the fact that parents' and teachers' involvement in primary education should be such that children see school as an 'extended home' and home as an 'extended school' (ibid, 1999. p. 3).

He indicates that at the elementary level parent involvement brings children with a positive attitude toward the school and with good health. At lower primary level its positive effect is in the prevention of early drop outs. The reason he gives for poor performance of children is also due to unattractive school environment and curriculum.

Parents and teachers should together take care to provide a feeling of an 'extended home' in the school, both emotionally and environmentally. This will make it easier for the child to socialise, interact with peer group and with teachers. A good rapport between parents and teachers is necessary to create such a child friendly atmosphere in schools (ibid, 1999, p.2).

Along with the above quote, he also encourages parent – teacher rapport that can be achieved by celebrating national and local festivals together. According to him this inculcates a sense of community participation in children at an early age.

When it comes to upper primary level, poor success is attributed to gender differences. It also is dependent on direct and indirect child labour. But here too he suggests that if local family oriented aspects are introduced then the level of education is greatly affected positively.

He also indicates that in parent – teacher association meetings, matters such as learning behaviour of children, their emotional mental and physical needs should be discussed.

Sarma (2005) identified 12 factors that are associated with schools that have effectiveness in children's overall development. The paper was based on findings as perceived by head masters. One of the conclusions of the study states that teacher-parent/committee relationship was low in both rural and urban India. He recommends in improving these relationships to optimise students' overall development. He suggests that to make the school more qualitative, parents' participation in school development is to be improved. In other words the study recommends the schools to have good relationships with the staff, students, parents and the community for the school development.

In a study conducted on children from schools in Dharwad (Karnataka) by Manjula, et al, (2009) the children showed difficulty in reading and writing skills when parental involvement was not substantially given. When parental intervention was given the improvement in academic performance was noticeable. The study also showed that this support which parents gave to the children could either be home-based or when parents volunteered in school activities. Her study also indicated that not adequate research was done in India regarding parent involvement.

2.1.6 Parental Role Construct

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) reviewed psychological theory and other literature which is critical to understand why parents become involved in their children's education. They believe that there are three major constructs that are central to parent involvement-

- The definition of role that parents give themselves.
- The sense of efficacy and their belief, that they can make a difference to their child's performance through their involvement.
- The demands and opportunities created by the school for their involvement.

According to them the invitation from school for involvement will meet with only limited success unless the parents sense of efficacy and role construct are not addressed.

One of the influential aspects of parental involvement is the role construct which is self given. It is influenced by beliefs about child development and about home-centred supports in general (Hoover- Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). This parental involvement is also subjected to levels of intensity and variation throughout school years. It is more intense in younger days than in high school.

According to Biddle in Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2001), parental involvement reflects the role that parents give to themselves regarding their child's education. This role is a result of their personal role construct or the influence of other pertinent persons in their life. It has been observed that this is a normal requirement and responsibility of parenting.

The power of parental role construct can be highlighted when findings point to continued involvement despite their concern about personal limitations such as lack of expertise and competence in subjects (Anesko, Shoiok, Ramirez, & Levine; Bryan, Nelson, & Mathur in Hoover-Dempsey, 2001). Parents sometimes consider that they are not competent to help their children due to educational limitations, but their involvement was not limited. According to Kay et al. in Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2001) parents who had doubts about their involvement levels did not doubt their capabilities to be involved but had misgivings on their lack of adequate information.

Parent's sense of efficacy for helping children is greatly guided by the expectations of positive outcomes of their involvement. If they set higher goals for themselves the higher are their persistence levels (Bandura in Hoover-Dempsey, 2001).

It has been well established, for example that family status variables (e.g., income, education, ethnicity, marital status) are often related to parental involvement and, in turn, to children's school success (Hoover-Dempsey,

1997, p. 7).

Ajzen in Pang & Watkins (2000) acknowledged control factors under which behaviour could be affected. The expectancy of parents in this regard can be -

- Context expectancy
- Social expectancy
- Self expectancy.

Context expectancy is relevant as parent-teacher communication involves two parties. The variation in time available to work load of both parties can influence their involvement. In India which is a developing country, it is not yet a norm of the society for both parents to work; therefore the parent involvement is more expected. But this is fast changing with global recession and westernization.

Social expectancy is more a subjective norm dependent on teacher's approval of the working environment. Most often it is the self expectancy which is an individual choice that matters greatly.

The People's Republic of China is in many ways similar to India culturally and is also comparable in its recent revolutionary changes brought about in education. The study conducted by Wei Gu (2008) on new horizons and challenges in its public schools for parent involvement exposed some interesting aspects. This study highlights the facts that parental involvement is more likely to be withdrawn when it is school-based but stronger when it is home-based. This attributes to cultural and historical background of China.

It is reported that improved relationships between schools and families have great influence on optimized child education (Bronfenbrenner in Wei Gu, 2008).

According to the study by Gu (2008), teachers in China should be trained more to deal and work with parents in primary schools. Continuous development might gear the traditional Chinese perceptions to the needs of the 21st century. This could also be achieved by creating more programmes for teachers for working with parents and to change parents' passive attitudes towards child's education.

The Hong Kong government likewise has given importance to home-school co-operation as research showed positive results in student performance (Pang & Watkins, 2000). The

Home-school Co-operation committee was set up in 1993, to deal with issues generated in this aspect. The University of Hong Kong conducted surveys on class teachers to delve into parental involvement practices on the various actors in the school system (teacher, student and parent). The paper took into consideration psychological models of teacher-parent communication. These were theory of planned behaviour, self efficacy theory, expectancy theory and theories of family-school relationships. Their findings show that teacher efficacy and personal commitment could be correlated to parent involvement practices similar to USA which were studied by Hoover-Dempsey. To increase teachers' intentions to communicate policy makers may need to attend to the perceived roles of teachers in respect to their working relationship with parents.

2.1.7 School Communication

Epstein (1992) suggests that home school communication is the basic obligation of schools. Such a communication enables both the parents and teachers to mutually exchange each other's expectations and needs of the children (Gallagher et al., in Pang & Watkins, 2000). When information is not forthcoming it might be the chief cause of parent-school conflicts (Partington & Wragg, 1989; Gestwicki, 1992 in Pang & Watkins, 2000). According to Epstein quoted in Pang and Watkins (2000) children learned about the importance of education and schooling in general when parents and teachers spent their time together to help them succeed. It is almost equal to a family where in both the parents mutually agree on the principles of their upbringing, which positively influences on parenting. They respect the time which the concerned parties spend on them.

Parental involvement is crucial at primary school level. This involvement is greater at primary level than secondary level in USA and UK (Epstein & Danber; Munn; in Pang & Watkins, 2000).

A heavily dependent child also promoted parent teacher co-operation to greater level (Munn, in Pang & Watkins, 2000). (One of the children whose parent was interviewed belonged to this category.)

2.1.8 Curriculum possibilities and developing skills in the child

In his views on progressive education, Dewey (Darling & Nordenbo, 2008) was not ready to agree that school was a preparation for life but rather an important part of life. He felt that instead of thinking of how to improve the child's future life, it was better to improve his quality of childhood. Fully lived childhood according to him constitutes the best preparation for adulthood. According to him knowing the world is to face endless situations and man forms his habits to cope with these endless problems. Therefore he asks the educators to prepare children to face these endless changing situations by gaining life skills.

James's (Garrison & Neiman, 2008) pedagogical principle of habitualizing as many useful actions into the unconscious or automatic realm so that the higher powers of the mind are set free for their proper work reminds me of Steiner's views of creating early rhythms in education.

According to James in Garrison and Neiman (2008) even though human psychology is the science of the mind it cannot be directly translated into education, as education is an art which cannot be generated from science directly but must be processed and created through the innovative mind of the educator.

According to Dewey the uncertainty in the future society is the reason to the uncertainty in choosing what education is best. Being flexible and diverse is one aspect of pragmatism which he recommends. (Garrison & Neiman, 2008).

The above references are only a few which indicate that the terrain of education systems is varied and has undergone radical changes. Present systems of alternative education take into considerations all these trends to educate children holistically. These schools were found to focus more on the *process of learning* rather than solely on the *end results* (Vittachi, 2007)

2.1.9 Steiner's views on Parent - Teacher Relationship

In 1992 Steiner gave lecture to students, parents and teachers. He said that he believed that a good understanding and collaborative work between parents and teachers was necessary for school progress. "Thus the entire thrust of education in the Waldorf School

is to work together with parents.” (Steiner, 1996, p. 212). He considered them as pioneers who not only worked out of personal human intention, but also a cultural challenge of the time. He wished for human awareness to guide the school.

If out of this awareness, we always try to give these children the best that can be given to them, then we need to have this school surrounded by a wall of parental understanding like the walls of a fortress (ibid, 1996, p. 74).

He believed that there would arise many questions when the child’s education is progressing that could be solved only through a parental partnership. Accordingly Steiner did not agree with Johann Gottlieb Fichte in taking children from their parents home and leaving them cooped up in special institutions. He felt it was better to accept the child’s social situation and circumstances. Therefore he suggested that the Waldorf School should stand in the midst of actual life where the parents were collaborating with the school and teachers (ibid, 1996, p. 212).

When he lectured to the parents, Rudolf Steiner stressed on the pressure teachers in general face with authorities (from government policies), which is not the view they have about parents. For a teacher to draw inner strength on daily basis recognition is not needed but an understanding is necessary from those who have entrusted them with the role of teaching their children.

Above all, we count on the understanding of those who entrust their children to us, who have a certain love for the Waldorf School. We count on them being able to grasp the thoughts, feelings and will impulses that sustain us (Steiner, 2003, p. 170).

Rudolf Steiner started the Waldorf School and in this school he met teachers and parents to whom he gave several lectures. In his lectures he gave several indications which were later interpreted and used for future ventures through the century (for all the Waldorf schools working in several countries). His thoughts were not for that century but for coming centuries too, because he did not base his indications on the knowledge of the existing society but on human beings as part of the existing society.

The only thing of value is the awareness that this school is taking a great risk in trying to use feeble human forces to recognize the scarcely indecipherable demands of the twentieth century and to recast them in the form of an

educational venture (ibid, 2003, p. 170).

This risk is even greater today when we are concerned about the twenty first century which is changing faster than ever before.

Steiner also expressed a view that parent- teacher meetings should take place with a right attitude as this right attitude then turns into right action. This action would be to result in good education practices. He believed that when a school achieved good practices then parents would be satisfied to admit their younger ones as well. “Those of you who already have children with us may have younger children at home. You may have come to love the principles of the Waldorf School and want to send your younger children here too.” (ibid, p. 172).

In writing an assessment of the children Steiner (2003) expressed an opinion that the meeting of the parents allows the teacher to see the child in the right light. “Just as writing a letter to someone you know is different from writing to a stranger, it is also different writing reports on students whose parents you know from those whose parents you have not met.” (ibid, p. 172).

Steiner suggested that if parents replied in the form of small notes the communication would be more effective. This according to Steiner is a great help if teaching should not be out of abstract ideas, but out of the impulse of our time. He recommended a fundamental honesty in parent-teacher interaction. “Simply keep in mind that things have changed a lot in recent years, not only in society but also in the souls of children. We cannot apply the standards of our own youth.” (ibid, p.181).

This is what is basically expected of us as teachers and as parents, while being in the field of educating the child. Steiner gave great importance to parent evenings and said that the teachers thrive on these parent meetings.

The echo that comes from the parents during the parent evening, there flows life towards the teacher from another perspective, and this is something that the teacher needs to be able to remain lively in her inner being (Steiner in Makinen, p. 34).

As regards to achieving academic competence Steiner was clear that children should be prepared to write examinations ultimately as this was one of the goals of the school. In

faculty meetings with Rudolf Steiner his opinion was to this effect. “If we do not prepare [the student] for the examinations, we would eventually close the last four grades. Parents would not send their children.” (Steiner, 1998, p. xxxi).

The literature collected shows a multi dimensional aspect of parent involvement but definitely one that has positive outcomes. Though most of the literature is from countries other than India, they all support the aims of this study which is to establish parents’ involvement in founding a school. In India it is not yet a regular practice for both the parents to be working therefore one would expect that it would be easy for parents to be more involved in their child’s education. The limited literature that was available in India only indicates the prominence of this study in view of current trends in education.

3. Methodology and methods

Qualitative research is a highly rewarding activity where the researcher engages himself or herself deeply in inquiring about social phenomena. My research question was to inquire into what the parents' reasons for choosing Sloka School were, and how their journey was through ten years. These questions could be best answered in a descriptive and exploratory way. Seeking such answers led me to explore the methods of qualitative research as I was more interested in the particular than the general. The question was very specific and I was not looking for a given recipe. I was looking for the finer experiences of the parents whose courage nourished the school. Statistical data was not enough for me as I was looking for more description and an explanation in the words of the parents. The methods had to be specific to this research. The dimensions that qualitative research explores are several.

Through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of every day life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the way the social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate (Mason, 2007, p. 1)

Instead of aiming at getting a general picture, qualitative research uses methodologies that highlight depth, nuances, context and complexity. Instead of editing these rich elements of educational research in trying to reduce it to finding out averages or generalisation it uses them to analyse and explain by putting forth compelling arguments. Qualitative research has unrivalled capacity to argue how and why things are so in a certain context. Even though it faces criticism of being merely anecdotal it is easy forgetting its extraordinary strengths of being able to explain the particular. The study was aimed at exploring the specific case of Sloka School and the methods chosen were therefore very case specific. I had to find ways of using the strengths of qualitative research and minimising its limitations. The research had a great potential and I as a practitioner had a continuous challenge of critical thinking.

Qualitative research does not contain a given recipe of methods but gives the practitioner a flexibility and opportunity to design the means of inquiry by active engagement to the chosen question. In addition to all this it gives a deep satisfaction and understanding (ibid, 2007).

As I was in the thick of it all, and testing the waters that I swam in it meant having to distance myself as often as possible. The research aimed to analyse and understand the conditions that influenced parents and resulted in establishing a Waldorf School. Hence, I was also interested in understanding the conditions that existed a decade before the present study. As the data available for this analysis was not found in any written document the choice was made to interview the parents who played an important role in establishing the school. I chose the qualitative research methods against quantifying as it was more appropriate to fulfil the objectives of the study which were to understand the process that facilitated the building of a school and its growth through the voice of the parents. I was also interested in emphasising key words and views of these parents which were their opinions based on situations and experiences which are personal and not the opinion of all parents. By doing so my intention was to describe and explore the view of parents as they relived an experience. My intention was also to stir their memory into recalling a situation from over a decade.

In Jennifer Mason's (2007) view the great strength of qualitative research is that it cannot be pigeon-holed and reduced to simple prescriptive set of principles. "In fact most of the archeologically recoverable information about human behaviour is text, the good stuff of social science." (Ryan and Bernard, in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 769)

In a review essay on qualitative research Patrick Dilley (2004) remarks that interviewing is important to many forms of qualitative research. Qualitative research uses three kinds of data collection methods.

1. Interviews
2. Observations and
3. Written documents.

After making the choice of interviews as data collection method, observations were used as a supportive method in influencing analysis. Interviews facilitated not only direct

information but the transformation of this knowledge in a person as lived experience. It did not involve only retrieving of the knowledge down the memory lane but was also as a reflective process. The intention was not to get just opinions but a reflective judgement of situations as suggested by Mason (2007).

According to Jennifer Mason (2007), structured rigid questions may not be suitable for analysis unless quantifying the data is our objective. Making a questionnaire from which quantitative analysis could be done was forgone as it would not generate a narrative. Asking different questions to each interviewee according to their conversation and developing them based on the situation was a good idea. I chose the interview method with specific intentions.

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind (for example, the interviewer's preconceived categories for organizing the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed (Patton in Best and Kahn, 2008, p. 265).

Even though to Webb and Webb in Wellington, (2008) interview is a conversation with purpose but to Wellington (2008) it is more than a conversation with a purpose. It is creating a platform for the informant to express his/her views after much contemplation. The methodology chosen was a semi-structured interview method. This demanded the interviewer to be positioned as a probe and not a sponge to absorb the knowledge. The informants were to be people who had experiences that the interviewer was not a part of, as the interviewer was not with the school at the time which was being inquired into. In his review article Dilley (2004) says that according to Kvale there are no standard methods like scientific procedures for interview methods. What happens in an interview transcends protocol or design. This is the greatest limitation and a merit of qualitative research. Added to this is also the limitation of language which is important, as thick descriptions are the very essence of qualitative analysis. It's yet another limitation is that it is specific to the researcher and informant and cannot be generalised to the population at large but as it was not my intention to generalise it, this did not create a limitation.

3.1 Focus group interviews

The one-to-one interviews with parents generated views in the form of a narrative, and after they were completed the question of validity was on my mind. To create internal validity I chose the focus group interview. By it I was going to achieve validity and also position the parents into the role of co-researchers. The discussion between them would bring a contextual dimension to my study. It also would add new group dynamics to my study. This was my way of creating triangulation for the study.

Kreuger (1988) suggests that focus group interviews were born in late 1930's when qualitative researchers doubted the traditional methods of data gathering. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that this term was coined for the kind of study conducted as a group interview on members after considerable research was already done by the researcher. The questions then asked are not completely open ended but more structured. The respondent takes on a different dimension as people may be influenced or may shift their positions according to the influence of other members in a group present.

Focus group studies give an opportunity to conceptualise the issue being discussed and may be a place where observations can be on situational interaction. Which ever type of study conducted, some inferences will be made as an interaction between the researcher and the informant. Conceptualising the already existing information was my intention.

According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), the questions put to the focus group should grow directly out of the research questions that motivated this study. They suggest that number of questions is also often restricted to less than a dozen. The analysis is also done in a comparison of terms or words previously used by the interviewee. The focus group interview facilitates internal validity as the informants are revisiting their views along with the other participants as co-workers. A review of the literature revealed that for a successful data collection, focus group methodology must be employed in a manner to promote validity. The issues outlined about are essential elements for credible qualitative research (Lewis, 2000).

3.2 Ethics

Seven social sins

Politics without Principles...

Pleasures without Conscience...

Wealth without Work...

Knowledge without Character...

Commerce without Morality...

Science without Humanity...

Worship without Sacrifice...

Mahatma Gandhi.

To this list a researcher may add *Research without Ethics*. In the planning of a research project that involves humans, the aspect of ethics should be an underlying feature, as all research using humans as subjects involves a certain element of risk. To keep the identity of the interviewee anonymous is one that belongs to this aspect. This research was conducted keeping within the norms which were considered essential for a fair, unbiased way in collecting data and analysis. Prior permissions were taken and explanations were given to keep the informant fully aware of the nature of the research project. Initially only after these permissions were obtained the project was commenced. The institutional approval was also obtained. I did not see any risk factor to the participant and a code was given to keep the identity of the person interviewed unknown.

At all stages the interviewees were taken into confidentiality. Only after their consent, were their words used as quotations. It was also kept in mind not to reveal their identity while formulating the focus group questions. I had a tough task in addressing questions to the group and not targeting a person.

After narrowing down the choice, and understanding the advantages and limitations of the chosen methodology a process of research methods is discussed further in this chapter.

3.3 Methods

This part of the chapter describes the process of methods carried on. Using the qualitative interview method and focus group method, the study investigates the relationship between parents and teachers in institutionalizing a framework for 'Sloka' the first Waldorf School in India. The work began with identifying the informants.

3.3.1 Selection of Informants

“Determining where and from whom data will be collected is directly analogous to our consideration of sampling.” (Rudestam et al, 2006, p. 106). As the research was a study connected to inquiring into the process of parental support in establishing a Waldorf School, identifying participants for the purpose of inquiry was more based on identifying the parents who experienced the process the most. The trick was to choose participants whose main credential was experiential relevance. The class from which these parents were chosen was the grade X. I was the class teacher of this class for four years and knew the parents fairly well. This familiarity was being used only as an advantage in building a rapport but not for any other biased views. The chosen class was not a large class and out of the parent body only six of them were parents associated with the school since its establishment. The choice of parents to be interviewed was done by purposeful selection. They were all parents who had long standing association with the school (over ten years). They were also completing the journey with the school as parents as their children were leaving the school after their 10th grade. One part of the interview was targeted at the view of parents at the final stage which was considered as their journey's end with the school. Their role during the establishment of the school was crucial as there would be no school without its pupils. Anthroposophy which is the guiding philosophy of the school was also attractive to them. In PTA meetings they were the most vocal, sometimes questioning, sometimes encouraging. I considered this aspect at the time of selecting respondents as it would be easy to interest them in talking about their understanding of the school. Two of them also volunteered for substitution when teachers were on leave. This indicated that they were better informed about the school's curriculum and its workings than others. I expected that their multiple roles in the school gave them a multidimensional perspective.

A part of the challenge was to master language necessary for qualitative inquiry. Understanding their jargons helped the analysis. One parent spoke Telugu (the local language of the state). This was not much of a challenge as I was conversant in it.

A critical friend was used in the role of a devil's advocate. She needled and pushed the inquiry further by discussing on methods of sociology as she was an expert in the field.

The study was limited to six parents with duration of half an hour in-depth interview.

3.3.2 Interview questions

The interviews were conducted informally appreciating the conversation style. Five interviews were conducted in English and one was done in Telugu as the parent felt comfortable in that language. This interview was taken and free translation was done while transcribing the interview. All interviews were done through a recorder and points that needed attention were noted. Special notes were made when certain gestures of importance were noted or when facial expressions that would help in analysis were noted. Transcriptions were done with a code to avoid identification of the respondent.

Interview questions were designed according to certain categories. (The questions prepared for the interviews and the focus group studies are listed in the appendix of this research paper). The interview questions were planned for initially, but they were neither asked in an order of priority nor conformed to, as they did not facilitate a conversation. The questions were more or less targeted towards bringing out a narrative of the parents' narrative. The questions sometimes were used as tools to draw out the participants to reflect on their experiences and implications in their life rather than unearthing facts. The opening questions were purposefully directed at making them feel comfortable. Intuition said parents were interested in talking about their children so here I could open the conversation. All of the interviews began with a common opening question "Why did you choose the Waldorf School for your child?" or similar in its meaning. After the narrative portion of the interview was completed, questions were asked as probes to go into the deeper meaning of their experiences. These questions were developed as the interview progressed. The questions were targeted at drawing out a narrative of their journey with the school.

Details of the interview were added in from listening to the recorded matter. These details were like 'she laughed' or 'she took time' etc. Even though transcribed notes were used for analysis, it was also accompanied by supplementary information gathered through paper-and-pencil note gathering. Here it was worth noting their smiles, frowns and lack of concentration, their gestures of sitting forward indicating involvement and relaxing into the chair meant a lot to the personal analysis.

My experience and association with the informants transformed me into an instrument to convey the same. The skill as a teacher was helpful in these observations. Part of Waldorf teacher training in the school which I had undergone was directed towards observations of the human being. This training came in handy while analysing the text. Teacher training also involves being capable of thinking on ones feet. Being able to direct the conversation and developing questions during the period of the interview belonged to this skill. As a class teacher of their children for 4 years being attuned to their mannerisms and 'jargons' was a fairly reliable skill that could be used as an instrument of the research.

The process of association with school was divided into three stages of association. The initial stage was where parents opted for the school; the second part was to be more concerned with the parent teacher association throughout the school years of their child. The third part was designed to throw light on the contemplations of the parents in retrospect. This last stage was a reflective stage where they threw light on their choice in life of giving their children the education of their choice. The interview questions corresponded to the above three stages.

The first part was to give information about the views of parents prior to joining their children in Sloka the second part was their process of interaction with the school through out their child's study in school. The third part corresponded to the time of this study. It was the phase where they looked back on their journey and expectations. All three parts are important aspects as they indicate expectations, a journey and a satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It would also create a platform for the parents to voice their individual opinions which would direct us, as a school, to shape future orientation of new parents. This would also help the school to look into the problems that were overlooked. I would

expect the study to delve into the process of parent involvement, and ultimately the findings would help to serve the students as an educational institution with holistic development of the students as its goal.

A second interview conducted with all the parents as a focus group discussion was helpful in validating and conceptualising the ideas that appeared through the first interview. The first interview satisfied a subjective experience of individuals.

This was the intention and I had an idea of their prevailing thoughts which were often expressed in PTA (parent teacher association) meetings, but I did not wish to make them known to the interviewees as this would put biased views on the interviewee's part.

3.3.3 Focus group Discussion

The focus group discussion was planned to validate the data collected in the one-to-one interviews. The group interview needed no rapport building plan as it was already in place. The questions were developed out of the first interview results after much pondering and a certain time lapse. The gap in time was used to give parents time for contemplation. For the sake of creating internal validity to the one-to-interviews, focus group study was done. The focus group discussion was used to facilitate and conceptualise the already existing information, thereby clarifying tentative findings, which were generated from the one-to one interviews with the participants. The focus group session also helped in positioning the participants in a co-researcher's role, by trying to confirm the validity and credibility of the findings.

The questions were planned in such a way that they were semi-structured, allowing the respondents to answer from a variety of dimensions, and they did not yield just 'yes' or 'no' as answers. They were used more to deepen and validate the trends noticed in the previous interview. I took on the role of a patient probe that was non reactive and non directive.

As one of the most distinct features of focus group study was the dynamics that were generated during the study (Thomas et al. in Rabiee, 2004, p.656.). The study was expected to illuminate different range of ideas that have been noticed earlier in a new perspective. The parents were given the role of co-researchers. They were prompted to

discuss the topic freely and I kept out of the discussion unless a question was directed towards me. The results were presented just as one-to-one interviews in uncomplicated way using quotations for support. In the next chapter the results and discussion of the study are presented.

3.3.4 Process of analysis

The interview data was read and it has been presented in the next chapter in its literal meaning using quotes from the parents. To it was also added interpretation and reflexive meaning. The subtitling was in a way that the indexing was done. These were placed mostly before the beginning of the analysis but some themes emerged as the analysis progressed. The interviews yielded a substantial amount of data which was initially grouped into three phases. These three phases were:

- The beginning phase or phase I, where the parents were at the time of choosing the Waldorf School.
- The second phase or phase II, was the parents' journey through the school, and represented their association in the past ten years.
- The third phase or phase III, was the present phase after completing a journey.

The transcriptions of the interviews were read and relevant points coded. Later the common terms which were repeated by more than one parent were identified. As an example terms like 'regular school', 'trust', 'homely atmosphere' etc. were repetitive terms that were chosen as themes for the analysis. These common terms and words generated were placed accordingly into the column that categorised the corresponding phase the parents were talking about. It was easier to expand these terms later on into analysis. Below are given these columns.

Phase I At the time of admission

Parents' positions

<p>Differences between mainstream and Waldorf school, orthodox, burdened with, very strict convent, no connection between teacher parent or teacher – student. Too many children in class. Absence of black boards in KG.</p>	<p>Trust. Trust in own judgment.</p>	<p>Teacher-student ratio, teachers like mothers,</p>	<p>Quality of Orientation at the time of admission, convincing orientation, interesting intensive.</p>	<p>First contact of child with school – the contentment, child was happy, the personal touch, soul lifting for me, very happy singing all the time.</p>	<p>Homely atmosphere. Home for mother too</p>	<p>Aesthetics</p>
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Phase II

Parents' positions through out school years

The left part of brain developing with right side too.	Confidence of children, multicultural exposure.	Their reasoning quality	Self confidence and articulation, Self learning, Compassion, Practical experience	Decision making power	Doubts about academics in the classes 7 upwards, Renewed trust in teachers	Competitiveness and being able to succeed	The lack of school administration, lack of infrastructure, lack of place to play, only responding to situations but not planning ahead, lack of communication, lack of change in the kindergarten, gap in communication regarding curriculum.
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Phase III

Parents' positions

		Being critical			Satisfaction, self learning	Guarding the school	Confidence,	Skills for life, positive attitude
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While analysing my personal reflections are worth a word or two. In this research study I started shifting roles as I proceeded. Sometimes I was a teacher in a Waldorf school, sometimes a teacher from a conventional school, sometimes a parent of my own children. These shifting roles gave me a multidimensional approach and as the expression denotes from different perspectives, it is more than one “truth,” but I hope it is closer to the objective truth. This is perhaps the way to overcome my subjectivity.

According to that (pluralistic) philosophy, the truth is too great for any one actual mind, even though that mind is dubbed “the absolute”, to know the whole of it. The facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and non-communicable perceptions always remain over, and the worst of it is that those who look for them from the outside never know where. (James in Garrison & Neiman, 2008, p.30).

I was not an outsider and I was using the position I was in to the best advantage of getting the real picture. Keeping the above thoughts in mind at all times the analysis was done cautiously. As a teacher of the Sloka School I was bound to possess a biased view but one of the exercises followed during the study was to distance myself. The analysis was done simultaneously along with the presentation of results as both coexisted in the study. The next chapter deals with this analysis.

4. Interview and Analysis

Four are the levels of speech. Three concentered in mystery cannot be manipulated. The wise who have knowledge know all of these; common men speak only with the fourth.

- Rig-Veda I.164.39

To understand the voice of the parents it took more than one sense. Reading, re- reading, listening for nuances and trying to listen with the head and heart at one time was the greatest part of the difficulty especially when I had to minimize the subjectivity.

The process of interviewing was smooth in the absence of any undue hitches. I felt welcome as their greetings were warm. These parents were all waiting at the appointed time. The interviews were conducted in their homes so they were the hosts. The interviewees who were informed that their comments would stay anonymous at all times, and that I would heed to the confidentiality clause seemed more ready to talk.

The interviews brought several aspects into forefront. Some common indexing methods were used which revealed interesting individual opinions for the questions asked and thus a common theme arose. The words or expressions used by each parent were unique to their narrative and yet the underlying idea was similar. The following chapter tries to bring forth this aspect through reflective practice.

4.1 What influenced their choice?

One common aspect that influenced all of them was a dislike of the existing system that pressurizes the student. There was this '*young radicals*' (ref. 1.1.4) sort of behaviour which fell into the category of '*self efficacy*' (ref. 2.1.6). Their reconstruction of the past seemed more or less accurate as they even recalled minute details. Most of them said that they came to the orientation programme organized by the founders and prospective teachers. They referred to the exhibition and talks given by the founder members regarding the Waldorf School by the usage of the term orientation.

The first respondent was very expressive and seemed to have given enough thought to my questions even before, as he did not hesitate to answer the questions that were not prior informed and were posed spontaneously. One respondent describes the routine of the school child from conventional schools which all of them term as ‘regular’ schools. The description was done in a derogative tone which shows his dislike of the ‘regular’ schools. His determination is clear as he says, “*I do not want my children to, you know, carry too much pressure right from the childhood.*” He also expressed that many of his associates and relatives did not understand his decision, to change his son from a more popular school, where admissions were difficult, into a school which was just beginning. He believes that he made the right decision as he was dissatisfied with his child’s stress at this other school.

According to the next respondent, “*When he was in a village school he showed extraordinary intelligence, so I wanted a school where his special qualities would be nurtured.*” This was a prime factor for her choice. She also comments that his first visit to the school found him pleased with the way he was welcomed with a red rose. The child loved the class room décor and he commented on the corner table that represents the seasons. She recalls her pleasure in seeing the colours of the curtains in the class room. Her voice became very soft while talking about the beauty of the class room. Here again the memory was seen to be vivid even after 10 years. Her home was very artistically decorated and she seemed to possess aesthetic sense. There was beauty in her home which showed me why she was impressed by the beauty of Sloka School*.

Yet another parent had such vivid memory of the time which was more than a decade. She remarks that she was running a fever on the day she went for orientation. The comments on parental orientation are that it was ‘*intensive and interesting*’.

One parent spoke of the appreciation of the ‘*concept*’ which was given during orientation, which attracted her. Her wish was that she wanted her son to have a good childhood which was without pressure. She also thinks that the school has been successful in giving this kind of education.

* It can be observed that the mainstream schools lack the attention to detail in the class room.

The next interviewee showed a book which she had retained over 12 years. This book contained information of a Waldorf school. This was her starting point. She says *“I was transfixed at what a child could go through in terms of music, art, medium of instruction and curriculum”*.

Her only question to the people who conducted the orientation was, *“Where is this school”*?

One other parent said that she heard of it from another alternative educational institution. In her words, *“I wanted my child to have a good childhood rather than what I had seen my daughter go through. I have seen what pressure my daughter went through in her schooling”*.

An informant spoke about the strength of the class. She said that she was against 60 children in a class. She also appreciated the rhythm of the school which was similar to the kind of rhythms she was used to in the house. While talking about her son she is very sarcastic in informing that she felt a great mother when her young son could count and spell unto a hundred. This was the training she gave her son before he faced an interview at the time of admitting him in a conventional school. *‘I thought I was the best mother’*. But with a lowering of her voice and sadness she said, *‘He lost all his childhood. I don’t think he ever played properly.’*

The way in which they were informed about the starting of the school was different to all the parents but it was seen that they had spoken at length to the founders. The series of meetings that the founder members and prospective teachers had were considered effective. They indicate being impressed by the underlying philosophy of the school which is *‘healing education’ (in their words)*. One parent being the first to admit her child took on the role of a person who forced the school to start. *‘I admitted my child without a school, a building or even a teacher’*. She says that she first tried to understand what the education was all about by training as a teacher even though she did not join as a teacher immediately. This she said would make her understand what her child would go through in her school. The child’s happiness was an influencing factor for this mother. She says that her child came home singing every day from the school.

A parent started as a teacher, because she chose the education for her personal growth as much as an education for her child. She recognised the free flowing spirit of Waldorf education which she terms as '*organised randomness*'. She appreciated the way it was done with a '*purpose, an accountability and beauty*'. She argued with herself as she spoke, about why her own education was not good. Here her reason was that she felt disconnected with her mind, heart and soul. '*I mean, if I enjoyed it I would have memory of it*'.

4.1.1 Creating a role model for themselves

When parents were deciding to choose for a school for their child one of the factor that influenced them was creating a role model for themselves and being guided by it in their actions regarding their child's education. A parent's narrative shows that she was influenced by her father's views on education. At length she describes that he gave great importance to his children's education. Her narrative in the beginning is based on how her parents sent her and her brother away to boarding schools or to relative's houses to be educated. Her role construct is based on her parents and she says that she wanted her son to benefit from the best education just as she and her brother had benefited from good education in their time. This according to her was one reason to search and choose Sloka School. She heard about the school through some relatives.

4.1.2 Mainstream vs. Waldorf education

In questioning about what in the parent's view was different between other schools and Sloka, a common pattern evolved. All the parents interviewed had not been satisfied with the way in which children were taxed with academic challenges from tender age. They had all belonged to this type of schooling and seemed to have been looking for something other than that for their children. They were all educated parents and compared their own education to what Sloka School had to offer. What they saw in the promise of a Waldorf school was this '*difference*'. They were objecting to the orthodox way of teaching followed in other schools. The orientation content according to them was convincing. They say they some how '*trusted*' these teachers and the founders.

In their own words,

'They really nurture the children'. 'They feed the soul of the child and not just their intellectual brain'. 'Learning is with joy'. 'The training we under went showed us many aspects of learning like music, rhythms and story telling which are not part of teaching in any other school'.

'My daughter used to cry to go to school.' At Sloka School the child had never complained to go to school. The decision was made fearlessly without looking back; it was also made even though it was not the path which all others around them chose. But this parent says she trusted herself. She remarked that if Waldorf education was successful else where in the world *'why not here?'* She wanted to live this way of life which she had chosen for her daughter. Her contemplation indicated how she disliked her own childhood. Her thoughts are on the verge of spiritualism as she remarks that she was not worried about anything that might have gone wrong with her choice. *'There is always rightness to the wrongness, and wrong to the rightness so I don't judge life.'* It is strange the way she describes her child's first experience at school as a *'beautiful and frightening experience.'* The word frightening was used more as awesome. She says that she was not ready to give up Waldorf education for something as regimental as uniform, socks and shoes and things that have to be done which had no purpose. She argued with herself saying *'In spite of all this if I had this randomness of learning I would still have good memories of my school.'* She showed a spiritual angle to her attitude, a very Indian attitude that, *'if you make a decision then the whole universe comes to help you.'* As she spoke she clearly showed a role shift, or she positioned herself as a teacher at times and at times as a mother. She sometimes spoke as an adult recollecting her own education. This positioning was giving me several perspectives in the life of one person but all showing the rationale of choosing Waldorf education. One interviewee expressed his displeasure in a routine system where memory is wakened at a very early age and learning by rote is given importance. *"Carrying 4kg weights and 6kg weights is not my idea of education."*

'I have 2 children and I can compare and evaluate the difference between them, one being a child out of a conventional school and the other a Waldorf school child'. Her use of the word *'evaluate'* is not a casual term but one to which much previous thought had been given. She spoke convincingly about this evaluation she had done while comparing her two children.

All the parents noticed the differences between Sloka School and other schools in several ways. One difference was the positive influence they felt in the Sloka School. this influence is concerning the positive out look of children.

4.2 Role of teachers

Having the same class teacher for at least 5 to 7 years was seen as a characteristic of the school which one of the interviewee considers as a positive point. He even gives a reason that such a practice gives an opportunity to the teacher to understand the student.

'No teacher no me' said a parent with great trust. Yes I followed it like a *Veda* (ancient Indian scriptures). She says that this is the trust she had on the teacher and she is willing to put back her child with the teacher again after these many years. On questioning whether it is the trust in school or the teacher she replied that she trusted the teacher who was appointed by the school. *'All he is today is thanks to the teacher and the school'* is her final statement.

4.2.1 Parent – teacher multiple roles

There were three parents who were teachers at Sloka at some time or other. These parents gave a multidimensional perspective to their thoughts. They rendered their view like a discussion. One parent indicates that her role was very special as she had the understanding of the school through two perspectives, one as a teacher and the other as a parent. She comments that she did not ask too many questions in the parent-teacher meetings as her questions were often asked by others and she was satisfied by the teacher's answers. The other two parents had trained as teachers and therefore understood the possibilities that the Waldorf education had to offer.

4.3 Attending PTA meetings

All the parents said that they attended the PTA (parent teacher association) meetings. *'It helped me to take care of my child year after year'* was said in such belief. He again reflects self efficacy (Ref.2.1.6) when he remarks that parents who say they are busy when the school calls for a PTA meeting are not the right parents.

'I have attended every PTA meeting' is a remark passed by one parent. She says she was helped by it in learning *'how to treat him at home.'* This parent was learning about the child's changing consciousness through the meetings which the teachers conducted at the beginning of every year. She says that the teachers spoke in detail about parenting. Every meeting gave the parents an input into understanding their child better.

4.4 The Waldorf curriculum

One parent recollected in detail her experience as a kindergarten teacher. She remembered how verbs could be introduced beautifully during the free play of a child. At this time her eyes were wide with a walking down the memory lane look. During this recollection her memory became sharp and the *'possibilities and beauty'* of the education became more transparent. Her language and meaning of her words became transparent to the researcher. She in fact recollected quite a few words in detail as though she had given it much thought even before this. Her narrative was rendered with passion and her recall was done with joy. On questioning whether all this play did not dull her child's academic performance, she replied that they were becoming sharper. *'If human beings can be touched in their soul the mind becomes sharper to learning more and there is never a dead moment'*. I could recognise her complete involvement with the school when she said that songs and stories were always in her head and she says that is what she experienced as a parent and a teacher.

'We had an opportunity to go to family traditional schools which for generations we patronized. But here it felt like your soul was lifted to another place, because this was what you wanted as a child in your school and you did not get it'.

A parent remarked that her child noticed the absence of black boards in kindergarten class room, which made the child very happy.

One parent said that his son has a good reasoning capacity when he tries to explain anything to any one. He reasons and convinces others instead of trying to use just a loud voice to make his point. This parent opined that such an analytical outlook was due to Sloka upbringing. All parents remarked on the self confidence that the children have gained, by being at Sloka School. Some have said that it was due to the *'multicultural'*

exposure of the school and others think it is because the teachers don't create fear in the children but allow them to express themselves.

The following are some of the quotes of parents in this context:

'I never liked learning by rote and writing what you learnt verbatim, becoming bookish and doing plenty of homework'.

'The left brain and right brain developed together.' This indicated a holistic development of the child.

One person remarked that even the shortcomings of the teacher didn't upset her but opened her eyes to the commitment and growth in teachers who were struggling with the curriculum. Here it is evident that parents were continuously involved with school activities and teacher developments. This understanding was seen more due to her capability to shift roles as a teacher and a parent. This parent was very watchful regarding the progress of teachers, she says she was never judgmental but always tried to prod and help. She was in constant contact with teachers through letters that would make teachers think. She even remarks that *'I have been through the curriculum myself so I knew exactly what the curriculum demanded.'* She positioned herself as one who does not criticize or *'point fingers'* but as some one who helps growth of the school. Her intention is clear and is significant to this thesis which is seeking the role of parents as the people who supported the growth of Sloka School.

The curriculum which was based on Waldorf curriculum was acceptable. They commented that it developed a multi-cultural attitude in children. This exposure to multi cultures was even given as a reason to the confidence that developed in children. The Waldorf curriculum exposes children to various other cultures at an early impressive age which gives them a world view. One parent remarked that they seem to know so much about other countries which *'his cousins children had no clue of.'*

A parent spoke some interesting words about her experience at school. When questioned what the education meant to her she said that when mentors came and when visitors from other countries came to India what they all expressed about anthroposophy and Waldorf School is their opinion and she says that hundred people have hundred ways of working.

She says she understood about the curriculum more by reading and interpreting personally. She says that one person's view is not the *'be all end all'* situation. These statements satisfy the researcher's belief that these parents have valuable information regarding the school which they gathered by being involved with the school from its inception days to their journey's end when their child leaves the school. This multi dimensional description of their experiences with the school was what the researcher was interested in understanding and exploring.

4.5 Concerned about academics

All parents seemed to have doubts about academic competence of their children around the grade 6th and 7th. Parents expressed a concern about academic competence of Sloka school students as compared to out side schools. We did not doubt the school but we wanted our children to also fair well in their examinations. By then the school's first batch of students had not given the grade 10th qualifying examinations. They were not sure how students coming from Waldorf educational back ground would fair in the qualifying 10th grade examinations. The agitation in the parents mind could have been due to this factor. They were after all pioneers in this venture and to be in doubt was only natural. The interesting aspect though was that they tried to find answers by questioning teachers and also by reading about Waldorf schools. A parent confirms this thought as she remarks that we met and discussed after their 8th grade and decided to stay with the school. By then the first 10th grade batch had finished their examinations successfully. It was after grade VIII, that the school departed from Waldorf curriculum to train their students for the official board of examination. Parents were offered the choice to take it from the Sloka School or any other school. The discussions that parents had between them must have been the reason for their renewed trust. This was a consistent factor in all the parents' words.

4.6 Renewed parental trust

One point that came across from a parent was that these class parents met after the 8th grade and discussed the future of their children. It was in this meeting that they decided

to keep back their children in school for the remaining two years. One parent says that the class play showed them (she speaks for all class parents) the remarkable change that the children had undergone which gave them back their trust in the school. She was referring to the drama that was enacted by students at the end of class VIII. This was a part of the curriculum in Sloka School. She says that it was during this time she knew that her child was better in his academics in comparison to outside school children. *'They all have so many tuitions (private lessons)'* she says and her son meanwhile did all his work independently. She also says that Sloka School was capable of catering to their educational needs. *'Personally I never thought that my child would not be able to sit for a competitive examination'*. I have so much trust that if there were a 11th and 12th grades my son would still be there.

By her comments she made me think that she played a dual role in school. She was a parent teacher. She says that her roles never got mixed and at all times she shifted roles (teacher and parent). The researcher trusts this parent's opinion as she speaks at length about the problems she faced being a teacher and parent. There is a truthful ring to her voice. The parental trust when dwindling was re-established by the parental discussions amongst themselves.

4.7 Positive experiences in Sloka

The positive experience in school has been the way art and beauty of the school was maintained. They also appreciated the effort teachers put regarding their child's education. This effort they saw in the way assessments were given not like other schools in the form of marks sheets but *'really describing their child'* in all aspects. The number of man hours spent was appreciated. She says the teachers knew their children more than the parents knew them.

"My child never once refused to go to school in the last ten years."

One parent had to argue with her husband about the home like appearance of the school. The extended home atmosphere was appreciated and she felt and decided that this would be the special school for her child.

“The multi cultural exposure of the school made my child gain confidence.”

This was a similar trend in many of their conversations.

4.8 Negative points at Sloka

One point which kept reappearing in the interview text was the inadequate administration of the school. They would like it to definitely improve. Even though the infrastructure was inadequate they said that the teachers were appreciated.

One informant remarks that the management takes too much time to get things in place. He compares it to his business by saying that he would be out of business if he failed to fore see problems and try to solve them ahead of time. He laughingly remarks that *‘its been now 12 years, so don’t you think building permissions and all other government formalities should be completed by now.’* I agree that the school has been rather slow in creating facilities such as the above mentioned. It was compromise on these matters and showing priority in teacher training, student activities and library building. The school management felt that, financially the school was not yet strong and working with priorities was the only way to survive.

One parent thought that teachers spent considerable amount of time in school administration works. She advised that if routine mundane school matters could be done by some one else other than teachers, then teachers will have enough time to develop themselves. This parent recognises the importance of teacher development that is needed for the school. She is better informed about this need as she started her journey in the school as a teacher.

When asked about any thing changed in the school that disappointed her one parent’s remark is rather strange. She said that she was disappointed that *nothing has changed*. This is the *‘dynamism’* she says that, Steiner spoke about which she could not see in the kindergarten. The routine of the good method once found remaining for ever was not what she understood about the Waldorf School. She wished for inner transformation of knowledge in teachers, which could be given to the children so that it became their own to transform. These comments indicate that she was well versed with the curriculum and

that they were watching the school closely through out these years. This was one area of development into which the school had to look if it had to uphold the Waldorf impulse.

The parents spoke with a passion that can only exist when they are possessive about anything. I get the feeling that they considered the school as their baby, and they wanted to see it through all its problems. They wanted this baby to grow strong and were ready to fight for it if things went wrong. A parent remarks that he would be the first to voice if things went array, as it affected not his child alone but all students.

One parent was questioned whether she was watchful in observing the school and her remark is '*I have*' and she laughs, '*yes from all points of view*'. Here it indicates that they were not only involved with their child's education but also the development of the school and teachers. As my study aimed at establishing these expectations which the parents came with, her answer was received gracefully. These were the critical comments I was looking for which could be at a later date translated into reforms at school.

The trend of all parents seemed to change around the 7th grade. They all participated in the discussions that were held regarding the choosing of the board of examinations that were to be held at the end of grade X. It was during this time when the 10th grade examination the children were supposed to take was being discussed in school. Up until that period of time the school had followed Waldorf curriculum, but now it was time to decide whether CBSE or ICSE should be affiliated with for year X examinations. This was the crucial time in Sloka School development to choose its direction. The parents were interested in choosing the right board that would make their children competent. I get the impression that during this year the parents changed their role from being parents into collaborators with the school teachers in taking an active part in directing the school's development.

When questioned whether academics mattered to them at any time one parent said '*yes of course*'. He even gives an example of an African saying that all animals in the wild must run. The prey for escaping or else it would die and the predator must run to stay out of hunger. This showed the researcher that these parents cared for scholastic performance as well as holistic enjoyable education. He also says that academics and marks do matter. '*It*

is not enough for the outside world to know that my son studied in Sloka School but they need to have some marks to say where he stands, for admission into further studies'.

One parent was a little concerned about teacher training and communication between the teacher and parent. She believes that the communication became more irregular in between the kindergarten years and upper grades. This communication she talks about is the communication between school management and the parents.

One parent was disappointed when Sloka went '*main stream*'. What she really means is that when the board examinations became important in the grades 9 and 10 the school worked like a conventional school with text books. Up until 9th grade the children were used to preparing their own lesson books. This was when teachers' main priority was to train children towards facing an examination. For her this was a '*compromise*' and an unhappy compromise. She then reasons philosophically that life teaches one to compromise at different stages. It occurs to her that this was also a necessary compromise to train the child into taking the examinations.

4.9 Skills for life versus skills for jobs

Most parents gave the answer that they were not looking for marks and passing exams for their children. On questioning to explain further they were sure that marks would help them in competitive world but their positive attitude would get them through problems in life.

A parent spoke about how her son loves to learn now and how he researches into the subject and will look for help from peers, teachers and internet to get information. She has noticed his helpful nature which has developed out of the compassion he has learnt at school. She seems to encourage and appreciate '*self learning*'.

Regarding the benefits of global exposure of children a parent remarks that the whole world is becoming one. He even gives an example that earlier businesses were only concerned with interstate relationships while today it has become international. This he says is the kind of help that his child received at Sloka School. His belief is that this skill will make him become a world citizen. His child's education has taught him to look at the

burning issues of global warming which he considers as a serious matter. “*My cousin’s children study in regular schools and can only talk of maths, physics and chemistry*”. He explains that he does not want his children to get only 95% in exams and not care of what happens ‘*next door*’. This parent remarked that he had been in touch with the previous batch of children who have passed out of school, to be kept informed about how Sloka children fit in the outside schools. He has also been doing some research into what choices are being offered for them in further education after school. He seems to be an involved parent from the time of joining the child at school to the present day and hasn’t reduced this level of interest in the schooling of his child. He even gives a reason for his son’s greater sophisticated mentality, which is the result of trouble free school atmosphere and teacher related problems such as favouritism etc. Here he shows a trust which is placed on the fair play and non partial behaviour of the teachers and students at school. He says that Sloka children have a weapon in hand which he calls ‘*smile and take things easy*’, which he believes will make them win. The words he was searching for were ‘*positive attitude*’.

The thought of eco friendliness that children possess has been commented upon by another parent who wishes that her child would choose to study this subject further. She uses the words ‘*moralistically*’ to indicate the further education of the student in the field of ecology. She believes that this is the most imminent need of the world at present. The parent has already been exploring on these lines for her child’s further education. Here again when questioned about the child’s skills to face the world she passed two very contradictory statements. At one instance she is not sure and at another time she says that the child ‘*can handle it (life) properly without a problem*’. To the researcher this seems to be the natural tendency of mothers in India. Future is never certain so this comment is most natural.

One interviewee remarks that her son has become independent and she feels lonely because of his reduction of dependence. Parents ultimately want their children to become independent even though it must be lonely for a mother who was deeply involved with the child’s education, after the child became independent. On questioning about his independence she says that this is a trait he learnt at school which is more than a skill.

One informant replied to the question of her child's readiness to leave school she became very dreamy. *'Yes my daughter has grown into a beautiful person'. 'She also knows her strengths and weaknesses'. 'She is not looking at what she cannot do, but is ready to use her strengths in the right way'.*

She also said that her child's learning would not be over with grade 10 but will go on for life. For her the learning that started in the school was only a chapter in the child's learning life.

To another interviewee, her son is very independent and she is sure that he can adjust any where, *'he can really survive in any kind of environment, in any kind of society and in any kind of circumstance'*. This she remarks is his readiness to the world. The student's tool for life is according to her his easy going nature. *'He can talk to a child, he can talk to an adult and he can talk to a teenager'*. She thinks that he might face some problems because of this openness but she thinks that he is prepared and can handle the problems that come with it.

The above mentioned parent showed her level of involvement in the child's schooling as she explains how she counselled him in time of need when he faced problems connected to teenage. Her personal development in the school as a pedagogy member helped her deal with his problem. She has spoken to him at length and from what she indicated her involvement was both in trying to help him in his academics as well as his personal development. She even expressed a desire to take him for career counselling to plan for his future. This is an indication that her level of involvement did not diminish from his childhood up until now. She also said that she knows that there are good teachers in school who she trusts can counsel him about his further study. On questioning about her relationship to the school she said that she was a silent parent. On further questioning she says she voiced her opinions and posed questions only when it mattered and not always. Considering the researcher's role as a probe she was further questioned whether she was silent as she felt she was sitting on the wrong side of the group. She is honest and remarked 'yes'. 'I realised that some of the questions asked during PTA meetings by the parents were my questions too'. She says that she got all her answers there along with the other parents.

All the parents were sure of their satisfaction that they received from the school and their answer was an affirmative to the question whether they would consider the school for their child again. In their words ‘if I had a grand child and there is a Sloka School then that will be the school’, or as in one case ‘I have already admitted my second son’.

4.10 Focus group analysis

The focus group interviews brought clarity to many dimensions that were discussed by parents in one-to-one interviews. Ten questions were listed down which were generated out of the themes that developed in personal interviews.

They all appeared to think that the orientation that happened initially was very good and created a sense of trust in parents. *‘Yes when we heard them speak we knew this was the kind of school our children were going to’.*

When the first question was asked it opened the flood gate of thoughts. The five parents were very eager to talk and at one point when they realised that the Telugu speaking mother was not speaking they made space for her to express her views.

The discussion was mostly amongst them and few things were targeted towards me. The quickness of their responses showed the researcher that this was a topic dear to their heart and they needed no encouragement to talk. I was thankful that I used two recorders as I feared loss of some feeble words in a room of that size.

They all confirmed that their main reason to choose a Waldorf school was their dissatisfaction, of the existing school systems. These they called as regimental and fearful. *‘No soul in my education’* was what one of them said. She says that she came out of her education not knowing any thing as that system only tested memory. She also says that she disliked it so much so, that poetry which she liked was also not given enough time to seep in. It was too quick and not enjoyable. The parents conversed very freely and each person’s words evoked the other ones experiences of their school days. This showed me that their experiences of *‘regular, conventional’* schools were not happy. Some talked of their experiences at school and others talked of their older child’s experiences at school. One of them remembers that she disliked her former school for the regimental

outlook where people checked socks, shoes, badges and ribbons tied in the hair. She even recalls being a monitor of the school and doing this checking which she *'hated.'*

One of them said that his child learnt his lessons well in another school but he came back home and slept while doing his home work. When he was four years of age he listened to the teacher in school and came home to do more work according to the instructions the teacher had given. He felt that his child had no time to think, *'I disliked his life as a child'*. At this stage another parent provided the word *'that he lacked space for imagination'*. The unhappiness of Carrying heavy loads of bags at a tender age was again reiterated.

A new theme that arose was about the disciplining acts of other schools. They discussed at length the way teachers discipline the children in *'regular schools'*. One said they send them out of class and another remarked that hitting children was carried on in schools. To this a parent remarked that it was not done since last five years because of the organisations that check on schools. They all appreciated the creative discipline that was followed at Sloka School. A parent recalled an anecdote where her daughter one day recalled that, on that day the class was very giggly and their teacher gave them time to finish the giggling and returned to the class to learn.

Even without asking the parents shifted to answering the second question which was about their positive experiences with Sloka. A parent remarked that she appreciated that her child came back home with a lot of energy. She also gives a reason that the teachers sustained their energy levels. She says that her child was ready to do a lot more things after coming home. This is in contrary to the experience of the child coming home and sleeping exhausted.

A repetition of some words from earlier interviews was noticed. Words such as *beauty, trust, love, artistic, truthfulness, lack of partiality*, were mentioned again. These were some of their positive experiences at the school.

Then slowly their conversation shifted to the role of teachers in the Sloka School. One of them said that the teacher is appreciated by the child for her truthfulness, even apologizing for her mistake. They also said that the teacher respecting the student was a positive influence. One attribute of Sloka teachers was that they lived a truthful life in

front of the child. Another parent affirmed this thought by saying *'yes children can easily recognise the fake'*. All of them ascertained that the child was happy to come to school and wished for school even on weekends.

At this time one parent became a co-researcher and targeted a question to the 3 parent-teachers present excluding me. He asked them to mention one of the things that described the positive aspect of the school which set apart the school from other schools. The answer after much pondering was that it was the love and relationships between all parties that existed in school. Interpersonal relationships between parent- teachers, parent-students, teacher- teachers and teacher- students were considered to be congenial and cordial. The study by Sarma (ref. 2.1.5) recommends a similar practice for effective student developmental outcome.

Discussion of the attendance and communication at PTA meetings brought some points of dissatisfaction and satisfaction to light. All parents agreed that they did not miss any opportunity to meet the teachers. They seemed to think that teachers were accessible and instilled a trust in them through their talks and interactions. They said that it was a pleasant surprise to see how teachers took the parent's objections quite positively and tried to develop themselves or to rectify the mistakes.

'We had higher goals and so teachers had to match our expectations'.

They said that they communicated through letters, phone calls to the home of the teacher or through personal visits. We did a critical analysis of the teacher and the acceptance came from the teacher developing herself taking these comments positively was their comment. One of the negative aspects was that teachers who came in new needed more orientation and they must also read the files that have been made for the child since childhood by the earlier teachers. *'This handing over must be done in a more organised way'* was their comment. They believe that this is not being done systematically by teachers.

As teacher attributes were discussed they said it was love, respect for the child and childlike behaviour of the teacher, which distinguished her as a Sloka School teacher. The curriculum aspect they said supported the teacher to work well.

All parents asserted the earlier theme that academics were a point of concern from grade six. To one it was not until 8th grade that she worried. They all also felt that the communication with the school, trust members and teachers was strained during this time. But soon the answer to their comment was also provided by them. They said that the school was going through a lot of problems like getting affiliation to the board of examinations and searching for the land which was not yet found. One of them said that he knew how the founder member was attacked by rude words by some parents. And they thought that all these factors strained the teacher parent relationship. They also think that the many changes that came in the teacher body where old staff left and new ones replaced could have been one reason. But they say it was rectified after the parents talked to the teachers. This is the understanding Steiner spoke about, which must be the basis on which Waldorf education was built. (ref. 2.1.9)

The parents talked of a dinner meeting that was organised, where they invited all teachers and the trust to discuss the future of the school and their children. This was the time they say that many issues were discussed. They said that they sensed the strong bond amongst the students. This bond was so strong that children carried all their co-students as a whole class. Parents also noticed how the weaker children were being encouraged by the rest and they said it was this dynamics of the class as a whole body which was appreciated, that made them decide to keep them all together for the next two years. This renewal of the trust was partly their effort along with the teacher body.

Yet another negative aspect they noticed in the school is the way that transition was done from Waldorf curriculum to CBSE. They have no doubts about the concepts being taught but the way it was being delivered. They seem to think that the administrators should take stronger decisions. From their conversation I gathered that this parent body had met and even spoke to each other often, discussing the children and the school. It appears as though they discussed teachers and student outcomes. Their little asides and jokes could be understood as their familiarity and their bond. Parents felt that things would have been less worrying if the communication had not suffered. If it was more often then they might have been less worried.

One of the themes that appeared in the personal interviews revealed that parents thought that children were ready for life due to their level of confidence and acquisition of social skills. On questioning further for them to elaborate; they said that the children possessed many life skills and these would make them succeed in jobs and life. They said that '*confidence and humbleness*' were the two attributes they learnt at Sloka. They also seem to think that children learnt to be kind to people who needed help. One parent said that her daughter was taken care of by all her friends. The parents noticed that the social dimension of the class was strong.

Through out the interview many of the comments made by the parents pointed to their involvement with the school and also their watchful eye. They seemed to have acted according to a role construct and self given efficacy. (Ref. 2.1.6)

As a closing statement one parent said that at the time of starting the school, the parent body and the founding members had discussed about the three pillars that should be in place for the school to become an educational institution. These pillars according to her were the teachers, parents and students. She spoke that all the pillars must be given equal importance and that any one of them growing unduly stronger or weaker would make the structure become lopsided. She said '*Now I am confident that these pillars have come to be*'.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of parents in supporting the establishment of a Waldorf school. Interviews revealed a multidimensional aspect of parental understanding and involvement in school development. They reflected on many aspects of the teachers, curriculum and school culture in general. The interviews also resulted in data that supported the literature reviewed and showed gaps in practices that facilitated parent- teacher collaborations. Reviewed literature indicates that parent collaboration in school is not yet a completely explored area in the context of Indian conditions. The literature also indicated that parental involvement had positive results in children's education. Reviewed literature and interviews also showed that this practice of parental involvement placed the Sloka School apart from other existing alternative schools and government schools in India.

The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's home and each home exhibited several items of decoration, which the children had done as a part of their work at school. As they were given a central point of focus it became evident that the parents valued their children's work which silently spoke of their appreciation of school based work. Their appreciation indicated the importance they gave to the school. In school as well, teachers decorated their class rooms with the children's art. In both the areas the child was given the most important position. As it was a union of ideas which both the teacher and parents held, children seemed to benefit from it. Just as the school exhibited the student's art work, so did the parents display it with pride. This could be termed as parent and teacher collaboration. One parent had a room where a kindergarten could easily be run. It was decorated similarly to the Waldorf kindergarten. She had worked as a kindergarten teacher and never lost the positive feelings she retained of this experience. The vision of parent collaboration was more obvious than ever, by the way she lived in her home, rather than when she spoke about Sloka School. The influence of the school had sunk deep into their lives. I realised that the parent involvement was so great that the extension of *school was seen at home* while most expressed the view that the *school was an*

extension of home. (ref. 2.1.5) This indicated that parents were very involved and impressed with what the child experienced in school.

The aspect of communicating through written assessments was one positive point for one interviewee to appreciate the teacher's work. He says, "You seem to know our children better than we know them". He also said that the number of man hours spent in writing assessments was appreciated. To compile these written assessments the teachers maintain diaries from which continuous ongoing assessment is done (ref. 2.1.9)

5.1.1 Choosing Sloka

In choosing a school, people are often guided by their personal experience or other's experiences. Here is a comment by Mehrotra which is worth considering.

People seek alternatives because they are dissatisfied with the mainstream. My own strong inclination towards alternative schooling has roots in my early years of school life. The experience fuelled my deep need to question conventional school practices and to explore how matters might be differently arranged (Mehrotra, 2007, p. 26).

The dissatisfaction that parents felt towards their own schooling conforms to the above quote. Parental remarks on how intense the orientation at the time of admission into school for parents was, and how many hours they spent at school in the initial stages also indicated that in the later years it was not so intense. This information is supportive of what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler stated (ref. 2.1.2). The levels of intensity of involvement varied throughout school years.

5.1.2 School-based Activity

Interviews also reveal the school-based activity described by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (ref. 2.1.2). All the parents said that they did not miss even one opportunity where they had to meet the teachers. Their attendance of the PTA meetings was regular. One of them who admitted their second child into the school said that communication dwindled during recent years, and this was the case with their second child. This indicates that the parents valued the school-based activity and appreciated it.

A few parents commented that during the initial stages of the school, their children came home and talked a lot about the school. At the time of the interviews, these children were now grown up and the parents said that they don't talk much at home, and so the parents miss this involvement. This is a case of home-based activity (ref. 2.1.2). These statements indicate a sustained involvement in school and a readiness to support the child at home.

There is a parent who is also on the school advisory board and arranged and accompanied school field trips (ref. 2.1.2). Her level of involvement was more than other parents. A Teacher parent, who played a dual role, was more involved with the school than others mainly due to the added opportunities that were offered due to her position.

Just as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) remark, the parental involvement at Sloka School has been seen to be beneficial to the children, parents and school (ref. 2.1.2). The school that started with its first student admitted without a school, teacher or a building (as a parent stated) has grown large enough to have nearly 350 students.

5.1.3 Role Constructs in Sloka

The parental role construct that Biddle (1986) mentioned, has been noticed as a major trait in the parent interviews. One parent's role construct was influenced by her father and brother, but most of them acted according to personal role construct (Ref, 2.1.6).

Two parents' personal role construct was so strong that parental involvement continued, despite their concern about personal limitations (ref, 2.1.6). They expressed doubts about their capacity to guide the child. One spoke about academic incompetence and the other about emotional incompetence. The curriculum is usually the teacher's forte and not really what parents are expected to do at home. It is easier for parents to help their children in educational works during younger days than when they reach higher classes. These statements are also in accordance to Kay et al. (1994) who indicate that doubts on parental involvement levels were guided by misgivings on the lack of adequate information (ref. 2.1.6). This is when a parent says that she gained support from PTA meetings and followed the teacher's suggestions as a *Veda*.

A parent remarked that they cannot be the right parents if they say they are too busy to look after their children. By this comment it is clear that he has set a higher goal for

himself and thereby his persistence level is higher (Ref. 2.1.6). This role he constructed for himself rather than being influenced by others in the society.

Children from previous batches who have left school succeeded in their board examinations and the current parents I interviewed were pleased with their outcomes and have acknowledged the beneficial influence of the school in both the personal development and holistic development of the children. When these three sectors (children, parents and teachers) benefit then one can hope for it to become beneficial for the community as a whole.

Research by Gu (2008), conducted in the People's Republic of China shows that parental involvement is mostly home-based (ref. 2.1.6). Culturally India and China are similar. The traditional system of education in India (*Gurukul system*) and the educational system during the British rule revolved round this idea. The children in olden days went and lived in the house of the *Guru* (teacher) for their schooling. This practice did not give any scope for school-based or home-based involvement of the parents. In later years too, popular private schools that encouraged resident students did not encourage school-based or home-based parental involvement. The encouragement of parents to become involved in their child's education is a part of Sloka School's policy. This was also a positive aspect for parents to become involved to improve child's educational outcomes. In here Sloka school showed a marked difference to existing trends in India. The parent involvement was both home-based and school-based. Sloka School which is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner has retained this practice of parental involvement according to his advice to the first school (ref.2.1.9)

5.1.4 Student attendance and Achievements at Sloka

Parent interviews indicated that they were satisfied by the student's holistic educational outcome, not just the academic achievements. Positive attitude, confidence, tolerance, concern for others and concern for the earth are some of the facets of their other educational outcomes.

A parent remarked that school- parent communication had reduced in later years in comparison to the inception of the school. Her statement indicates that she considered it

as an important reason for her trust in school. This supports Epstein's study (1992) which suggests that it is the basic obligation of the school (ref.2.1.4).

The parents' comments are like warning bells to the teachers which should alert teachers' practices that shape the future of parent-teacher relationships and home-school partnerships.

When parents talked of their child's willingness to come to school and maintaining better attendance it supports the study by Epstein (ref.2.1.4). One parent commented that the reason why his son never wanted to miss school was that the teachers were not partial to one or other student and the fact that the students were all very friendly. The willingness of the students to come to school indicates the school's congenial atmosphere. One parent said that her child never missed school even when he didn't complete his home work as he didn't fear the teachers –this shows the positive aspect of the student-teacher relationship.

5.1.5 Expectancy

The choice of parents in opting and supporting a school fell under three categories as Ajzen (ref. 2.1.6) indicated. All six parents said that the communication and orientation during the time of admitting their children in school was very effective and they trusted the teachers. The social expectancy was less influential. Self expectancy was the most evident control factor.

5.1.6 Types of Parent Involvement at Sloka

Epstein (2004) distinguished six types of parent involvement. (ref. 2.1.3) The study showed that Sloka School followed these six types of involvements. Out of the 6 types, involvement with the community could be encouraged more at Sloka School and this could be the area of focus for the future. The six types of parental involvement were in place at Sloka School.

- The PTA meetings that were organised were used to help parents create positive home conditions to promote the development of the children. A parent's narrative indicates how she depended on the teacher's help in handling the child at home.

She also requested counselling for children at school as the teachers were better trained for it.

- The written assessments given to parents were formatted in such a way that the parents understood the teacher clearly and they also provided a comprehensive picture of their child's progress through school. This was also backed by one-to-one meetings with parents regarding their child's progress and difficulties.
- The parents who were interviewed were volunteers for substituting when teachers were absent, and organised school trips.
- Even though this was not an area that was specifically questioned, I gathered from their comments such as 'now he learns on his own' or 'we talked about the school for hours' that indicated home-based activity.
- All the parents are members of the parent council and one parent who was interviewed was also involved in decision making as a Trust member.
- The school has been working with community resources during the winter bazaar and when festivals are celebrated at school.

The communication between school and home was felt as a positive aspect of Sloka School. In describing how reports are written by the teachers one parent appreciated the effort and time spent to inform them about their child (ref. 2.1.9). Parents received sufficient information from the school in the form of news letters, written assessments and one-to-one meetings at Sloka School. Nair's suggestion that parents should become a part of the school's celebrations of national and other festivals is also being followed at Sloka School. Such practices can be seen as having positive results in student performance. This type of communication was suggested by Nair as beneficial for parent involvement and resulting in positive student outcomes (ref. 2.1.5).

One parent indicated that there had been a degree of lapse in parent communication in recent years. This is an area of weakness that needs to be addressed in future for the school progress.

In the focus group study a parent said that the 'expectations of the parents were high' and because of this the school and teachers had had to match their demands (ref. 2.1.2).

Accordingly when parents came with high expectations and set their goals higher for themselves, their persistent levels also go higher. This persistence motivated them to question and prod the teachers and school until they responded positively (ref. 2.1.6). This supports the study of Fan (2001). One of the positive educational effects may be in accordance to this study. One of the effects of this persistence is that one of the pillars (parents, teachers or students) might grow stronger resulting slowly in a lopsided and unequal effect. It also shows how the other dimensions can progress at a matching pace to balance the effects of all in a common goal of educating the child holistically.

The voluntary service that parents render was a key dimension of one parent's involvement where she accompanied children on field trips and also became a member of the advisory board.

5.1.7 School as an extension of home

The appreciation of an extended home environment was remarked by three mothers who gave great credit for this aspect of the school for their choice of school. They considered the school as an extension of the home and the researcher noticed how the school was extended into their homes as a part of décor (Ref. 2.1.5). Parents also adapted their way of life to suit what the child was experiencing at school.

Most of the parent narratives were conforming to Steiner's suggestions for establishing a Waldorf school. Parents showed that they trusted the school and teachers which is the understanding that Steiner wishes for from parents (ref. 2.1.9). Parents developed a love of the school that they even sent their younger ones to the Sloka School. When this was not possible as in the case of one parent she says that she would send her grandchild to school given the opportunity.

Steiner's suggestions on written assessments which were being followed at the school were seen as a positive point of the school. Parents appreciated this communication and felt that they were informed of their child in more ways than just in marks.

Parents showing concern towards educational outcomes and academic performances during middle school days was what Steiner foresaw as a concern for Waldorf schools if they wished to run upper grades (ref. 2.1.9).

5.1.8 Skills for life

Parents said that the skills that children learnt at school were for life. A parent indicated that her child slowly grew in his self esteem and was helped by the teachers at school to develop in this positive way. Her comment supports the view that the child is an active participant in constructing its school experiences into a process of ego development (ref. 2.1.3).

The positive outlook and confidence in children were attributed to the school's curriculum (ref. 2.1.5). The parents noticed that the children had life skills at Sloka School which were the result of multicultural exposure the students received which was created by the curriculum.

Parents believe that children at Sloka School benefited by the congenial school environment (ref.2.1.4). The interpersonal relationships at school were also looked upon as the strongest attribute of the school which favoured child performance and joy at school (ref. 2.1.5).

Yet another parent stressed that there was need for school based motivation towards addressing problems faced as she felt that parents lacked this expertise and were not competent. Two parents asked for this help in parenting. Both teachers and parents sought mutual co-operation in solving problems that surfaced during the adolescent period in the child's development. They could only be solved with collaborative practices.

5.1.9 Sloka Parents – Young Radical culture

At Sloka Waldorf School the role of a parent is more defined and guided hence variable according to child observations by the teachers. At Hyderabad which holds a patriarchal culture in general, it is observed that the role of a father is restricted to expertise and occasional involvement while it's the mother's role to look deeper into the education of a child.

As a teacher this trend was quite noticeable when PTA meetings were mostly attended by mothers with an exception of a few fathers. But for my study this was not a variable I was

looking for. A parent who had difficulty in educating the child said she never gave up. It always reminded me of the saying “*when the going gets tough the tough get going*”.

As a teacher in Sloka School it is the researcher’s interest to establish this aspect of parental involvement which had positive influence on student performance levels and school existence. The aim was to try to reconstruct the parents’ decision at the onset of admitting the children into Sloka School and also examining a process from then onwards which would be beneficial to the school and community.

5.1.10 Teacher parent association at Sloka

It is interesting to note that not many parents have done their communication with the school in the form of letters or notes but have tried to reply orally. Only one of the parents was in the habit of constantly keeping in touch with the teacher through letters. These letters have created a stir and the outcome was always positive (ref.2.1.9). As a teacher I appreciated it as another side of the coin viewed from the parent’s side.

The parent teacher relationship of Sloka has developed over the years in a very constructive way. The school was started after a series of discussions with parents initially and during the past 12 years it has been shaped into a bond with many facets to it. During a time when the school split into two, the parents expressed a renewed trust in the teachers and continued to support the school. They quickly became members of the trust that runs the school and its financial log books saw a significant improvement. During the construction of the school building even though the lions share of the fund came from financial organizations both abroad and Indian banks there was a significant contribution that was received from parents, teachers and students through their winter bazaars and cultural Programmes. The amount of contribution is not the issue here but it speaks of their intention to contribute. When there is strife in all the parties concerned to safe guard the interests of the school in concern it indicates a something more than a superficial relationship.

The love for the Waldorf School Steiner talks about (ref.2.1.9) was evident in the voice of one of the parents who spoke quite passionately about Waldorf education. It is clear that

these parents, as was the given circumstance, had more time for training at the beginning when the school started.

Steiner expresses a deep wish for parents to contribute to humanity's great tasks of the twentieth century through entrusting of their children (ref.2.1.9). One parent expressed a deep satisfaction that their child was showing concern towards ecology which is the imminent need of the twenty first century.

In the interviews three of the parents have conformed to the view of Steiner that right attitude in parent- teacher meetings brings out the right action in parents and findings suggest that the parents admitted their younger children in school.

Interviews revealed parents as guardians of the school. They observed closely and even guided the teachers when necessary through letters and phone calls. The parent's took on the role of a fortress wall which Steiner (ref.2.1.9) talked about.

The parents expressed a similar view that Tagore expressed about his schooling. As a child Tagore refused to go to school; he later wrote:

“What tortured me in my school days was the fact that the school had not the completeness of the world. It was a special arrangement for giving lessons ... But children are in love with life, and it is their first love. All its colours and movement attract their eager attention. And are we quite sure of our wisdom in stifling this love? We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar... Child nature protests such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment (Tagore, in Mehrotra, 2007).

Interviewed parents expressed this disconnection with education which was their starting point for choosing Sloka School. The above statement sums up the influence of poor schooling on children.

6. Conclusions

The present thesis was initiated with an aim to understand the views of the parents in establishing and supporting Sloka School. It also aimed to analyse their relationship with the school throughout their children's school years. It was done in expectation that the information rendered through the parent's voice would show areas for improvement in school-parent practices which could help the school in its further development. Parents' views would also illuminate areas of good practice for orientation programmes given to parents in the future and help the school to grow into a better educational institution. The study showed areas of weaknesses which needed to be addressed. This study can be used as a basis for further developmental activities in school.

One of the aims of this study was to find out the parents' reasons for choosing Sloka School.

The interviews revealed that one of the reasons that parents chose this school was their dissatisfaction with the existing choice of schools. The other schools were excellent in bringing out the best marks in examination results. They were competent at increasing the child's memory. They were able to inculcate discipline and had a good infrastructure that facilitated learning and a regime for advocating formal dressing.

The parents were not impressed with these achievements, and were in fact dissatisfied with them. They were all products of such an education system. They objected to children carrying the heavy weight of school bags full of books at a tender age. They felt that their child was being taxed at a very early age to learn by rote and was being forced to memorise without creativity. There was no time given to the child to 'internalise' education. The interviewed parents expressed their criticism towards the way punishments were meted out to students. They objected to having too many teachers to meet with in younger classes. In Sloka School the same class teacher accompanies the children for six to seven years. This was considered as a positive experience for the children as the teacher had enough time to get to know the student's and also about any learning difficulties and work towards resolving them. They also disliked conventional schools for the way fear was created in a student about teachers in order to achieve better

results. This description renders a critical view of schools, where 'soul engagement' was absent.

These parents decided that such an education was not to their liking from both personal experiences and also experiences of one or two older children. They were saddened to see how exhausted their older children were. The comment that the child had 'lost his childhood' indicates that they were determined to give their child something more meaningful than just theoretical knowledge.

Parents indicated that the way they were spoken to in the beginning about this form of education, about the school curriculum, its specific ways, and about Waldorf education in general was impressive, intensive and promised a school with more than just theoretical subjects (this they call orientation).

Another reason for choosing this alternative education was the aesthetics in the school. The parents appreciated the way in which class rooms were decorated with the curtains and the table placed at the corner of each class to represent the seasons. Focus group study conceptualised their meaning that they appreciated the congenial atmosphere in the school. The teacher-teacher, teacher-parent, teacher-student and student-student interpersonal relationships were congenial and cordial. This was yet another reason given for choosing the school. Parents indicated that the child loved being at school and was never willing to be absent. This is an indication that children experienced joy at school. The children were treated with respect by the teachers and care was taken to enrich their life. Starting from the way the teachers welcome students to the way in which they were disciplined creatively were appreciated.

Interviewed parents expressed that the initial discussions with the founders instilled a sense of trust in their hearts. The parents learnt more about this type of education by reading about it. They also gained knowledge about Steiner education through the training given to teachers and parents. This assisted in strengthening their determination and trust that such an education was possible. Some of the parents deepened their understanding by going through the training as a teacher so that they gained yet another perspective of the education. The willingness to change their way of life, giving up a job

to join the school faculty signifies their involvement with the school as collaborative members rather than outsiders.

They brought their children in with the trust and understanding which the school asked for. The school had no black boards in the kindergarten which was a positive influence for a student. The black boards represented the formal education system in India where children sit behind tables on their chairs doing what the teacher asks of them. There was beauty and love in the school which was evident to both parents and children. Parents felt that the school was like an extended home and the researcher found that their homes were like extended schools. The season's table that existed in every class was also decorated in one child's home as an indication of this love.

The teachers were trusted by parents as they saw the way they struggled to live the life of a role model themselves. The parents were not affected by the lack of infrastructure and recognised the importance of teachers as one of the three pillars of a good educational institution, the other two being parents and children. They believed that this type of school which has worked elsewhere in the world will also work in India. This cleared their doubts about many questions they had about the school. Sloka School was a pioneering school in India but it was not new to other parts of the world. These schools were in place for several years in many countries. This could have been one reason for their trust in a new school.

They became involved in their child's education due to the "self efficacy" they had given themselves and a role construct created accordingly. The parental involvement was not superficial but very deep. They were involved not just with the child's education but their school as well. They watched the teachers and the way teaching was done. They almost took on a role of guardians for the school which was watchful and critical. Their support was like a fortress wall which safeguarded the interests of the school.

The aspect of multicultural exposure of the school has been seen as beneficial to the students to gain confidence and important social skills for life. The Waldorf School curriculum is designed to expose the child to world culture. Parents believe that the children benefit by this exposure in gaining confidence. The curriculum also has innumerable possibilities where children gain hands-on knowledge. The possibilities that

are created for learning music, being trained in healthy rhythms of learning and storytelling are some of the aspects of the Waldorf curriculum which are unique to this education. The parents appreciated a holistic curriculum which was carried out with a purpose to educate children with accountability and detail to beauty.

Their recognition of the strong class dynamics was one of their reasons for supporting the school. They wanted their children to retain this close bond they had amongst themselves. They commented that collective responsibility is a rare virtue in today's society.

The positive attitude and consideration for others is also said to have been created by the school. This I believe could also be a part of their home atmosphere. The school can only take credit for providing some opportunities to exercise social activities that encourage positive thinking. I believe that even though parents were ready to accredit the school for all the positive outcomes, the parents working as collaborators with the school should be given equal credit for achieving these outcomes. The children also play an important role in self motivation by being active participants in creating schema about themselves which are indirectly the result of parental involvement as suggested by Grolnick, et al.

The six types of parental involvement designed by Joyce Epstein (2004) are practiced at Sloka School. The satisfaction that parents expressed in the school communication could be given the credit for this. The parent-teacher relationship is multidimensional at Sloka School. The practice of sending news letters, arranging PTA meetings, having parent evenings, and one-to-one meetings with parents all fall under this frame work of practices for school motivated communication. The written assessments given to students instead of assessments in the form of marks, is a practice that is classified as parent-teacher communication. This practice was also one of the positive experiences for the parents and showed them the commitment and hard work put in by the teachers. To be able to compile written assessments, the teachers maintain daily diaries which then help when the reports are prepared. Their day to day observations of the children are entered in these diaries. This calls for undying interest and enthusiasm on the part of the teachers. It comes as no surprise that the collaborative parents noticed these beneficial practices.

The other question that this research aimed to answer is 'What expectations the parents brought with them?'

The parents came with their expectations which were to give their children an education that was ‘soul engaging’ and meaningful. It promised them a *childhood* for their children along with *academics*. They were convinced that there were other ways of learning, rather than those currently available in the city.

The parents wished for a soul engaging education. They wanted their children to learn with joy. Their expectations were high. They wanted their children to gain academic competence through joyful learning where their heart was involved and not just through memorising. Instead of catering only to developing the memory and intellect of the children they wanted their children to learn tolerance, collective responsibility and reverence to interpersonal relationships. They came with an expectation of finding a school that could educate their children holistically catering to the fields of art, music, story telling, medium of instruction and the curriculum.

The parents also wanted theoretical knowledge. The academic competence of the school curriculum was taken seriously by the parents from grade six. These were some of the high expectations that parents brought along with them at the time of admitting their children in school. Their high expectations in the system encouraged the school towards reaching a higher goal.

The third aim of this research was to describe the experiences of the parents in their association with the school.

The understanding of the parents’ journey would illuminate their experiences both in a positive and negative way. These experiences in their turn can create new practices for the school development programme.

Parents mostly had encouraging experiences with the school teachers. They were not completely satisfied with the infrastructure that was provided for the children. They also believe that transition from Waldorf curriculum to CBSE should be done smoothly giving the children confidence. They suggested that the hand over from the class teacher to the upper grade teachers should be done systematically. They wanted the new teachers to read the children’s files before taking on a class as this would give valuable information about each child. At the time of starting the first Waldorf School, Steiner suggested that anthroposophy (knowledge of the human being) should become the guiding principle for

teaching. He indicated that teachers should work out of the understanding of the human being to educate children. The parents were stressing this aspect of Waldorf education. These pioneer parents were indeed fulfilling their role as co-workers in the process of educating their children.

There were lapses in communication which were one reason of discontent as they felt this could cause mistrust in the school. They took the issue into their hands and initiated a meeting to encourage communication. In doing so, they again played a role of the co-workers in the development of the school. Their collaboration kept the school growing.

Poor administration and the inability to take action to solve problems which occurred was a concern. The parents pointed out that administration must be improved as this can have a negative effect on teacher's potential. They also felt that teachers should be less involved in mundane administrative details and leave it to the office staff. They suggested that teacher training was a very important aspect and teachers should transform knowledge before it becomes child's knowledge. The school is constantly engaged in training its teachers but it is important for the teacher community to not just be involved in training but also provide the scope for teacher development. These founder parents played multiple roles in the school at the time of its inception and thereby their knowledge was a multidimensional perspective that the school and teachers had to take into account when designing the developmental programmes.

According to one parent the initial goals at the time of starting the school were realised. That is, the three pillars on which the school rests which are parents, teachers and students have at last '*come to be.*' The parents' journey indicated a time when the structure of the school was growing '*lop-sided*' which was put on the right footing by active involvement by the parents. Here I would like to look at it as a philosopher, and suggest that when things grow (like in a plant), certain lopsidedness is bound to be noticed. This is a natural tendency but self correcting measures must be taken before the lopsidedness becomes a defect. The school is not yet a finished product nor will it ever be one, and constant listening to the parents would help in rectifying problems before they become crises.

To work with students, Steiner suggested a continuous dynamic attitude in teachers who had to take society into consideration, and I realized there is no better way to do this than to interact with the parents. They are the wheels of dynamism. Their problems are plenty but can fall into patterns or even be quite individual. Teachers are more or less set in their stage of work and can become stale. On the contrary, the parent profile is ever changing and due to this there is freshness and a new momentum. It is this body that sometimes creates the breaks or new stimulus to re-energize the education process. My thesis work is the creation of understanding of their minds. The journey of parents indicated a hopeful trust filled beginning, exciting watchful journey and a satisfied result.

6.1 Summary

This thesis describes the importance of a close working relationship between parents and the school. It also places emphasis on the view of the parents who send their children to the school with trust and expectations. It gives importance to parents as collaborators (as suggested by Rudolf Steiner) in the education of their children. As parent-school collaboration has been viewed to be beneficial to the holistic development of the child, Sloka School gives ample opportunities to parents to become involved with their child's schooling.

Sloka School is an alternative education initiative whose aim is to provide a congenial atmosphere for children to learn without fear and learn education through arts. It believes that when feelings are nurtured along with thinking the education will be soul engaging and seep deeper. The curriculum that it follows is the waldorf curriculum up to 8th grade. This waldorf curriculum takes into consideration arts, music, story telling and hands-on experience of children. It is planned and executed age appropriately.

We have shown that in our school- the involvement of the parents has made a difference not just to the academic education of their children, but also to their social awareness, concern for ecology and tolerance to fellow human beings. Their overall social development has been catered to through a multicultural exposure.

The parents not only helped their children at home, but also incorporated the ethos of the school in their home life resulting in the all round development of their children. The

parents were involved in helping the school in administration, raising funds and working as members of the administration.

The study illuminates many aspects of parent involvement and shows that the ongoing communication with them must continue. Further collaboration with the parent council can become beneficial for the school development. The study also shows that the school administration should be improved.

6.2 Limitations

The limitations of this study credit consideration. As it is an interview based study it is specific to the situation of these informants. These parents were speaking in a particular context. The study could be subject to change if the context changed or when the parents changed. I appreciate that the study cannot be generalised to the population at large. It cannot also be generalised to another Waldorf School.

The study also has some personal limitations which may have been due to the involvement of being a teacher in the school with the school developmental programme as a mandate. This is in view of the possibility of a biased view that I possess as a researcher. This biased view also holds good to the parents who supported the school through its developmental stage. While selecting the parents for this study their possible biased view was taken into consideration.

The study indicated that there are three components in a school (parents, teachers and students). A correlative study may be conducted at a later date to give voice to teachers and students to get a more multifaceted narrative. Despite all these limitations this study gives valuable information to teachers and parents to build an educational institution with the goal of educating students holistically. As the study is based in India it also adds to the significance considering that there is limited literature about parental involvement in schools.

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8. Appendix

Interview questions

1. How did you hear about this school?
2. What alternatives did you consider before joining this school?
3. Why did you make this choice?
4. With what expectations did you join your child in this school?
5. What association have you had so far, can you talk more on your personal experiences with the school?
6. What positive points did you notice in your child's schooling?
7. What negative points did you notice while he was at school?
8. Have you interacted with the teachers regarding this issue? How did they react to your query?
9. Were you ever concerned about the academic competence of your child?
10. What do you think about the child's readiness for life? what are the skills they have acquired?
11. Given a chance to return to the starting point, how would you shape your association?
12. Do you feel that your initial expectations were realised?

Focus group discussions

1. All of you seemed to have disliked the existing system of schools. Can you be clearer on your views? How was your experience at the regular schools?
2. Can you explain again why you chose Sloka School?
3. What were your positive experiences at Sloka School?
4. How was the Waldorf curriculum suitable for the children?
5. What were the negative aspects of the school that you wish to change?
6. When did academic performance become important for you?
7. What were the reasons for staying on at Sloka after 8th grade?
8. What were your expectations at the beginning of the school?
9. You say your child learnt many things at Sloka, what are the most important things they have learnt?
10. You are now at your journey's end; can you explain your relationship with the school?