

**Learning As Life:  
Empowering Leadership for the Guardians of Childhood**

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The need for imagination,  
A sense of truth  
And a feeling of responsibility-  
These are the three forces  
Which are the very nerve  
Of Education.

(Steiner, Study of Man, 1966, p. 190)

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## **Learning As Life: Empowering Leadership for the Guardians of Childhood**

Among my hopes for this project is to articulate and support how Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf education provide several important elements: what parents need to understand for a full scope of child development, what children are looking for from parents throughout each phase of a child's upbringing, and how to create a nourishing space for children throughout the day and in momentary interactions. For the purpose of this thesis, I share as a fundamental node that education does not start nor stop at school doors; education is not Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Education is not only the task of the teacher. In the title of this thesis I start with the phrase "Learning as Life" as a way to distinguish kinds of learning, leaning away from the term education, which can recall a mental picture of being in the classroom, learning from a teacher, absorbing information, and applying it within the classroom setting. Something essential for this thesis is how Steiner and Waldorf education encourages the process of imbuing purpose, love, and structure in the everyday—including the home environment—in service to self and to children. While we are surrounded by an education culture, without a different lens such as Steiner's, conventional schooling does not fulfill enough of the child's needs for growth and development; this is the impetus for my writing through the lens of empowering the parents' position in a child's life as their first and always educator.

I use the term "empowering leadership" in the title of this thesis. When it comes to empowering leadership I do not mean how to manage a big group but rather how to cultivate the depth of self leadership through coming into yourself, coming into your body, quieting your mind, and calming your emotions so you can be a receptive container for children. In my mind, I am looking beyond a stereotypical, masculine definition of leadership as an outward force, and appealing to a more feminine gesture of nurturing while holding a place of stillness and

receptivity. My experience is that Waldorf education aligns with this more feminine gesture of openness and deep but non judgemental observation of oneself and the child in front of you. This can be seen in Rudolf Steiner's invitation to "Receive the children with reverence, educate them with love, and send them forth in freedom" (McDermott, 1998, pp. xi-xiv). Reverence is a difficult state to get to and maintain when we are pulled in multiple directions like the stream our society runs on. What I am sharing here in this thesis are qualities and methods from Waldorf education so that you can be able to receive the children, who live in the present, be a vessel of love, and through your own embodiment of freedom send the children forth in the spirit of freedom. The term "Guardians of Childhood" is a point of discovery that emerged as a result of the body of work shared below.

COVID-19 took away the predictable educational culture that so many parents relied on. Due to the disruption in these predictable patterns, there were and continue to be many holes to fill, and questions to ask and answer around parenting, work life, child wellness, parent nourishment, and schools; it was a time in our history as if parents were jarred awake. While COVID-19 created tremendous misery, hardship, and stress for many, it also opened up the opportunity to talk about issues and questions about meeting children's needs. In this historical moment, parents have seen a particular opportunity to reflect on the purpose of education. Some have asked whether the conventional school setting is serving their children? Some have embraced a new role in serving the well-being of their children. Their journey lies at the heart of this thesis.

One of the qualities of my research is witnessing parents and teachers in conversation about their process. While the process of my research is described in greater detail in the methodology section, I want to distinguish that the term research can recall a probing type of



gesture whereas my research I consider as witnessing, as my approach embodies the openness and receptivity of the feminine to allow for growth and expansion within conversation. In my experience, when one is witnessed as they are it is as if they are illuminated by another in that moment and from that illumination, expansion can occur.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions that have emerged from my ongoing work with parents focus on the ways in which parents have sought to support their children's education and well-being at a time when the predictable patterns of school and homelife were disrupted by COVID-era precautions:

- How are parents supporting their children's education and overall wellbeing at home?
- What changes have been forced upon them due to outside circumstances?
- What changes have they chosen to make?
- What have they observed about themselves, their family life and their children in this process of change?

Ultimately, my engagement with parents over the duration of this project has brought me to the following, fundamental questions:

- Can raising children, including taking on a robust role of guardianship for one's children's overall education and well-being, be just as nourishing for parents as it is for their children?
- How can a deeper engagement in education and raising children be a positive force in a family's life?

## **What Developed From My Childhood into Professional Life**

For the purpose of this thesis, which engages with the idea and ideal of a life of learning, I can look back to where the above inquiries emerged even before I knew what Waldorf was. From the time I was 6 years old, I was curious about how and why the world worked as it did, particularly our relationship to nature, our relationship to ourselves, one another, and God (god/goddess, source, creator, universe). I saw and felt how everything connected and wove together and did not understand why adults separated everything out, making life more complicated. As I grew up and began babysitting at 12 years old, I began asking questions about family dynamics—noticing similarities and differences from routines to how the adults spoke to their children and how the children talked to their parents. When I was at Oakland University for my bachelors degree, I wrote a paper inspired by John Dewey about a democratically run classroom, for 5th or 6th grade. I wanted to open up schools or help school communities with decreasing the extraneous stress that accumulates, as I soon found myself pondering the underlying nature of schools and education.

Once I started my teaching career at a charter school in Detroit at 23 years old, the idealistic rose colored glasses came off very quickly as the relationship amongst teachers and administration was tense and mismanaged. I strived to keep everyone in high regard, manage my classroom as best as I could in my first year of teaching, and despite the coaching and progress I made I was fired and replaced by a friend of the principal's mid-year. My colleagues urged me to get a lawyer for wrongful termination, however I was so certain it was me that was the problem that I didn't take their advice. Furthermore, I didn't want to cause the school any more stress than they were clearly already under, which meant the students would get the brunt of it. During my last few weeks at that school, I prayed I would be fired or tried to work up the courage to resign.

Which led me to ask: Did I manifest my own termination in some sense? If that's true, what else could I manifest?

### ***From the Modern Mystery Mystery School to Waldorf Teacher Education***

While I was teaching I became aware of where I needed to tend to my own wellness so that I could show up for my students and colleagues, let alone family or friends. This led me to seek spiritual insight and training. I found a Life Activation Practitioner<sup>1</sup>, Chris Elwart, who facilitated the Life Activation session for me, which helped me get a sense of the bigger picture: not as a burned out teacher, but as someone with this deeper desire to help adults heal so they, too, could show up more fully for children. From there I began to connect resources to help teachers, parents, and schools adopt methods that work to decrease stress and increase wellbeing; these methods include practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and yoga. Following the Life Activation session, I went through Empower Thyself<sup>2</sup>, a class and physical initiation into a true ancient lineage, the lineage of King Salomon facilitated by the Modern Mystery School. This training not only helped me feel safer and more grounded, but it also raised my energetic baseline towards joy. That initiation gave me a greater capacity to let stress roll off my back, and daily energetic practices to balance, rejuvenate, protect my energy field, and manifest what I want intentionally. As I was sitting in Empower Thyself, I knew in my gut that this was what I wanted to be teaching because I had this longing for proven resources to help adults balance life in a joyful way, and create a world where children can grow up safely and to their full potential. From there, my interest in social emotional development led me to Mini Me Yoga<sup>3</sup>, which I've been a trainer for over 5 years. In these years of spiritual training, I often shared my deep interest

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<sup>1</sup> Life Activation Practitioner is a certification offered by The Modern Mystery School (MMS) (<https://www.modernmysteryschoolint.com/certified-professionals/>). With Western world headquarters in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, MMS provides pathways for study and certification.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see <https://www.modernmysteryschoolint.com/class/empower-thyself/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://minimeyoga.com/>

in education with my spiritual teachers and fellow seekers. More than once, I was asked whether I had discovered Waldorf education. It took some time, but my path finally led me, first to theosophy, and then to Rudolf Steiner's work, anthroposophy—the philosophy behind Waldorf education—and Waldorf Education itself. While not all Waldorf teachers would connect these different spiritual traditions, I found deep meaning in the connections and overlaps that I found between these schools of thought. For example, when reading a lecture by Steiner for my Waldorf teacher training, I came across a diagram of the interlocking relationship of the spirit, the soul, and the physical body (see Lievegoed, 2012, p. 17) that was almost identical to a diagram I had first encountered in one of my Modern Mystery School readings. It was particularly meaningful to me to hear that my teachers in the Modern Mystery School—called The Golden Dawn in Steiner's lifetime—considered Rudolf Steiner to be an initiate in the same lineage (B. Segura, personal communication, May 24, 2014). It is an honor, I feel, to imagine sharing this ancient mystery school lineage with Rudolf Steiner.

### ***Pursuing Waldorf Teacher Education***

Even before I started my formal studies to become a certified Waldorf teacher, I was instantly fascinated with Steiner's lectures and how they were applied in Waldorf education. I wanted to learn as much as I could, since whenever I would read something from Steiner I felt a part of my soul awaken and affirm that this is a key for adults and children. Antioch University New England was near where I was living, and I began the application process for the year-round Waldorf Teacher Education Program. From 2017-2018 I completed the coursework with my lovely cohort and professors. In the Fall 2018 semester, I completed a 3-part internship at Pine Hill/High Mowing Waldorf School in Wilton, NH: in 7th grade with Julia Kerr, in handwork with Adria Osgood, and in administration with Kat McFee and Geraldine Kline. After

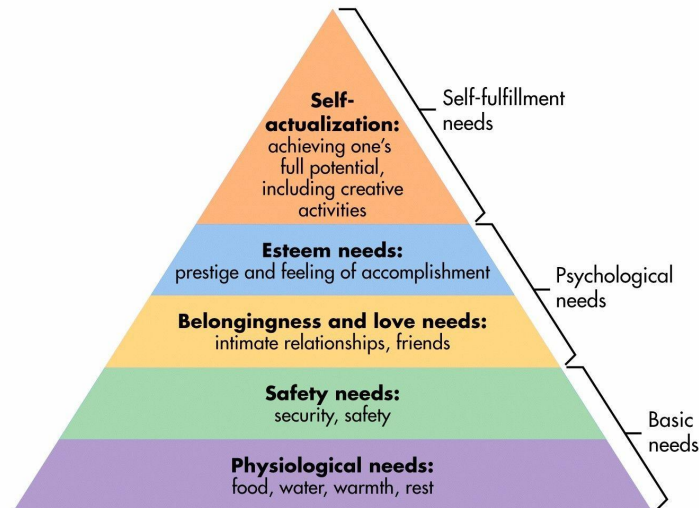
successfully completing all three aspects of the internship in November 2018, I took a couple months off and returned to the masters thesis in 2019 with the intention to gather trauma education resources from Waldorf and mainstream education sources. That quickly grew into the psychology realm, so I gave the thesis a rest as I readjusted. During that time off, I expanded my healing practice business, focusing primarily on energy healing work and meditation classes, and held a ribbon cutting for the grand opening of a spacious new office in January 2020. Then COVID-19 hit the United States in March 2020. For two months I did not see any clients in person but I moved to doing the couple of distance healings I have, to continue to serve others in that particularly traumatic time in human history. I also offered free meditation classes online each week to assist with further support and care for my local community, and across the country. Meanwhile, reading and hearing about how schools were handling COVID-19 and how families were coping, I wanted to help more. This longing led to combining Waldorf methodology with meditations, coaching, and distance healings for the Waldorf inspired homeschooling apprenticeship I created alongside a friend and colleague come June 2020.

### **My Waldorf Inspired Response to COVID-19**

When COVID-19 came to the United States, the remainder of the 2020 school year was met with varying approaches to keeping children, teachers, and families safe from the immediate danger of the first global pandemic in our lifetimes. The significance of schooling and formal learning during a global pandemic was not always evident. At a time when basic safety was called into question, many parents were confused about how to prioritize their children's education. Interestingly, though a parent or teacher might connect education and schooling to several tiers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, education is not actually listed on the common representation of this hierarchy at all (see figure below): from the foundation of safety, to the

pinnacle of higher level learning at the top. Everyone was doing the best they knew how to do—no one had been in this situation before, and unprecedented levels of confusion and fear left parents feeling adrift among competing priorities. If education and learning contribute to a variety of basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment related needs, how could parents balance this against the risk that education and learning activities—including but not limited to school—might actually put their children’s very lives at risk.

Table 1  
*Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*



*Note:* from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> by McLeod, 2007

In June 2020, I started reaching out to friends of mine who are parents and asked how they were doing with the upcoming school year with COVID-19. For those who were struggling and wanted support in making a change to homeschooling, I co-created a one semester Waldorf Inspired Homeschooling Apprenticeship alongside a dear friend, Lucy MacArthur, who I met in the Waldorf Teacher Education program at Antioch University of New England. We worked with three families across three states and three grade levels. However, in order to move forward with

guiding these non-Waldorf families into Waldorf inspired teaching and living, we created a Waldorf introductory workshop series that spanned from a handful of sessions from July into August and encompassed grades 1-8 curriculum themes. In the apprenticeship program we designed, we covered topics ranging from art throughout the grades, the Four Temperaments, Waldorf's approach to technology, creating rhythm, the wisdom of eurythmy, and the power of speech. What I found in these workshops was a desire from non-Waldorf parents to learn more about Rudolf Steiner's methodologies and child development theories. Often I would observe a light bulb moment for the parents, about their own child's development and renewed faith in how to approach their child differently.

In these introductory Waldorf workshops, Lucy and I brought to the surface the value of one's personal work alongside their child's learning. Based on my prior study, I found myself naturally tying together the Hermetic Principles I learned through the Modern Mystery School with Waldorf Education. From both these realms of training, I was able to see that as each of us are individual beings, here at the same time for a specific purpose individually and together, the role of a parent becomes an act of service to guide and support this child as a fellow eternal being. Inspired by this understanding, Lucy and I added a personal coaching piece to the homeschooling apprenticeship—which was a time for us to hear how the parent was doing with holding the container of rhythm, now full time educator, and seeing the reflection their child shows to them. This work as a personal coach was deeply fulfilling. This has been a role I have seen myself in, time and again, over my 20 years of working with families: being a safe place for parents to relax and let go of the shame, the guilt, the should's, so that they can reclaim their torch of empowerment and firmly lead their children and household.

As mentioned above, COVID-19 brought up many questions in regards to how we live our lives, and in particular how we educate our children and how we mitigate the effects of that education. COVID-19 exposed the vulnerabilities in the education system. It brought the humanity to the surface—the humanity of the teachers, administrators, parents, and children. There was no more room to outsource education to the schools between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. because, for many families, school came into the home. When worlds so neatly compartmentalized reunite, it can be messy and yet amidst it all there can emerge room for deeper conversations, shifts in everyday life, and hopefully for grace. It was a labor of love to work with the few families that joined our Waldorf Inspired Homeschooling Apprenticeship, supporting them in this quick pivot that gave way to actualizing their dreams, as a family unit, and becoming leaders in their respective communities. As will be discussed later in this paper, two of the three mothers were also interviewed as a part of my formal Master's Project, and their responses can be seen in the Results and Findings, as Participants 5 and 7. It was incredibly difficult work that I am so grateful for and for everyone who said yes to being a part of it and supporting it. As I share below in greater detail, I was in awe at what the practices and methods from Waldorf education could do when applied in a home setting by parents.

After that experience, I reflected more on this topic of what it takes for adults to be supported so they can support children, at any and every stage of life. How long have parents and teachers operated on burnout which creates ripples of dysfunction? What would it look like for parents to weave learning into their day to day activities, alongside their children, as a way of life, as a way of leading themselves and their household? Would that contribute to more resilient children? Would that contribute to greater creativity? Would that contribute to greater joy in life? From these initial impulses, I arrived at the research questions documented above. It was largely



due to the experience of supporting homeschooling parents in the Waldorf Apprenticeship Program that I discovered the most fundamental of these questions, and the questions that gave direction to my Master's Project: namely can taking on a robust role in guiding one's children's overall education and well-being, not only be nourishing for parents and children but actually be a positive force in a family's life?

In addition to my decades of experience with families, children, and teaching—which forms an essential foundation for my Master's Project—the research I did for this project includes a literature review from anthroposophic perspectives, mainstream resources, as well as literature from practical application of spiritual training. This project also focuses on interviews with parents who chose to take up (or found themselves taking up) a more robust role in guiding and carrying responsibility for their children's education. The parents I interviewed are from many backgrounds, including (1) Waldorf families and teachers (parents who have children enrolled in Waldorf schools), (2) Waldorf-inspired families (those parents who have committed themselves to learning about and implementing Waldorf practices even if their children do not attend Waldorf schools), and (3) non-Waldorf families (those parents who have not chosen Waldorf methods and practices, whether from lack of exposure or lack of access). There is, importantly to this project, a common thread that runs between all of the parent participants, based on prior conversations with the participants or directly from the interviews: each of these parents values continually progressing themselves, in their own ongoing learning and unlearning, as their children grow. This will be evident in the Results and Findings section.

### **My Observations of Mainstream Education Culture Prior to COVID-19**

I was in my Bachelors studies in the early 2000s when Common Core State Standards were beginning to be implemented in schools. From the pushing down of content to earlier and

earlier grades, to the multiple ways of learning one type of mathematics, or micro-managing the teaching and learning of reading, I heard parents within my extended family and those for whom I babysat speak to feeling helpless in guiding their children with their homework at night. The process of doing homework that had once been a moment of bonding for parents and children, and affirming the capacity of the parent to serve as a teacher and guide, was now an activity for which the child could not seek help from outside of school. Parents may not have felt highly effective as teachers before, but now they felt entirely excluded.

Soon after beginning my teaching career, I started asking questions about how education was playing a role in family systems. I was concerned about the authority of the parents' role and the lack of collaboration and cooperation between teachers and parents. The problem with this extreme disconnect between home and school is that learning does not start at school drop off time and end at afternoon pick up. The education of a child is worth more than the severing that was created between adults. I knew that I wanted to explore ways to reconnect parents to their role as guardians.

By the time COVID-19 impacted schooling in profound ways in the spring of 2020, many parents had long since felt disenfranchised as potential teachers and guides for their own children. Many had accepted a model of outsourcing the education of their children to experts, and no longer expected to even be involved in nightly homework or other academic support. Schooling had become a wedge between children and parents, and reuniting family systems for educational development during a crisis, such as a worldwide pandemic, would prove to be messy at best.

## **My Journey to Waldorf Education**

*You will not be good teachers*

*If you focus only on what you do*

*And not upon who you are.*

*~ Rudolf Steiner*

I wanted to deepen the well of wisdom within me, so I could share that with my students as opposed to sharing mere facts and figures. This is something I have seen in Waldorf schools, as the development and reverence for wisdom. In a society that values fast paced knowledge *en masse*, wisdom is garnered through an active process of reflection, service, and humility. Pursuing wisdom in this way is practically swimming upstream in today's information saturated society. Throughout this questioning, my spiritual journey rose from within. While training with one of the seven ancient mystery schools, Rudolf Steiner's name continued to come up in conversations, and I began meeting several Waldorf teachers by happenstance. I started reading a few books that explored aspects of Waldorf education and the grander purpose of education became clear: first, guide and protect childhood and then discovery and expertise can arise. After completing this masters thesis, my hope and dream is to build collaborative teams in communities across the United States in order to open Waldorf Schools or Waldorf inspired learning communities.

This is a topic that has been gestating within me since I was very young, and to have the opportunity to work with the threads of experience throughout my life as well as a wealth of information and weave it together into a cohesive piece is nothing short of a blessing. This body of work is not for one particular audience or school of thought. My hope is to bridge the gap in

the conversation around the greater picture of each child's education as an ongoing, living process we call life.

### **Literature Review**

In this literature review, I share some of the important literatures for this project, especially in the realm of Waldorf education, to complement the deep experiential background that I bring to this project, including the Waldorf Inspired Homeschooling Apprenticeship Program, and the spiritual insight that has guided me over the years as I have held this quandary.

This literature review has six primary sections, the first of which is The Roots and Impulse of Education, where I consider the history of education in the United States. This also includes the purpose of education throughout history, which is a question I have asked for years and have continued to read, research, and discuss with people. The next section is called Education for Social Change and Renewal, where I introduce the wisdom and methodology of Waldorf Education and how it meets our modern times. The third section is From Hearth to School and Back Home Again, where I dive into the value of a parent's role in their child's ongoing education. The fourth section continues with Steiner's child development theory in Phases of Child Development, followed by the fifth section The Four Temperaments—a guiding Steiner philosophy on identifying ourselves and the children we work with. The final primary section, the sixth section, is An Environment that Nurtures where the subsections include Creating Rhythm in Life, Rhythm of Festivals and Traditions, and lastly Speech as a Tool. Each of these sections engage the esoteric background from Rudolf Steiner as well as references to the Hermetic Principles from my training in the Modern Mystery School as well as other spiritual insights, to further affirm the grand scope of us as spiritual beings learning and growing in the physical. Each of these topics within the literature review is essential to this thesis project, as this

project uses a Waldorf framework, and acknowledges that Waldorf and Steiner's work provide a foundation and wisdom as a method to navigate towards meeting the fundamental needs of the children in our care while creating harmony in our lives.

### **The Roots and Impulse of Schooling in America**

As America was founded on core principles stated in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," questions around the application of these truths have come up in all forms of discourse in the recent history of America, which largely is for another topic of discussion for another time, however what I want to highlight here is the quality of life for families, the level of freedom or liberty that parents and children experience, and a pursuit of happiness that is inclusive of all members of the family and community. Are we actualizing these original hopes from The Founding Fathers? When it comes to education, the typical experience for many families is that the child is separated from the parents for an extended period of time, entrusted into the care of the teachers and staff at the school either chosen or that is simply available in their area. The schooling hours, typically 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., represent a significant portion of the waking hours of the day, but in many cases the period of separation between children and parents extends until 5:00 p.m. to accommodate working parents, leaving little time in the morning and after school for parents to be with their child or for the child to digest the day, as will be covered in the Results and Findings section.

In the "History and Evolution of Public Education in the U.S.," Kober (2020) observed that the Founding Fathers considered education to be essential for the success of the nation, as

education would ensure that those who voted had the understanding to protect their new nation from the undue influence of tyrants and demagogues:

[The Founding Fathers] believed strongly that preserving democracy would require an educated population that could understand political and social issues and would participate in civic life, vote wisely, protect their rights and freedoms, and resist tyrants and demagogues. (p. 2)

As a part of this educational system, the Founding Fathers also believed that character development and virtues are “essential to good citizenship, and education was seen as a means to provide moral instruction and build character” (Kober, 2020, p. 2).

According to “A Brief History of Education in the United States,” following the Revolutionary War, “compulsory education was intended to further national unity and to teach immigrants ‘American’ values” (A Brief History, n.d., p. 3). In time this education system evolved to meet the needs of industrialization, “as an industrial economy demanded reading, writing, and math skills much more than an agricultural economy had” (“A Brief History,” n.d.).

Conversely, Rudolf Steiner (1985), the founder of Waldorf Education, spoke of keeping government out of schools for the purpose of developing true autonomy of the free thinking human. He observed that the modern person does not even notice that education has become a tool of the state to create useful servants and productive workers, whereas the rightful purpose of education should be the all-around development of each human being. As taken from his lecture on the “The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom (GA 24),” in 1919:

At every level, schools mold human beings into the form the state requires for doing what the state deems necessary. Arrangements in the schools reflect the government's requirements. There is much talk, certainly, of striving to achieve an all-around

development of the person, and so on; but the modern person unconsciously feels so completely a part of the whole order of the state that he does not even notice, when talking about the all-around development of the human being, that what is meant is molding the human being into a useful servant of the state. (Steiner, 1985, para. 1)

Steiner created an education system that nourishes the whole child: body, soul, and spirit. By this, Steiner included not just the education of the mind—which is usually the primary focus of conventional education—but rather a holistic approach to defining and educating the whole child, as will be discussed in the following sub section in the Literature Review and throughout the Results and Findings section.

Steiner’s view stands in contrast to the aims of conventional education in which the development of intellect and intelligence is the center point. Even when social-emotional learning and healthy movement are added on, they are still secondary to the priority of academics:

Waldorf School education must be listened to with other ears than those with which one hears about other kinds of education or educational reform. For the Waldorf School gives no answer to the questions people want to have answered today and which are ostensibly answered by other systems of education. What is the aim of such questions? Their usual aim is intelligence, much intelligence—and of intelligence the present time has an incalculable amount. Intelligence, intellect, cleverness—these are widespread commodities at the present time. (Steiner, 1961, para. 23)

In the passage above, Steiner makes a curious observation about the fact that our age is already dominated by intellect, presumably at the expense of other capacities, but he also goes on to argue that this focus on the intellect—rather than the unfolding of each child’s natural gifts and

capacities—seems to go hand in hand with parental aspirations for how they want their child to turn out. To the extent that these are shallow aspirations, concerned only with likability, future economic success, and status, they are not the purview of Waldorf education:

One can give terribly intelligent answers to questions like: What should we make out of the child? How should we inculcate this or that into him? The ultimate result is that people answer for themselves the question: What pleases me in the child, and how can I get the child to be what I like? But such questions have no significance in the deeper evolutionary course of humanity. And to such questions Waldorf pedagogy gives no reply at all. (Steiner, 1961, para 23)

With parents focusing on intellect and intelligence, especially by the school's standards for measuring a child's success and achievement (e.g. grades, standardized test scores, etc.) this can contribute to parents thinking they are properly guiding their children rather than observing their unfolding and supporting the child in front of them. If parenting continues with this focus, as Steiner says above, then where is the innovation that children naturally bring with them from the spiritual world? We are reproducing cultural norms that we may not agree with nor desire to carry on, and ultimately we fail to serve the larger purpose of the evolutionary course of humanity.

To give a picture of what Waldorf Education is, we must say that it speaks quite differently from the way in which people speak elsewhere in the sphere of education: Waldorf School Education is not a pedagogical system but an Art—the Art of awakening what is actually there within the human being. Fundamentally, the Waldorf School does not want to educate, but to awaken. For an awakening is needed today. First of all, the



teachers must be awakened, and then the teachers must awaken the children and the young people. (Steiner, 1961, para 24)

Here, Steiner is acknowledging the eternal, spiritual nature of us as human beings. This understanding forms the basis of true education. If, as a culture, we consider that educators and parents hold responsibility to observe children, in their totality, to foster their growth, then there needs to be an acknowledgement of our innate composition as body, soul, and spirit. Steiner (1996) made clear, in *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, originally given as a lecture in 1923, that there is a necessary role to take on that allows one to critically see the individual human being, in order guide their development and growth. There, he argued that education, in the best sense of the word, requires the cultivation of faculties of discernment so that parents and educators can perceive both the outer and inner realities of the child, including the fact that each human being is composed of body, soul, and spirit.

It is impossible to observe the human being completely without distinguishing between what is internal and what is external. When considering the organization of the whole human being, who is made up of body, soul, and spirit, it is especially necessary to develop a refined faculty of discrimination, and this is particularly true in the field of education. (p. 43)

### **Education for Social Change and Renewal**

*We must teach so that future humanity can fulfill the developmental impulses prescribed by the universal cosmic order. We must realize above all that by employing our method we will, in a certain way, harmonize the higher human being (the human spirit and soul) with the physical body (our lower being).*

—*Rudolf Steiner*

Now that Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf education have been introduced in this thesis as an alternative method of education, I continue in this section to share the foundation of Waldorf education. Waldorf Education was founded by Dr. Rudolf Steiner in 1919, as a way to provide education to the children of those who worked at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. As Gobel (2020) observed, Steiner wrote and spoke about a myriad of topics, from government and money, to agriculture, medicine, and education. His goal was to affect government and political systems; however, upon navigating that realm he realized he could make a greater effect on schools and education, as schools are microcosms of the society at large. What he created with Waldorf Education can be considered to both oppose and complement current education, by supporting the teacher and parent in understanding a child's development from a wider perspective that encompasses the mind, body, emotions, soul, and spirit as aspects of the anatomy of humans, as described above. As soon as the first Waldorf school was founded, there was wondering if this method of education would meet the needs of children in the 20th and 21st centuries, whether an education system over 100 years old could manage the task (Steiner, 2006, p. 9). Conversely, within the conventional education system, there is a great need for change, from how teachers are treated and paid, to the size of the classrooms, to the amount of standardized testing, let alone in the quality of a child's education—as this conventional system focuses on the intellectualization of the child regardless of readiness and developmental appropriateness, as if a child has their education added into their lives, rather than honoring the fact that the learning and development of each child has an integrity of its own.

For Steiner (2007), education is an art that is not abstract but real and part of a child's life: "The art of education must proceed from life itself and not from abstract scientific thought" (p. 5). If we are looking at children as whole beings, who need to be nourished in all their dimensions, then education must proceed from life itself. Rudolf Steiner worked from the construct that children are whole beings in and of themselves, that each child chose to come to their parents at a specific time, for a specific reason, and it is the challenge of parents and teachers to be removers of hindrances that may be in the way of a child's fully embodying who they are at their core (Steiner, 1922, para. 36).

Based on Steiner's conception of the 3-fold human being—body, soul, and spirit—he developed Waldorf education to support children in integrating and balancing this three-fold nature throughout their lives. As a teacher with experience outside of Waldorf education, there always seemed to be aspects missing or not acknowledged in mainstream education. The recent focus on social/emotional development may be a quest to fill that void, but acknowledging the development of the social/emotional qualities is not the same as acknowledging the spirit and soul of a child and seeking what would nourish them at various stages of development. If the purpose of education is to guide children in their lives, and be a focal point for developing community, then there must also be a focus on the adults around them, and for this thesis, in particular the guardians of these children.

### **From Hearth to School and Back Home Again**

Waldorf innately affirms adulthood, and the "grown up" nature of parents. While it is easy to see how Waldorf education is child-centered, it also honors the achievements of adulthood. For example, a couple of noticeable practices I immediately took note of in Waldorf schools was that the teacher would not bend down to greet the children, nor would they kneel

down to work with them at their desk. I have a memory of one of my professors pointing out that this is to subtly yet significantly reinforce that the teacher is the “grown up” and grown ups are who children literally and metaphorically “look up to.” Oftentimes, especially nowadays with social media and television, peer-like relations between child and parent are far more common through pop culture references. The common trope of the “dumb parent” who lacks of maturity, craves instant gratification, and needs the child to save the day has recently emerged in our culture. The concept of authority has become less acceptable over the years, and because of it we not only have parents who are uncomfortable with holding authority, but children who are uncomfortable with healthy authority in the family, in the classroom, and in the community (Kim John Payne, Alliance for Public Waldorf Education, January 2019).

A concept I shared with the parents in the Waldorf inspired homeschooling apprenticeship was to keep adulthood out of childhood, meaning: have adult conversations, especially ones pertaining to children, away from the children. Children have no business in adult scenarios, as a child’s level of being awake should not match our own. This further builds the trust from child to adult, as well as confidence within the adult. Within the book *You Are Your Child’s First Teacher*, author Rahima Baldwin Dancy (2012), a midwife and Waldorf teacher, states:

It is appropriate that we question what we are doing and that we discuss our attitudes and intentions with one another—but not in front of the children! It is beneficial for children to think we know what we are doing, even if we aren't so sure ourselves. They don’t need to be involved in the intricacies of adult considerations and thought processes. Rather, they need to feel that mother and father are united in what they are doing. (p. 4)

Baldwin Dancy carries on to share research by Burton White from Harvard University that was completed in the 1960s. While early childhood supports like Head Start were being studied at that time, White conducted a thirteen year study of the impact of the first six years of a child's life with the following conclusion:

In our studies we were not only impressed by what some children could achieve in the first years, but also by the fact that a child's own family seemed so obviously central to the outcome. Indeed, we came to believe that the more informal education that families provide for their children makes more of an impact on a child's total education than the formal educational system. If a family does its job well, the professional can then provide effective training. If not, there may be little a professional can do to save a child from mediocrity. (White, as cited in Baldwin Dancy, 2012, p. 2)

Baldwin Dancy (2012) continues to share how the evolution of parenting is evident in the inability to be with a child, before calling it "boring" (p. 3). She calls this the parents' dilemma today, and goes on to describe the cultural changes that undermine the art of parenting:

Our culture no longer provides a strong and unified message about how children should be raised. In addition, most of us live far away from our own parents or extended family, the people who traditionally provided wisdom, help, and continuity in rearing children.

The art of mothering has been replaced by the science of parenting. (pp. 3-4)

Baldwin Dancy affirms the parents' own connection to their parental intuition and their ability to stay fast in the face of ever-changing parenting fads:

We need to listen to our own inner knowing. And we need to acquire knowledge about how the young child develops so we can make informed choices with confidence and receptivity. Most new parents have no knowledge of child development, and we haven't

even been around children since we grew up. Many of us have forgotten what children are like and find ourselves on the path of parenting without any knowledge of the landscape. (p. 5)

For Dancy the solution is gaining insight into the world of child development, in a holistic sense. This is why I steered the families I worked with in the Waldorf Homeschooling Apprenticeship towards Rudolf Steiner's child development theories as each stage provides both a insight into the development of a child's energy structure as well as the needs the child has of the adults in their lives at each stage.

A parent's level of empowerment coupled with their understanding of their child's holistic development can place the parent as an advocate for their child, especially up against the trends, marketing schemes, and legislative campaigns that collectively chip away at childhood:

We need to realize that there are many cultural forces working against seeing the child in such a way [as a whole child, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual] and responding with what really supports our children's development. First of all, we need to recognize that childhood is being squeezed out as a valuable phase in itself as legislators, academicians, and marketers bring academics and clothing styles to every-younger recipients. Our society tends to regard children as little adults, so we are encouraged to reason with them as if they were grown-ups and to teach them with techniques appropriate for much older children. Despite years of studies by Piaget and neurophysiologists, educational politicians determine curricula and textbooks seemingly without any regard to the way children actually think and learn, pushing curricula earlier and earlier and teaching to the test. (Baldwin Dancy, 2012, pp. 5-6)

## **Phases of Child Development According to Rudolf Steiner**

Largely, child development theories arise from the work of developmental psychologists in an effort to “understand, explain and predict behaviors that occur throughout the lifespan” (Cherry, 2020). Many child development theories have become prominent over the years in identifying how a child physically develops, and only recently have we unlocked how the brain develops, and even more importantly only recently have we considered the social and emotional development of the child. Educator and psychosocial rehabilitation specialist Cherry (2020) looks at how our understanding of child development has changed in child development theories and examples, explaining that children—at least in the modern, western world—were historically seen not as children but as undeveloped adults, and were given little consideration for the stages of development that they need to go through, in terms of language, cognition and physical growth. Cherry (2020) writes:

Interest in the field of child development finally began to emerge early in the 20th century, but it tended to focus on abnormal behavior. Eventually, researchers became increasingly interested in other topics including typical child development as well as the influences on development. (Cherry, 2020, How Our Understanding Has Changed section, para.7)

While Cherry explains the shift and interest in the development of the body, mind, and social development of children, we are still missing key pieces in this conversation regarding the fullness of human anatomy and development via the soul and the spirit.

### ***Seven-year Phases of Development***

In 1907 Steiner first introduced his concept of human development throughout seven-year periods in *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science*, as summarized by Zech (2019):

The concept [of development through seven-year periods] derives from the theosophical-anthroposophical view that we incarnate gradually into the different levels of our organization and is based on the ancient idea of human development proceeding in hebdomadal (seven-year) steps. (para. 2)

The phases of child development according to Steiner are as follows: Birth to year seven, year seven to fourteen, year fourteen to twenty-one, and so forth. Steiner continued in the 1907 lecture to depict what archetypally occurs in each phase of development, however the first three stages are applicable to the schooling years.

- Birth is freeing the self from mom's physical body
- The 7th year is birth of the ether/etheric body and imaginative thinking
- The 14th year is birth of the astral body, where our soul organism becomes connected to thinking
- The 21st year is the birth of the I, which is the body of the Ego. (J. Kerr, personal communication, March 27, 2022)

In that same communication with Kerr, a seasoned Waldorf teacher who welcomed me into her classroom for my Waldorf internship at Pine Hill Waldorf School, she continued to share context that primes these stages of seven years, beginning in utero: “When a child is in utero, before physical birth, their physical body is in [a] nine month gestational period, then when [the child is] born into this physical body, the physical body develops on the outside and has to achieve a level of readiness to be born. Physical [birth] is connected to the mineral kingdom.”



**Birth to Age Seven.** “The first seven years of life (0-7 years old) were associated with the Moon. During this time, the psychic forces are working to transform the body of the child from one that was inherited from the parents, to one that represents the full personality of the child” (Armstrong, 2021, para. 1). “After the physical birth mostly unconscious processes prevail as the organism is built up and motor and perceptual skills develop through imitation. During that phase learning is unreflective and will-based” (Zech, 2019, para. 3). After the physical body of the mother is taxed to gestate the growing child within resulting with the child being birthed, then the etheric body is in gestation by the parents, taxing on their etheric body to hold the child in softness and strength while the etheric gestates. Kerr carried on that the “first seven years, the etheric is in the gestational stage [and the] sign of [the etheric’s] birth is the falling [out] of [the baby] teeth. [With the etheric gestating, the goal from birth to age seven is] protecting the etheric. [The] etheric is related to [the] plant [kingdom and plant] life; plants live in the rhythm of the earth, the seasons, the day and night and the etheric is nourished by rhythm—everything that nourishes a plant nourishes the etheric” (J. Kerr, personal communication, March 27, 2022). During this stage of a child’s life, I often advise parents to take especially good care of their etheric to further nourish their child’s etheric development. Such activities include meditation, martial arts, chi work, breath work, exercise, living in rhythm of the cycles of nature, going out into nature, working with the elements of creation (earth, water, air, and fire), and consuming quality food and water.

**Age Seven to Fourteen.** “The second seven years (7-14 years old) is associated with Mercury. At this time, the child’s imagination and feeling life takes center stage” (Armstrong, 2021, para. 1). “In the second seven-year period, when learning is mostly based on the child’s emotional relationship with the lesson content and the individuality of the teacher, we can also

discern three sub-phases, marked by the nine-year change and the twelve-year change” (Zech, 2019, para. 4).

According to Zech (2019), Steiner’s description of how childrens’ relationship to the world changes, during this second seven year phase, that is similar to what Piaget found:

The initially more unconscious process of learning through (joyfully) joining in and doing changes in the tenth year—known as the nine-year change—with the emergence of the subject-object relationship that has also been described by Piaget: children are now more conscious of their separateness from the world around them and differentiate between inner experiences and outer perception. A keen interest in discovery arises as well as the need for contextualization of the multiple perceptions and creative learning processes. From the age of twelve the child’s imaginative powers recede with the growing need to grasp hold of the world and its causal connections through thinking. Experiences and discoveries are now cognitively permeated and worked through. Piaget referred to this change as the transition from concrete operational to formal operational thinking. (Zech, 2019, para. 4)

Now that the etheric body is born and ruling, Kerr shared that “after the change of teeth, there is the gestational period of the astral body [from seven years to fourteen]. [From] seven to fourteen is the slow recognition of [one’s] inner world, sometimes nine year olds have that more distinctly. [During this phase, the] feeling of being alone, sad, angry, clingy [can arise]; it’s a phase and then it’s gone, then they balance out and stabilize—where breath and heart rate and everything is balanced, levity and gravity; [this is a good time to] highlight physical skill and accomplishment.” Kerr quoted Eugene Schwartz who says “we interrupt this childhood to bring you a message from adolescence.” Although the child is not an adolescent yet, from seven to

fourteen is a window into what adolescents may bring. Kerr continues: “[The] brain stem rules the physical, mammalian brain related to the astral [such as] emotions, feelings, and reward and punishment, [which is] why if we teach from the head [for] seven to fourteen [year olds], we are under-nourishing the heart. [The] astral body is nourished by story and by music. [The] astral body [is] born at age fourteen [and is related to the animal kingdom].” Kerr shared an insight that while the astral is gestating, the adult’s astral is containing the child’s. She states that “the adult’s astral body is working on the child’s through the adult’s heart forces. [The] main goal is to [guide the seven to fourteen year old to] develop inner pictures, done through relationships and story; [which shows as] the [child’s] ability to be creative in high school.” During this seven year period, Kerr shares what children are facing on a spiritual level and how to approach and not approach them as parenting needs to shift: “[On a] Spiritual level, they are beginning to take on the karma they came into the world with. Because children are taking on their own karma, they may say they don’t want to be at a school anymore—[causing] the parent to ask ‘is she looking for her karmic people?’ Children feel themselves drawn to dealing with their karma.” She says during this phase, “parents say children are just like a parent, but that is because the child took that on to beat it; [being] coddled and cared for holds them back.” Kerr quotes poet Kahlil Gibran: “Your children are not your children” (J. Kerr, personal communication, March 27, 2022).

**Age Fourteen to Twenty-One, and Beyond.** “The third seven years (14-21 years old) is a time that the higher mind of the adolescent takes root, and the psychic development can be disturbed by the strong impulses of puberty. The next three seven-year segments are associated with the Sun (21-42 years old), and the elements of sentient soul, intellectual soul, and consciousness soul” (Armstrong, 2021, para. 1). “The main aspect of adolescence is, according

to Steiner, the development of the power of independent judgment. Again, we can distinguish different phases in the course of which the power of judgment becomes more reflective because it is decreasingly informed by subjective and idealist naivety and increasingly by wider aspects and the readiness to take on responsibility” (Zech, 2019, para. 5). The third seven year period is gestating the ego body, which will tax the psychic and emotional capacity of the child’s guardians. Here, Kerr shares that [the] “birth of [the] astral at fourteen, [is followed by the] gestational period of ego [which is] nourished by mentorship.” She continued that this is why a “Waldorf high school has specialists [whereas a] Waldorf elementary has generalists.” She says “[this phase is when] the intellect wakes up, they want to deal in facts, statistics, and there is nothing to convince a high schooler to do something [other] than facts. [This phase of fourteen to twenty-one is] grabbing hold of the physical world, how it operates, etc.” Kerr continued by referring to Steiner (1907) who wrote, “this ‘body of the ego’ is the vehicle of the higher soul of man” (J. Kerr, personal communication, March 27, 2022). Therefore, this phase is associated with the human kingdom.

### **The Four Temperaments**

In a lecture given by Rudolf Steiner in Berlin in 1909, he opened with the following description of the call to greater understanding of oneself and another through the knowledge and application of the four temperaments:

It has frequently been emphasized that man's greatest riddle is himself. Both natural and spiritual science ultimately try to solve this riddle—the former by understanding the natural laws that govern our outer being, the latter by seeking the essence and purpose inherent in our existence. Now as correct as it may be that man's greatest riddle is himself, it must also be emphasized that each individual human being is a riddle, often

even to himself. Every one of us experiences this in encounters with other people.

(Steiner, 1909b, para. 1)

The Four Temperaments can be a means for understanding oneself, as well as those you meet and interact with. This is a particularly powerful lens when working with children, as they are so keen to their spiritual heredity and as those of us who have been here on Earth a bit longer, we bring wisdom of the physical heredity. One of the core foundations of Waldorf education that Rudolf Steiner introduced is the Four Temperaments, formerly known in the Middle Ages as The Four Humours and used by doctors and scholars to aid the sick and cultivate wellness (Bowen, 2020a, para. 1). For adults, Steiner (2000) advises to observe the temperament of a child and how that child is expressing the temperament and then complement that temperament and embody what the archetype would be, the archetype that the child needs in order to help them grow and move through that temperament phase. Steiner dispels the mystery behind the origin of the Four Temperaments, from how they are created and then compiled within each of us—as the union of the physical heredity of our ancestors and the spiritual heredity that each of us carry from the spiritual world:

Spiritual science tells us first of all that the human being is part of a line of heredity. He displays the characteristics he has inherited from father, mother, grandparents, and so on. These characteristics he then passes on to his progeny. The human being thus possesses certain traits by virtue of being part of a succession of generations.

However, this inheritance gives us only one side of his nature. Joined to that is the individuality he brings with him out of the spiritual world. This he adds to what his father and mother, his ancestors, are able to give him (Steiner, 1909b, para. 1-2)

Since these two streams of heredity, from the physical DNA and the spiritual DNA, or individuality, compile the temperament, this helps resolve the riddle of oneself and also aids in our interactions and observations of others. In a lecture, Steiner gave, called “*The Mystery of the Human Temperaments*,” in 1909, he said:

We see then in a person confronting us the flowing together of two streams; of these two streams each human being is composed. In him we see on the one side what comes to him from his family, and on the other what has developed from the individual’s innermost being; namely, a number of predispositions, characteristics, inner capacities and outer destiny. An agreement must be effected. We find that a man must adapt himself to this union, in accordance with his innermost being on the one side, and on the other in accordance with that which is brought to him from the line of heredity. (Steiner, 1944 para. 16)

Developing an understanding of what compiles the Four Temperaments, as well as knowledge of each of the temperaments that will be shared below, supports us in honoring the uniqueness of each of us—especially beyond what we see physically—as the mystery of the human being is more than physicality, but also spiritual. As paraphrased by Finser (2015) in *Guided Self-Study*, Steiner observed that the individual temperament arises from which aspect of the 4-fold human being—as described below—predominates when this union of physical and spiritual heredity occurs:

Human beings as we know them in this life are beings of four members. The first, the physical body, they have in common with the mineral world. The first suprasensory member, the etheric body, is integrated into the physical and separates from it only at death. There follows as the third member the astral body, the bearer of instincts, drives,

passion, desires, and of the ever-changing content of sensation and thought. Our highest member places us above all other earthly beings as the bearer of the human “I”, which endows us in such a curious and yet undeniable fashion with the power of self-awareness. These four members we have come to know as the essential constituents of a human being.

The way the four members combine is determined by the flowing together of the two streams upon a person’s entry into the physical world. In every case, one of the four members achieves predominance over the others, and gives them its own peculiar stamp. Where the bearer of the “I” predominates, a choleric temperament results. Where the astral body predominates, we find a sanguine temperament. Where the etheric or life body predominates, we speak of a phlegmatic temperament. And where the physical body predominates, we have to deal with a melancholic temperament. The specific way in which the eternal and the ephemeral combine determines what relationship the four members will enter into with one another. (Finser, 2015, p. 93)

As Bowen (2020a) reminds us, it is interesting to reflect on the number four in the Four Temperaments, and the significance of this number. When it comes to the the number four, there are many ways that the number four occurs in our natural lives: many of us are familiar with the four elements of creation (earth, water, air, fire), the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, fall), the four cardinal directions (north, east, south, west); also, most of us have and rely on our four limbs (right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg); we experience, if we are lucky, four stages of life (child, adolescent, adult, elder), and we are surrounded by four kingdoms of life (mineral, plant, animal, human). So to reflect this “fourfold occurrence” (para. 3) within life, into our being as a means of representing the composite of a physiological predisposition, mental/emotional

predisposition, it gives grounds for a spiritual predisposition that can come into fruition when matured and balanced alongside each of the temperaments. These temperaments are sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic (Bowen, 2020a).

### ***Sanguine Temperament***

According to Bowen (2020a), the sanguine temperament often corresponds to the season of Spring, the element of air, Sanguine is:

Seen in those children and people who are excited to wake up, to do new things, to meet new people, to go to new places, to start a new project, to introduce one group of friends to another group of friends... They are social butterflies. They easily adapt and move on from one thing to the next... (para. 5)

Bowen carries on that:

When the French used the expression “joie de vivre” (joy of life), they were speaking of the sanguine temperament expressed in people. Physically, these people are often slender and long (think of fairy or elf) and light on their feet. Some walk on their toes or with a noticeable bounce. (para. 5)

Bowen (2020a) continues by sharing that sanguines are explorative; they are able to start new things, without necessarily having the ability to finish these explorations or projects. Other important aspects of the sanguines include joyfulness and excitement, being spontaneous and alive to the moment. Some of the more stable, rooted, grounded aspects are lacking, and sanguines may not always be trustworthy or dependable. If sanguines ignore more complex or difficult feelings or situations, they may appear to others to be flighty, but they can be balanced by the other temperaments (para. 7), and then:



This person is a ray of light and hope. They bring positivity and new outlooks. They bring folks together. They find common ground. They see connections where others see differences. They can be the types of leaders that see the good in others, that see each person's unique gifts and find ways to optimize these for the good of all. (Bowen, 2020a, para. 8)

In a 1909 lecture called *The Mystery of the Human Temperaments*, Steiner (1944) refers to the Sanguine's predominance of the astral body and how this affects their ability to ground, move from idea to idea, and follow through with difficulty:

The sanguine person cannot linger with an impression, he cannot hold fast to an image, cannot fix his attention upon one subject. He hurries from one life impression to another, from perception to perception, from idea to idea; he shows a fickle disposition. That can be especially observed with sanguine children, and in this case it may cause one anxiety. Interest is easily aroused, a picture begins easily to have an effect, quickly makes an impression, but the impression soon vanishes again. (Steiner, 1944, para. 40)

### ***Choleric Temperament***

The choleric temperament is correlated with the Summer, and the element of fire. Bowen adds that "The choleric temperament wants to take charge of situations and to lead groups toward a goal—that "goal" being the choleric's vision or solution." (Bowen, 2020c, para. 1) Bowen carries on with describing the caricature of the choleric as follows:

The choleric does not need to spend time away from the world in contemplation. It is aimed at action and once it has seen a goal, it sets all its efforts on achieving it and will doggedly adhere to this goal, persevering through great hardships if needed. After all, such challenges only reveal the great power and virtue of such a being. The choleric

temperament will speak its mind, sometimes with painful and unsympathetic candor. It will not even consider backing down from confrontations, and sometimes seeks them with relish. The choleric finishes every task, usually as fast as possible. Was it beautifully done? The choleric does not need it to be beautiful; it just needs to complete the task. The choleric will often work harder, not smarter. (para. 1)

However, according to Bowen (2020c), the mature choleric has potential to be a true leader:

[The mature choleric is] balanced by the influences and tendencies of all the temperaments. It sees the vision, and even allows for input and buy-in from the group. It allows time for contemplation so that we work “smarter not harder,” but it does not allow for contemplations to lead to inactivity. The choleric can pull others along and indeed blaze the path... When in service, the choleric does not want to burn through those who have different ideas; they want to light the fire of inspiration so that we can all accomplish something together. (para. 3)

For Steiner, in his 1909 lecture on the *Mystery of the Human Temperaments*, speaking about the choleric temperament, what stands out strongly is the active force of the individual and the strong will of this individual:

The choleric temperament will show itself as active in a strongly pulsating blood; in this the element of force in the individual makes its appearance, in the fact that he has a special influence upon his blood. In such a person, in whom spiritually the ego, physically the blood, is particularly active, we see the innermost force vigorously keeping the organization fit. And as he thus confronts the outer world, the force of his ego will wish to make itself felt. (Steiner, 1944, para. 35)

### ***Melancholic Temperament***

Bowen states that “The melancholic is winter; it is earth; it is mineral” (Bowen, 2020b, para. 1). Bowen continues with painting the picture of the melancholic as private, sensitive to hardships and pain. Their internal experiences as well as their deep impressions of the world make them a fitting healer.

The melancholic temperament does not jump into action, it observes and considers; it contemplates. They rarely speak, but when they do their words reveal a profound consciousness [in the mature melancholic]. This temperament will not create the great leader of action, or the social balm, or even the steady-as-she-goes reliable worker. This is the temperament of the wizard or sage, those who often retreat from the world to work on something in private. If this temperament does make any friends, it is only with one or two people and those friendships are deep and all-important. (para. 1)

Bowen (2020b) makes the distinction between the immature melancholic and the mature melancholic: when the melancholic becomes mature, they turn from depression and self-pity towards compassion and understanding (para. 3).

For Steiner (1944), he points out that the immature melancholics are ruled by the body, the densest part of the human being:

This is the way the hardened physical system appears when it is in excess. The person is not able to bring about flexibility where it should exist. The inner man has no power over his physical system; he feels inner obstacles. They show themselves through the fact that the person is compelled to direct his strength upon these inner obstacles. What cannot be overcome is what causes sorrow and pain; and these make it impossible for the individual to look out upon his contemporary world in an unprejudiced way. (para. 51)

According to Bowen (2020b):

The mature version [of the melancholic temperament] is so important to understand and achieve however. Rudolf Steiner said that it is the most important temperament for the parent and for the teacher to cultivate and mature, because when it is mature, it turns from self-pity to compassion for others. Yet, it understands the difficulties and pains, and so it can relate to others who are struggling—and we ask children/students to struggle a lot.

Or, we should be doing so. Learning is often a struggle. If we remain in our comfort zones, we learn very little. So, learning and growing is often difficult. (para.3 )

When melancholics are mature, they are able to share their wisdom, to heal, to bring gifts of profound considerations to those who may need or value their understanding.

### ***Phlegmatic Temperament***

The fourth temperament to be considered here is the phlegmatic. According to Bowen (2020d), The phlegmatic temperament is associated with the season of Fall, the element of water. The phlegmatics are guided by routines and habits, the patterns and rhythms of daily life, with its comforts and reliability. Along with these qualities are their dependability and consistency; “they are innately trustworthy even if not necessarily dynamic and profound” (Bowen, 2020). For the phlegmatics, organization is key as anxiety may surface from chaotic experiences. Bowen shares about the lifestyle of the phlegmatic:

Creature comforts are very important to these people [phlegmatics] as well. A warm, cozy house with things organized just so is a delight. These people may not be very social, but they are warm and pleasant. They may not be inspiring leaders, but they are steady and consistent workers. They may not be the deepest thinkers, but they understand consistency. (Bowen, 2020d, para. 4)

Steiner, in his 1909 lecture, differentiates between the etheric body, the astral body, and the ego in relation to how they are expressed which also correlates in the temperaments. For the phlegmatic temperament, the ruling body is the etheric, as Steiner (1944) writes:

The etheric body is a body which leads a sort of inner life, while the astral body expresses itself in outer interests, and the ego is the bearer of our activity and will, directed outward. If then this etheric body, which acts as life-body, and maintains the separate functions in equilibrium, an equilibrium which expresses itself in the feeling of life's general comfort ... The more inwardly comfortable he [the phlegmatic] feels, the more harmony will he create between the inner and outer. When this is the case, when it is even carried to excess, we have to do with a phlegmatic person. (para. 40)

### ***The Healing Nature of Temperament***

Throughout the Antioch University masters coursework and lectures, my professors shared that Waldorf teachers would classify the children in their class based on the temperaments and seat children of similar temperaments next to each other. The curative impetus behind this can be illustrated with this example: if a melancholic child is seated next to another melancholic child, the child is ready to grow out of that temperament when the child gets sick of a fellow melancholic. So we see that the greatest medicine for a child is their own temperament and to be met within their temperament so the child can create that balance within themselves, as opposed to the juxtaposition of being surrounded by other temperaments.

This recognition of the four temperaments was a key piece of the Waldorf-inspired virtual homeschooling that I provided, with Lucy MacArthur, in Fall 2020. An impression I gathered from conversations during my Waldorf masters classes was that the reason why it was so crucial to work with the four temperaments is because children move through these different phases or

qualities of each of these temperaments and that the duty of the adults in their lives is to help the children move through it. For example if a child is melancholic, then, rather than submitting to the impulse to fix the child and help them push out of melancholy, furthermore, from the masters classes I gathered the impression and value to meet the child where they are at. Children want to be seen, heard, and loved. We send that love to a child. We see that through acceptance a child feels seen and heard therefore it becomes easier for the child to be able to meet themselves where they are at and eventually grow from a place of seeing and hearing oneself. This concept was profound for the parents in the Waldorf homeschooling apprenticeship. The results of the parents observing which temperament their child was expressing and then turning to meet them in that space and further for the parents to embody that temperament and be there with their child in it, the parents saw such a shift in each of their child's ability to grow as well as nurture the trust and the rapport within the relationship of parent and child because the child felt seen, heard, accepted and loved as opposed to being looked over, not recognized, or fought with. As Steiner (1944) says in his lecture the *Mystery of the Human Temperaments*:

In self-education also we can again use this method: we must always allow the existing tendencies, the forces present in us, to work themselves out, and not artificially repress them. (para. 66)

From the lens of the four temperaments, it can be used as a tool for our own inner work as well as in our work as guardians, to show up and be the presence children need in any moment in time. While the four temperaments are a way to shift our inner environment and guide children in theirs, another way to continue this work is in creating an environment that nurtures.

## **An Environment That Nurtures**

This section of the literature review continues Steiner and Waldorf perspectives of education and the broader mission of living life, as spiritual beings having a human experience. Here I engage with some explorations around creating rhythm in life, and then the exploration of speech as a tool in education and guardianship. When children are met, as described in the Four Temperaments section, additional noticings will arise such as a child's biological flow of breathing. Children have their own rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, and when this is honored and mirrored into the environment, as described below, then a child can feel seen, heard, and met.

### ***Creating Rhythm in Life***

Rhythm is reflected in the macrocosm through a variety of ways, such as the 28 year cycle of Saturn, the cycles of the moon each month, to the ebbs and flows of the ocean tides. We are also connected to our environment in a multitude of ways; we mark the passage of time and completion of life chapters. From sunrise to sunset, the week, month, year, the four seasons, holidays, celebrations, and birthdays. In the microcosm of our physical vessel, our body, it embraces rhythm through multiple functions: from eating and drinking to eliminating, breathing in to breathing out, pumping oxygen to the blood and bringing it back to the heart, in order to strengthen our muscles we expand and contract them, and we have waking hours and time to sleep. Honoring the cycles of nature and of time is deep within our DNA, and in human history. As Jon McAlice (n.d.) states in *Learning through Rhythm*:

In the course of the last decades, the significance of rhythm for the existence of the human being has been re-discovered. We can see that all life is rhythm and that the interplay of vital processes is a harmony of rhythms. (p. 2)

When looking at ancient teachings on rhythm, The Three Initiates wrote about the Principle of Rhythm in the Kybalion, as it is one of the seven Hermetic Principles: “Everything flows out and in, everything has its tides, all things rise and fall...” (The Kybalion, 2019, p. 15), which nods to another Hermetic Principle, The Principle of Correspondence “As above, so below; as below, so above” (The Kybalion, 2019, p. 11 ) Steiner takes these principles a step further, acknowledging how the microcosm and macrocosm reflect within one another in personal development with the assistance of rhythm, saying: “One can ascend to a higher development only by bringing rhythm and repetition into one's life. Rhythm holds sway in all nature” (as cited in Scheinfeld, 2018, para. 3).

As Steiner established Waldorf education, it mirrors the rhythms of life into the day to day classroom routine, particularly through in breath and out breath activities as described by Helle Heckmann (2011) in Waldorf News:

In the inhaling or breathing-in phase the child directs his attention to an activity that basically relates him to himself. For little children each breathing-in period (drawing, watercolor painting, knitting, eating...) is very short because little children can only concentrate for short periods of time. In the exhaling or breathing-out period, the child relates mainly to the surrounding world (free play, free running etc.). For each breathing-in period the child needs a breathing-out period and so a pattern is established. This rhythm is something that you can bring into your home. You have to try to find out when the children breathes-in and when they breathe-out. (p. 1)

Heckmann goes on to share the guardians’ role while children are involved with in breath and out breath activities:



...when the children are in the breathing-in period, you have to make sure you are present, so the child feels *ah, here I feel my parents, they are there for me*. After that, for a very short time, you can do what you have to do at home and you can tell your child *you have to wait because I need to do this*. And this will be alright because you know you have been present with the child. (Heckmann, 2011, p. 1)

Jon McAlice (n.d.) shares another way that rhythm is reflected into education; as we spend time awake or conscious we also spend time sleeping or unconscious. This waking or sleeping is “a central aspect of all processes that are connected with learning” (p. 2). One method this can be done in schools is through focusing on certain subjects each day for up to three to four weeks, also known as block scheduling, which is based on the principle of rhythm.

An example of how to incorporate rhythm into family life comes from workshops Lucy MacArthur and I led with the Waldorf inspired homeschooling cohort in 2020. Rhythm was one section of the Parent Workshops we led in order to foster likeness to Steiner’s in breath and out breath into the house and home of the families we worked with. Below is part of that workshop content:

The purpose for establishing rhythm is not only because life is one great rhythm, and there are many rhythms in it, but because when children have rhythm, it truly allows them to delve into subjects in a healthy way, because with rhythm and routine, there is a harmonizing that happens throughout life, and when we are operating out of a place of harmony, we are far more capable to make healthy decisions and live into gratitude.

Think about when you’ve had enough sleep, when you’ve had enough exercise and eaten good food. Think about your ability to take on challenges versus when you are tired, hungry, and stagnant. What is your ability to tackle a problem?

This led to a further discussion on what rhythm would work for each family, depending on the parent's career and their schedule, number of and ages of children in the home, and bringing a spirit of experimentation. Steiner often says, "rhythm replaces strength," (O'Connell, 2020) and when we begin to train ourselves and have the discipline to establish these pillars in everyday life, it replaces the need to have as much effort in our planning and doing. It allows us to embrace and enjoy other rhythms as well: the rhythms of the seasons, the rhythms of the skies, and our own rhythms in our bodies. When we think about creating the daily rhythm, we need to also keep in mind the view for the week. Then it becomes a conversation with yourself of what you would like to accomplish each day. Thus, rhythm replaces strength. Your capacity to overcome inertia in your life increases, as you have a vehicle to build momentum for what you want in your life. As the planets have their own forces that keep them in motion, we too can enact such forces within our own lives.

### ***Rhythm of Festivals and Traditions***

Another aspect of rhythm applied into everyday life is tradition. My co-teacher for these workshops shared that a tradition is defined as a custom or belief that is passed down through the generations whether it is done time after time or year after year, it could be a number of things including a blessing, a verse, a meal, an experience, or craft. Traditions and celebrations are an opportunity to develop awareness and reverence in the cycles of nature and life. Reverence is the greatest protector of imagination because it allows our hearts and minds to open (Harwood, 2001). Therefore when we establish these experiences with regularity for growing children it encourages them to wonder and see beauty reflected in themselves and be able to create with ease.

In Waldorf Education there is the festival life that marks times of transition in the seasons and celebrations for the community to come together. Traditions hold meaning for us and traditions build community, the sense of a bond with one another. Traditions can create a sense of reverence, courage, and trust within a family unit and especially amongst children (Harwood, 2001). Every type of tradition helps to lay the foundation of a world that has beauty and is filled with goodness and gives children the tools to go out and create more of this. Traditions help children to feel anchored in the day, in the months, and of the year to help them to be able to look forward to them and also be able to have anchor points throughout their life to reflect back on what was going on for them at those times throughout their life. Traditions create rhythm and regularity further supporting a child's trust within themselves within the world and with the adults around them. Celebration is a key part of tradition. The joy that is grounded as the foundation of tradition creates a wellspring of opportunity to be taken into the rest of the day, the month, or the year. Traditions teach children that life is a series of celebrations, that it is a process of discovering and rediscovering joy within themselves and especially alongside others. Traditions create a sense of predictability within a child's life. In the Waldorf school system there is the festival life which creates rhythm and assists with guiding children with what they are experiencing within themselves and outside of themselves. Many of the celebrations of the Waldorf world have roots in pagan religious and non-religious practices however it is an effort to acknowledge the significant shifts throughout the calendar year (L. Lin MacArthur, personal communication, June 2020). From day to day, throughout the year, there are plenty of opportunities to create rhythm that nourishes the child's growth and development.

### ***Speech As a Tool***

“If you want to find the secrets of the universe,

think in terms of energy, frequency, and vibration.”

-Nikola Tesla

Another key tool for the guardians of childhood is a powerful one—it is the use of speech in connection with our imagination and gesture to speak into the world what we want to create; to use our voice as a tool for creating a specific vibration or frequency. We find evidence of this in many traditions and schools of thought. In the *Kybalion* (2019) is the Hermetic Principle of Vibration: “everything is in motion; everything vibrates; nothing is at rest” (p. 12 ). Summarizing from *Subtle Yoga: Building Resilience*, Kaoveri (2008) states that in yoga, the throat chakra is the bridge between the lower centers and higher centers of our beings. It is a creational center, for those who have control over their faculties to speak and make it so. Kaoveri continues:

...it also is the center through which we actualize our lives, our purpose for being here on this planet at this time in history. It is the bridge through which the body/mind delivers the self to the doorway of its highest potential. (para. 7)

Steiner brought particular attention to speech formation for children, as well as for teachers. In *Speech and Drama*, Steiner (1924/2007c) states that “[speech formation] is to be conscious of the very way one speaks, such as the way of letting out the sounds, the use of gesture, the way one relates to what one talks about” (p. 30). In a lecture originally given in 1919, Steiner shares in *The Genius of Language*, as quoted here from Okumoto’s (2019) *Enlivening thinking and speech in search of spiritual identity*:

The goal of speech formation is to have an access to this original power of language.

Such ultimate goal of speech formation is not explicit in Waldorf education; however, the whole practice of speech formation is to prepare students to have a body, heart and head

that are holistically developed, so that they can be conscious of and open to this subtlety of language. (para. 7)

Steiner (1924/2007) went on to relate inhaling as taking in the breath, as an earthly connection, and bridging it to the spiritual world, whereas exhaling spreads one's own breath; bringing the spiritual element into earth. This also corresponds to the anatomy of our speech faculties such as the tongue corresponding with the head and thinking capacity, the lips with the heart and feeling realm, and the palate with the lower body and willing.

In the Fall 2020 Waldorf inspired homeschooling cohort, we brought speech exercises first to the parents in the Parent Workshops, as they were embarking on being their child's teacher. These exercises were non-sensical phrases that Steiner gives meaning into the consonant relationships and vowel placements (Langman, 2014, p. 125). We also brought speech exercises to the students and witnessed over time their speech in everyday life grow more beautiful and purposeful.

One of the lessons I took from my Waldorf teacher training is that when you are telling a story, you see it all in front of you and speak it into existence. What I extrapolated from that lesson is how this too can be translated into giving a child directions and setting boundaries. In our homeschooling apprenticeship program, we combined an insight I gathered from my preparatory studies for the Waldorf teacher certificate program, which suggested a method for conducting child study meetings: to keep the child's Higher Self in mind and speaking to the child's Higher Self with the use of speech and imagination. An example from one parent illustrates the transformative power of speech as a result of intentionally using speech with imagination and practicing these exercises. One young student of ours, who was particularly defiant with his mom, shifted as she held the vision for him to listen once and follow

through—she spoke to him once, setting the boundary, he mildly fussed, she held the vision in silence, and he followed through. There was a lot of celebration after hearing her news and in the weeks following as his demeanor towards her evolved. Another instance was a middle school boy who was shutting down in school and after a couple of weeks working with us, he began to bloom into confidence. In speech training during the Waldorf masters program, Debbie Spitulnik shared from Steiner that when we speak, we are expressing or speaking from the I, from our Higher Self—the more skilled one is connected to their I the easier it is to speak (D. Spitulnik, personal communication, 2018). Especially as a child is facing the impulses of adolescence, it is crucial for a child to be connected to their Higher Self as a guiding compass and symptoms of that connection is the adolescent's speech and gestures of how they hold themselves. As Steiner articulates in *The Faithfulness Verse*:

Create for yourself a new indomitable perception of faithfulness. What is usually called faithfulness passes so quickly. Let this be your faithfulness: You will experience moments, fleeting moments, with the other person. The human being will appear to you then as if filled, irradiated, with the archetype of his/her spirit. And then there may be, indeed will be, other moments, long periods of time when human beings are darkened. At such times, you will learn to say to yourself, 'The spirit makes me strong. I remember the archetype. I saw it once. No illusion, no deception shall rob me of it.' Always struggle for the image that you saw. This struggle is faithfulness. Striving thus for faithfulness you shall be close to one another as if endowed with the protective powers of angels. (as cited in Utne, 2004)

## Methodology

Because the methodology for this project research relies on research questions, I open this section with reviewing what those research questions include, following these main questions: Can raising children, including taking on a robust role of guardianship for one's children's overall education and well-being, be just as nourishing for parents as it is for their children? How can a deeper engagement in education and raising children be a positive force in a family's life? Auxiliary questions include 1) How are parents supporting their children's education and overall wellbeing at home? 2) What changes have been forced upon them due to outside circumstances? 3) What changes have they chosen to make? And 4) What have they observed about themselves, their family life and their children in this process of change?

For the inquiries and investigations of this thesis, the primary method of research was long-form interviews with specific questions to guide the conversation to allow for the interview to reach depth and wisdom and include secondary conversation that might further inform this research. The questions for the interviews included:

- 1) What choices in your daily routine seem to best support your child's:
  - a) Social/emotional wellbeing
  - b) Self-esteem
  - c) Love of learning
  - d) Resilience
- 2) Have you noticed, throughout your child's life, a time when you needed to address or make a change in order to affect their self-esteem, social/emotional wellbeing, learning behaviors, love of learning?

- 3) What was the tipping point, from internal and/or external circumstances, towards making a change in your parenting and homelife?
- 4) What was your experience like as you made this transition?
  - a) Internal experience/process
  - b) Dynamic with children
- 5) How do you approach or avoid difficult situations? (This was a personal question, which they could opt out of)

These questions can also be found in the appendix (Appendix B) .

I conducted interviews with ten individuals, categorized into three areas: 1) Waldorf parents and teachers, 2) Waldorf-inspired parents and homeschoolers, and 3) non-Waldorf parents. The common thread throughout the interviewees were adults who valued their own personal growth and development, and offered an opportunity to distinguish and gather similarities and differences among the groups of Waldorf, Waldorf-inspired, to non-Waldorf parents and teachers. I did not want to interview only Waldorf parents and teachers, because I wanted to compare and contrast the language, practices, and approaches between Waldorf, Waldorf-inspired, and non-Waldorf parents. In having a variety in the interviewee population, I wanted to see where there was harmony across the board, where there was diversity, and what were some of the various drivers for each interviewee in how they approach their children or classroom.

Of the ten interviewees, two were new connections and were both Waldorf parents (group 1). From these two new connections, one was recommended to me to connect with, as a fellow masters student at Antioch University New England, and another I found through her Instagram page where she shares content to support parents with Waldorf methods. For the remaining eight



interviewees, I had already had conversations around education, parenting, and the future of education so when it came time to select interviewees, they were on the top of my list to revisit and dive deeper into conversation.

Table 2

*Interviewee participant identifiers and relationship to interviewer*

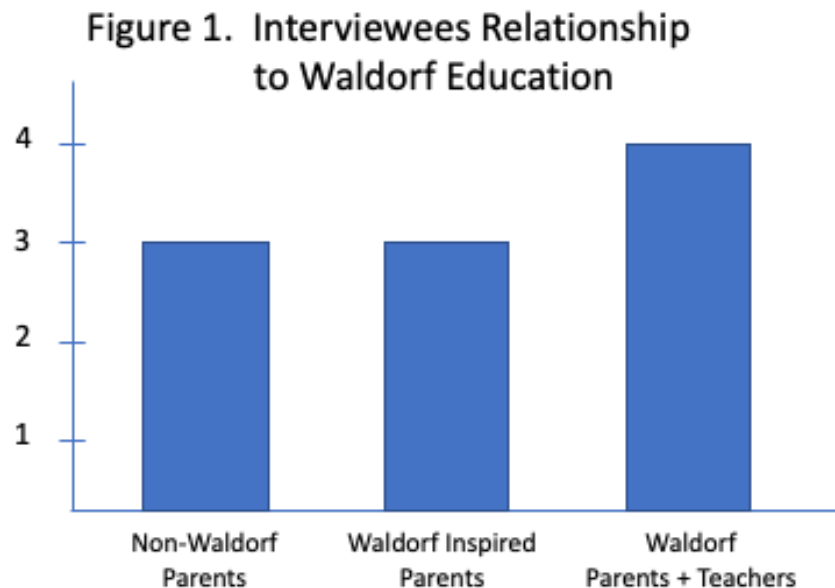
Participant	Waldorf Affiliation	Relationship and Connection
Participant 1	Waldorf parent & teacher	Cooperating teacher from my Waldorf internship
Participant 2	Waldorf parent & teacher	Classmate in AUNE Waldorf Certificate Program
Participant 3	Waldorf parent & teacher	New contact
Participant 4	Waldorf parent & teacher	New contact
Participant 5	Waldorf-inspired parent	Waldorf Homeschooling Cohort/Modern Mystery School
Participant 6	Waldorf-inspired parent	One of the people who first introduced me to Waldorf Education
Participant 7	Waldorf-inspired parent	Waldorf Homeschooling Cohort/Modern Mystery School
Participant 8	Non-Waldorf parent	Modern Mystery School
Participant 9	Non-Waldorf parent	Modern Mystery School
Participant 10	Non-Waldorf parent	Modern Mystery School

As you can see from the table above, I am intentionally exploring a community conversation around sustainable education and parenting practices which led into my interview

questions. This research project respects the involvement and engagement of community, as community is where we get our information from.

I initially reached out to each interviewee over text, Facebook messaging, Instagram messaging, or over email to gauge their interest in participating in my research for this project, sharing the scope of this project, and inquired about their availability. Every person I asked was enthusiastic in their response to participate. Following that, I emailed each interviewee with a letter of consent and the interview questions at least 48 hours in advance so they could review both documents before our conversation. Each interviewee emailed me a response confirming their consent to participate in the interview, to me taking notes, and to the interview being recorded for this project’s research purposes; this email response served as their electronic signature. With a larger scope, I would not have been able to investigate on the scale that seems crucial here, even though there were five others I wanted to interview, and probably more.

The figures below summarizes the interviewees’ relationship to Waldorf education, practices, and methodology:



Each one-on-one interview was between 45-90 minutes over Zoom. I chose the longer 90 minute format interviews with only a small number of people so I could look at the data at a fine grain scale; with a limited number of them I could look deeply into each one and avoid the truncated narrative that could distort the interviewees voice, by allowing for details to come out that gave more meaning to the discussion as opposed to have more interviews at a shorter amount of time. The interviews happened during the week in the morning or afternoon with the questions being the same across all categories of parents as a control. Interviewing people I already had experience with was important to highlight the depth of sharing, and the familiarity that allowed for sharing in an authentic way.

Within each of the interviews, I would often find that the conversation that organically arose led us down the path of answering the questions I had already prepared. In conversation, I allowed the interviewee to take the lead, with some discussion back and forth. The format was open ended with the guiding questions, to allow the interviewee to share as they were drawn to. At the conclusion of many of the interviews, there was an exchange of gratitude for time, wisdom shared, and many interviewees wanted to know where this was going to lead in the future, from this project to beyond this project.

The secondary method of research was in the analyzing of those interviews. Once interviews were completed I had notes that I typed while interviewing, and recordings from Zoom for a written transcript as well as the audio file. I downloaded the transcripts from Zoom and uploaded them to Otter.ai, (<https://otter.ai/>) which also included the audio recording within the same file in order to hear and read the interviews. In finding crucial quotes throughout each interview, I created a summative document with each interviewee's name as a heading, then gave subheadings under each interviewee's name to categorize the quotes by themes. While some of

the individual interviews had upwards of fourteen themes, in my analysis, I discovered twenty-two thematic patterns that showed up across the interviews; however, I focused on six of these thematic patterns in the Results & Findings below.

## **Results & Findings**

From the interview responses, I coded each of these interviews according to these six themes that my literature review also works with: 1) Education 2) Homelife and Love of Learning 3) Phases of Child Development 4) The Four Temperaments 5) A Nurturing Environment through Rhythm or Speech and finally 6) Personal Practices or Guiding Principles in parenting and life.

### **Interview Takeaways**

As I open up the results and findings from the topics of education across these interviewees, it was a common theme that this interview process focuses on recognizing the whole child and the fullness of the adult's role in caretaking and that ultimately holistic view of the child is both unique to Waldorf or Waldorf-inspired discourse and is necessary in conversations amongst parents and teachers moving forward. Before proceeding, below is Figure 2 and Figure 3, displaying the interviewees careers and demographics, where half of the participants were trained educators, and the other half spread across a variety of career backgrounds. It is noteworthy that the cumulative years of educator experience across these participants is 60 years. In terms of demographics, out of ten interviewees, nine were women and one was a man; as for relationship status, eight of the ten were married and remaining two were single parents.

**Figure 2. Interviewee Careers**

<u>Count</u>	<u>Careers</u>
5	Educators *
1	Energy Healers
1	Massage Therapist
1	Doula
1	Engineer
1	Therapist

\* Over 60 years cumulative Teaching Experience

**Figure 3. Interviewee Demographics**

<u>Count</u>	<u>Demographic</u>
9	Women
1	Man
8	Married
2	Single Parent

One participant reflected on the unusual nature of the conversation we had; that it could not even occur in some settings because of the innately spiritual quality of childhood, parenting, and education:

*Think about how a conversation like this [between us in this interview] could not happen in a lot of school settings. One of the things I was thinking about [when reading] your questions, [is that] there has to be an understanding right from the get go: that things are not necessarily what they appear to be, [and that] there's a spiritual component...that there's an inner component that we don't necessarily fully understand or recognize, but that we can strive to understand or recognize. (Waldorf, Participant 1, J.K.)*

It was a treasure to hear from one of the participants about the value of this conversation, which was a common thread amongst the participants as a whole that this conversation needs to continue beyond the scope of this project. In each section of this analysis below, I look at the

responses in the three categories: Waldorf parents and teachers first, Waldorf-Inspired parents second, and finally Non-Waldorf parents.

### ***Desire for Children's Education***

In this section, the Waldorf participants share their experiences in discovering Waldorf Education as well as facilitating that discovery for parents. Participant 1 spoke about how her introduction to a way of looking at children's behavior through Waldorf education was "*totally new*" to her and when she listened to what the Waldorf teachers had to say about her own children, she said, "*I thought, 'Wow, I want to know what they know.'*" Participant 1 also spoke to the reaction of parents when they walk into a Waldorf School for the first time, that they often respond with

*Oh my God, I've been thinking these things all along. I didn't know there was a school. [Whereas] children who come and visit say, 'Is this really a school? [Do] you do this every day? And listen to stories'?*

Like many other Waldorf participants, Participant 6, a Waldorf-inspired homeschooling parent, spoke to the immediate and visceral feel of what Waldorf education and spaces provide: "*That's something that I've noticed as soon as I walk into a Waldorf school: there's this gentleness, nurturing childhood. It's visually the place, it's the energy in the room, it's just the toys, [it's] everything.*" (Participant 6, D.M.)

Participant 9, a non-Waldorf participant, shared her and her husband's pursuit in finding a daycare with loving Latina women who became like Aunt's to her children; she was looking for specificity in the depth of care for her children to feel from their teachers while they were young. This same participant, Participant 9, mentioned moving to a certain neighborhood because of the local magnet school that met the caliber of education and innovation in education that she

wanted for her children. While she is interested in Waldorf education, and Steiner's philosophy, there is not a Waldorf school near her.

**Parents Reflect on their own Education and Childhood.** Participant 1 went on to share that Waldorf Education is nourishing for the child and the parent, and this participation in Waldorf education provides self-reflection about one's own childhood: "*Oh, I wish I had had this.*" (Participant 1, J.K.)

This kind of reflection on one's own childhood education came up in the interview with Participant 4, Waldorf parent and teacher, who had left behind a school system in Nigeria, which she recognized was unhealthy. Upon the birth of her son, in the United States, she confirmed her desire for a different type of education and eventually discovered a Parent and Child group at a local Waldorf School. In the interview, Participant 4, said:

*When I had children, with my son being my first, I really wanted to give him something different, because I knew what I had was not what I wanted for [him].*

**Making a Commitment to a Different Kind of Education.** Participant 4 spoke to the challenges of the desire for a kind of education for one's child and the financial realities that make the situations difficult. Participant 4 spoke about early on rejecting the plan to go back to work and find childcare, and also the desire for a certain kind of education. The desire to provide this kind of childhood experience and education for one's child is central to many Waldorf parents. Participant 4 continued in the interview:

*And then a week after [my son] was born, I'm telling my husband, 'I can't, I just can't [go back to work].' And he said, 'Well, we only saved money for six months.' And I said, 'I just can't.' I'd look at my son. [My son] was like, 'No.'*

***Listening to the Child.*** Just as Participant 1 spoke to a sense of knowing when she finally walked into a Waldorf school, Participant 4 spoke to a knowing that is in the child: “*Babies know what they want. And they tell us.*” Again, this kind of knowing is important, as it shows up in knowing oneself consciously and expressing this knowledge in how one can choose what is right for one’s child. Participant 4 explained the path to choice: “*Look what exists. And I have this ability to choose this [Waldorf education]. I can choose this for my family, I don't know if I can afford it. But I'm choosing it.*”

***Rejecting a Path of Disengagement.*** The other side of feeling the power of choosing is the disempowerment that some participants recognized in those parents around them. Participant 5, a Waldorf-inspired parent, spoke to the kind of school system where parents are disengaged: “*I think a lot of people drop their kids off. And they're like, ‘Okay, those adults are going to take care of it. My job is done until I have to pick them up.’*” She continued with the contrast of her own desire for her children’s education and the community as a whole:

*I'm like, ‘Nope, let me sit in the classroom and observe it. Let me tell you what my observations are. Let me tell you what my children are telling me. Let me ask my children what's going on in the class? Let me put pieces together. Let me talk to other parents,’ but apparently most people don't do that.*

For Participant 5, this desire exists in a commitment to volunteering and community development in order to create the educational experience that she is cultivating. “*[My wife and I] have decided we are going to volunteer for every opportunity that we are available to volunteer for; we are going to build these relationships.*”

***The Choice to Homeschool.*** For the Waldorf-inspired participants, there was also a stated desire to find something out of the mainstream that would carry into and make an impression in



the home life. For Participant 6, there was an entry into and a profound recognition of looking for something, and finding it. In her interview, Participant 6 spoke about when the family first started homeschooling for their daughter after having been at school full time in early childhood:

*So I was looking for something for me to kind of step down into. And somebody had told me about [Waldorf education] in the homeschooling community. And so I went and checked it out and just loved [it]. I mean, I loved it for me. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

This homeschooling experience was taking place in a local Waldorf-inspired group, and Participant 6 spoke to her exploration of Steiner's work, in the need to not just sample but to immerse oneself in it:

*And so I put all these things on hold at the library—Steiner books on hold. I went to pick them up, and my mom was with me, and she started thumbing through [the Steiner books]. And she's like, 'Oh, what is this? Oh, I think we have to read it all. I [don't] think we [can] do a little sampling of it. It's a whole thing. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

As Participant 6 continued with homeschooling her children, there was a year where her children chose the primary focus and every subject tied into that focus (The Beatles). This kind of immersion in learning, which rejects the fragmented view of the child that is common in many mainstream educational systems, is powerful for this participant. In the interview, Participant 6 said:

*There's something so beautiful about being able to immerse yourself and to commit to something. Because there's so much of this surface level, like knowing the facts, but what's below that and for [the kids] to push, to dive into something deeper [is beautiful]. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

Similar to Participant 4 and the struggle within the family to enact choices financially, there were other roadblocks to struggle with for Participant 6 and her family. “[My husband] did not believe in homeschooling at all and was very vocal about [it]. He was very worried about socialization and everything with our kids, which is kind of crazy [in hindsight].”

Negotiating in a family to follow the desire for a certain kind of education showed up as an experiment in this family. Participant 6 explained that her husband agreed to one year of Waldorf-inspired homeschooling. “And so we did it for one year, and I loved it. The kids loved it. And people were coming up to him saying that your kids are great. You know, he was getting a lot of academics saying, ‘Wow, your kids are smart.’” Participant 6 relayed that her husband would respond with, “Yes,” and that “The kids were really happy.” (Participant 6, D.M.)

**COVID-19 as an Opportunity for Educational Choice.** For Participant 7, another Waldorf-inspired homeschooling parent, the desire for a certain type of education and homelife experience came from the struggles and difficulties of working with COVID-19. Her response to what she observed was going on within her children, academically and emotionally, led her to an empowering journey for her children and family: “it was an empowering journey because I got to have the responsibility of my child's well being put back on my shoulders [and] to get to know them again.” (Participant 7, R.M.) She attributed the decision to do Waldorf-inspired Homeschooling, as an opportunity to recreate the foundation and return to her initial vision that she’s always carried as a mother: “I’ve always had this vision [and] hope that my children would be raised to be these well rounded human beings. I didn't really know how to get us there.”

The disengagement of mainstream schooling as it separates a parent from their child/children was observed and noted in the interview with Participant 7, much as it showed up for Participant 5. Common Core State Standards, for example, in the public schools left the

parents unable to help their children, according to Participant 7, resulting in family unit separation:

*So the school is like don't even help them with their homework. So like that was the way to still connect with your child when they come home. [Eat] dinner, [then] you help them with their homework, you get ready for bed, you talk about the day, and then all of a sudden, it's like, 'Nope, don't help them with anything. If they need help, they can come back to us.' So literally, we were paying for the roof over their head and sending them off to be raised by somebody else. (Participant 7, R.M.)*

The tipping point for Participant 7 was when COVID-19 began and her children were sent home to finish the school year on Zoom. She said: “*When COVID happened and everyone went home and had to do Zoom, and isolation, and all this other stuff, both my kids for different reasons just tanked.*” After school concluded in June 2020, she wanted to homeschool her children for the following school year, particularly Waldorf-inspired homeschooling:

*[Waldorf-inspired] homeschooling gave [us] an opportunity to shatter the foundation that we had started with and build a new one; to fill in the holes, identify where there were weaknesses and strengths and [navigate] how to bring solutions to the problems.*

One of the questions that Participant 7 had as she decided to do homeschooling, was that her son was already beyond her capacity in math. In knowing herself and her capacity she got clarity on her role as parent and guardian of her children, that it isn't a parent's job to fulfill all of their children's needs; rather it is a parent's job “*to advocate and be able to recognize where they need more, and know how to help them find that.*” As Participant 7 returned to her initial vision for her children's education and home life, she began reflecting on her children and the task of raising children in a more holistic sense:

*When we're raising kids, we're not just helping them find what their full potential is academically, or in the community, but also within themselves. I feel [that finding your full potential] within yourself has to come first before any[thing] else.*

One of the non-Waldorf parents, Participant 9, spoke to her educational philosophy for her children and her family, and the process of calling in the experts to support her and her husband:

*I think it takes a community to raise a child, I definitely know that. So [it is important] to have experts, just like I want to go to an expert for my physical health, for my exercise, for my nutrition; why not have a team help? Ultimately, it's up to me, and I know our children the best, [my husband] and I do, but certainly having people with credentials and experience is helpful.*

This is an example of a collaborative relationship between parent and educational experts, where parents have the authority to say what is best for their child; however, experts have the experience in their field to advise along the way.

***Parents Encountering Waldorf Education for the First Time.*** From the perspective of how adults approach Waldorf Education for the first time, Participant 1 explained that she often finds herself sharing with other non-Waldorf parents that there is one teacher who carries the class from grades one through eight to which these non-Waldorf parents often reply with ‘*What if you don't like the teacher?*’ Participant 1, in the interview, explained that her experience with Waldorf is based on a belief in process and transformation, which relies on a kind of teacher that Waldorf education supports. She said:

*We believe in process, we believe that people are capable of transformation for the good. The parents are capable, the child is, that's where it starts. So in order to be the most*

*effective teacher, you become a different kind of representation of humanity.* (Participant 1, J.K.)

Participant 1 also spoke to a ‘child centered world’ and the ability of Waldorf teachers to see into that world:

*When you talk about a child centered world, you have to understand where the child is coming from. I was inspired by these teachers being able to see into that world.*

(Participant 1, J.K.)

Going further with how adults reflect on how their children experience Waldorf-inspired education, Participant 7, a Waldorf-inspired parent, spoke about observing her seventh grade son, who, when he was in public schools, was shutting down to the world and only wanting to do academic work that he was good at and was avoiding other parts of school and home life. His attitude was worsening until he began the Waldorf-inspired homeschooling in Fall 2020, and this allowed him room for transformation. This challenge and opportunity came with the experience of facing one’s weaknesses and safely going into places where one may not be comfortable. It was the relationship with teachers or mentors that for this parent allowed her child to blossom:

*Waldorf took him out of his comfort zone, and introduced him to something different.*

*Waldorf educators pushed him because he wasn't comfortable in movement, he wasn't comfortable in speaking and pronunciation. He wasn't comfortable in coordination—in a way, he still has room for growth—but it was like an introduction to here's how your life is going to be; you're not going to get comfortable [and only stay] in your safety zone.*

(Participant 7, R.M.)

### ***Home Life & Love of Learning***

The next part of this results and findings section is a focus on home life as the foundation and extension of a child's education, inclusive of the parent/s. Home life, for the purposes of this discussion, includes love of learning as a primary part of the experience of many of the participants; I also consider in this section on home life some of the important effects of Covid-19, as a major impact on families in these times.

**Being Attentive While Following the Child's Curiosity.** For Waldorf participants, love of learning is cultivated in the world of the home, and in the relationships thereof. Participant 1 spoke to how love is modeled through the parent for the child as a process of the act of love and loving life, as Participant 1 shares: "*The act of loving is the action of being attentive. So it's about focus*" (Participant 1, J.K.). She goes on to share that love of learning is modeled love, by the parent for the child, and she received advice when her children were young:

*to always have a book by the side of the bed, and then I learned later as a parent to continue to read aloud to your children, even after they can read to themselves, because you're sharing a lot more than the story when you do that.* (Participant 1, J.K.)

Similarly, Participant 2, a Waldorf Parent and Teacher, shared how she and her husband are present with their young children when the children play and how they follow their children's learning interests while not engaging them intellectually too early, without a lot of teaching while following their children's curiosity. Participant 2 spoke about a meaningful quote from Jean Piaget, and how it integrates with their parenting:

*I love this quote by Piaget, that says 'Be careful what you teach, because it might interrupt what they're learning.' [It's about] providing some experiences and being present with them, and allowing them to have full control over their learning at this point, and their play.* (Participant 2, H.M.)

Participant 3, a Waldorf parent and teacher, also shared about the impression that adults make on young children, and more specifically what young children yearn to see from adults around them. Participant 3 responded that she thinks that love of learning is a process of observing and modeling:

*It's watching the person that she [the child] loves and modeling herself to work joyfully. She imitates joyful, purposeful work, and I do a lot of handwork, so she is always seeing me working with my hands. (Participant 3, J.B.)*

Participant 3 also shared as an example how she approached her daughter's curiosity about the alphabet and reading by the time she was five years old, and how even going slowly in her daughter's learning was an important shift for her, the parent's, consciousness: *"I kept her off of academics for so long that she started asking before her fifth birthday. I went gently, showing her the alphabet, but not sounding out or only really slowly reading"* (Participant 3, J.B.).

This process allowed Participant 3 to recognize how teaching a child can teach the parent, and then the parent can, iteratively, respond to this dynamic:

*It turns out that when you don't push it, once they're ready, they're ready, and now that she can read these weird symbols that are written on signs all over, she's been initiated into this other level of consciousness to love of learning. (Participant 3, J.B.)*

Home life is also essential to the Waldorf-inspired participants, as they were especially tied to the home in their homeschooling. A poignant response from Participant 6 included the deep embodiment of both parent and child, more specifically mother and child. Here, Participant 6 included giving birth and nursing as part of the trusting relationship that takes place in the home:

*I can't emphasize the trust in the child enough. I trusted my child to come out of my body, I trusted my child to know how to latch on and nurse, but somehow, when we get into the school years, we start to just [say] 'We're adults, and we have to tell you what you need to know.' And so that's the only thing on my [chest] is trust the child now, because I have to do it every day. And even when I look at [what my child is interested in] and ask, 'Where is that going?' I wait and see where it goes, and that's my job. I trust the child in this space. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

**Engaging Children in Household Tasks.** An aspect of everyday home life is the daily tasks or as Participant 4, a Waldorf parent and teacher, calls them, “household tasks” rather than chores. She describes the value of bringing children into these tasks alongside you, at the child’s capability. Participant 4 specifically points out the importance of not nit-picking a child as they do such tasks, because the quality that is being fostered here is not perfection but joy in the task itself. She also spoke to the balance of play and work in home life, and that it is essential to have plenty of play. She mentions that Steiner speaks to when a child is at play, they reconnect to their spirit self and their greater purpose for this life. There is, then, at home, the opportunity, as Participant 4 spoke:

*To participate in the tasks of the home. I want to avoid the word chores because chore makes it seem like a hardship. I've been referring to them lately as household tasks. So [household tasks] support that sense of confidence. (Participant 4, C. K.)*

Participant 9 also echoed the point that Participant 4 raised around connecting through household tasks; here, Participant 9 calls them mundane tasks. For her, these tasks work to hold relationships together in a complicated home life, where work schedules interrupt time with



family and children. There becomes an emphasis on the kind of time that they experience in the home, with an emphasis on being engaged, active, imaginative:

*And so with that [complicated] schedule, what we've started to do is figure out ways that we're engaging [together], and making sure that when we're on, we're on, and we're all in and that we don't have those distractions, and we can really bring out day to day things like cooking together, [or] even doing laundry together, but turning it into a way to connect the whole adventure. It's not just completely zoning out and doing this, but it's finding ways [to have fun], even for the mundane tasks. (Participant 9, S.S.)*

**The Gift of Free Play and Time to Digest.** For Participant 4, there is a natural sense of balance between play and other learning. This comes up specifically around her critique of enrichment classes, outside of the home. For Participant 4, the love of learning starts with play in a way that happens without a child being directed to play:

*I would say to parents that would come to me with a question of wanting to sign their child up for this class or after school [program]. In their minds they are thinking 'I can sign my child up for these enrichment classes.' Well, what [too many enrichment classes] does is awful. (Participant 4, C.K. )*

Participant 4 also recognized and shared her ideas around the whole child, taking in and resting, breathing and digesting what has occurred. This is a crucial part of home. Participant 4 asks the question:

*And then when does the child get time to digest? There has to be that time of being able to engage and then that time to just rest in and digest. It's like that in breathing out breathing. And I do believe that the love of learning initially comes through the opportunity to just have [time for this process]. (Participant 4, C.K.)*

**Reading Together as an Opportunity to Connect.** For Participant 10, a non-Waldorf parent, home life was inclusive of many things, but specifically centered around reading. This practice brought closeness and experience into the relationship between parent and child, and continued from infancy to school age, fitting into the crevices of time that a single mom could find in their home together. I include this section to honor the voice here that contains both joy and sadness in the situation that home life exists in:

*I have read to him since he was fresh in swaddling clothes. We always read so we would just devour books upon books. And that was part of my joy because that's the kind of kid that I was. I chowed down on every book I could get my hands on. The fatter the better, for every reason and I really wanted that for him. I really wanted him to have the experience of different worlds and different voices and all that and just also the way it primes our mind.*

*At first it was this thing that I could put on Harry Potter so that I could cook dinner. Single Mommy. I think we started the audio book thing where it occurred to me like, 'Oh, my God, this is the thing we could do together.' When he was six we read together every night anyway. And then, by the time he was coming home from school and being in aftercare it would be five or six o'clock by the time we got home, and I would need to make dinner, and I would want to be engaged with him, but have to do whatever [is needed]. (Participant 10, S.D.)*

Participant 9, another non-Waldorf Parent, also spoke to the significance of books in her home life, as a playful and joyful way to explore together, between a parent and her strong-willed child. The books become a way to focus attention from parent to child, which her child loves:

*So we have a book with the alphabet for how to spell his name, so you can see it, and then we have the repetition of reading it, and then we can point to it. So he gets all the attention, he loves it. So if you're just focused just on him, and then you can weave in what he loves, like dance, movement, singing, art, and then we make it playful, [by] paying attention and exploring his senses. (Participant 9, S.S.)*

### ***The Vast Impact of COVID on Parenting***

Half of the interviews moved into the topic of COVID-19, from how it affected their family, their community, to their children. Participant 2, a Waldorf parent and teacher, spoke to how COVID-19 brought to light the importance of community and how that greater community connection couldn't happen, so with children at home, *"Parents, your role is really crucial"* (Participant 2, H.M.).

**A Worldwide Pandemic as Impetus to Reframe Parenting.** Waldorf-inspired homeschooling parent Participant 6, shared about reading an opinion piece about how awful it is that so many women left the workforce. However, she felt that,

*Maybe they're finding something, maybe they're finding something that feeds them. Lucky them that they got this ultimate snow day to figure it out, to sit with that and sort it out for themselves. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

For Participant 7, another Waldorf-inspired homeschooling parent, she considered COVID-19 to be a positive event for her and her family, not immediately but in the long run:

*COVID was a blessing for our family. And I will say that to the day that I die. Is it a blessing for the world? Maybe also, I don't know but [for] my family, it was a blessing. It pushed us to a point where it was [obvious if] we don't make these changes; where we all*

*go [is] where these kids end up [and] it wasn't good enough for me. They deserve better.*

(Participant 7, R.M.)

Participant 7 was already dissatisfied with the schools her children were attending, with what was happening: “*I just needed an excuse. COVID was that excuse.*” In fact, COVID-19 created the opportunity for her to go to her ex-husband and children’s father in order to,

*Present him with the [education] alternative [as well as present their current school situation and] be like, is this really how you want your kids to be taught? And he said no. And then he said he didn't want anything to do with it because he didn't have the energy. And I was like, Thank you. (Participant 7, R.M.)*

***Pause to Ask the Questions.*** With Participant 7 she was finally able to take the reins on her children’s education and lead the way. She noted multiple questions she began to ask for herself personally, which rippled out into taking action for her children and her family:

*There was a lot of internal processing of like, ‘What's best? Where [do] we go from here?’ A lot of unknowns, a lot of, ‘Okay, what do I need? Who can help me?’ That's where you [Katlyn] came in. ‘Who can help me school these children because this is a huge undertaking.’*

***Overcoming Fear and Empowering Oneself into Action.*** Once Participant 7 engaged the courage and resources, she began a process of overcoming her fears for change that began with herself: “*And then there was the ‘Oh, I have to face my[self] in this process.’ So my excuses for not showing up for life had to be removed, because if I didn't, then I wasn't going to do [my children] any justice.*”

Participant 7 continued:

*COVID literally changed our entire family, our dynamic. It brought us back together again. [It] gave us an opportunity for all this [positive change]. I mean, we did the work, right. We showed up for it. Had we stayed where we were, I would be so much more fearful. And instead I'm like, 'Alright, we're gonna just keep moving. We'll just keep responding. We're gonna just keep figuring this out, versus completely disempowered.' I can understand how people are disempowered and scared and fearful of getting behind masks and vaccines and mandates. If they didn't shift and pivot and change and figure out what is there, to even ask the question, is there a better way? I can totally understand why there's such fear and crippling inactions. You know, if that's how they chose to respond. (Participant 7, R.M.)*

This shares the value of asking questions and taking appropriate action, and how the universe will unfold to support you, even amidst a worldwide pandemic that no one knew how to handle.

**Covid Compounded the Stress of Parenting.** For Participant 10, a non-waldorf Parent and single mom, COVID-19 came at the crest of her own parenting fatigue:

*Nobody knew how to actually parent. Nobody knew, because that's not what we specialize in and we don't specialize in child development. Our society is so diverse, like specialized, we all have our thing. We send our kids to the kids specialists and we go off and do our specialty. (Participant 10, S.D.)*

This is the second time a non-waldorf parent mentioned an expertise in teachers that is not innate within themselves as parents. Participant 10 continued sharing her observations of the multiple aspects in education and her own child's learning that came up during the pandemic:

*When you need to make changes, especially for learning, it is really interesting to observe. Because it was all just an experiment, which was super cool. Like, how cool that*

*we got to do that. What was really interesting to see was the combination of the pandemic stuff, the schooling, videos, whatever, it really had an effect on his curiosity. Like, his latent ability to be like, 'Oh, what if?' That was a big thing that kind of fell asleep, through that process because we were seeing this kind of deadening effect on him. In terms of his curiosity, his drive to learn anything. (Participant 10, S.D.)*

**The Effects of Timely Change for Children.** In further conversation with Participant 7, she shared that while her mother was unsure of Participant 7's choices during COVID-19, her mother has a friend who is currently doing observational research on the after effects of school approaches to COVID-19 on children, and what her friend is finding is that while a child may have been a third grader prior to COVID-19, while the child may be an academic fifth grader in every other regard the child has not grown- socially, emotionally, or mentally. Participant 7's mother contrasted this experience with her grandchildren who participated in the Waldorf-inspired homeschooling with me in Fall 2020. Her grandchildren, Participant 7's children, have not only academically grown but have flourished into thriving individuals who authentically communicate, face their fears as challenges, and actively participate in the family as a unit.

### **Internal/External Process of Parenting**

The Results and Findings section began with education and what happens outside of the home, followed by Home Life and how education begins and returns to home. In this section, the focus moves further inward to look at how parents and teachers develop, as well as become aware of the obstacles within themselves to either create the space and capacity to be present and balanced or not, in order to better serve children and occupy the role of guardian—a role that will be explored in the coming section. A comment from Participant 8, a non-Waldorf parent and the

only father interviewed, shared that this conversation about education and parenting led him to become re-inspired as a parent: *“This [interview] rekindles my passion and my love of parenting of children, because [children are] very special, and they are the future. They are everything.”*

(Participant 8, D.A.)

### ***The Challenges of the Internal Process***

For Participant 1, in the Waldorf group, this development within herself to look inward is a difficult process, and she recognizes the sense of responsibility that she has to her children that inspires her to do the difficult work. Participant 1 spoke to this difficulty:

*It's much easier to work with somebody else's messes than it is with yours. So I would say that my sense of responsibility toward children inspires me to not run away, but to try to be my best self, which is what I'm always asking of them and always looking for in them. I'm not so good at looking [inward at] myself, [from] the idea of self love and self appreciation and self care and all those self focus things.* (Participant 1, J.K.)

Where we are able to show up well may be challenged in the family, as Participant 1 speaks to, and recognizing that pattern or shortcoming may be a way to work towards development. Participant 1 shared how she was her best self with the children that she taught because she felt the immediacy of that responsibility. In contrast, she shared: *“I give my family my worst, I think we all do actually. We just let it all down and why and how family has been relegated to that, why they have to take that in and still stick by you”* (Participant 1, J.K.).

Similar to Participant 1, Participant 7, a Waldorf-inspired parent, takes the time to be ready in order to take action. She shared that she avoids things until she is ready, and won't be pushed until then, and she also marks that point of delayed readiness in her own process that

could be her thinking she can't handle something, rather that it's actually fear. Participant 7 continued on to share:

*In order for me to really be able to fully show up for my kids, I've had to face stuff that I didn't realize was an issue or didn't want to look at. [I had] to look at myself deeper. And there's so much truth to that [teaching]; My world has completely changed around me because I committed to changing myself and facing my stuff. [From] my kids, [to] my relationship with my husband, everything has shifted and changed. Everything's different. Everything's better. And getting better. And it doesn't mean that there's not still room for improvement. (Participant 7, R.M.)*

Participant 8, a Non-Waldorf parent and the only father interviewed, shared his reflections on his own patterns and how they would show up in his adult years and with his children. For Participant 8, as he realized his own tendencies, he recognized that there was trauma there from when he was younger, that manifested as an adult and in his parenting: “*And I realized that it made me act in certain ways towards my kids, that without that trauma or that past experience, I probably would have never done [these specific reactions]*” (Participant 8, D.A.).

Participant 8 explained how he understood this kind of learning through experiences, how life allows us to learn and move through what we have blocked off to be better parents:

*And as [my children] learned to be themselves, seeing that some of the stuff I went through had blocked me off from teaching them and being a better father and being a better parent or better teacher, and as I healed [from the trauma], as I progressed, they helped me heal what was going on inside. So, it's a two way street. (Participant 8, D.A.)*



Participant 8 continued on to share his understanding in how uncomplicated children are, and that what complicates things are adults and what adults allow to get in their own way of experiencing life, and being a guardian for children:

*At the end of the day it came down to me taking care of myself, so that way I could be there for [my children] as a father, as a parent, as a teacher, whatever else I needed to be for them. That falls into going to therapy, going to different forms of self improvement, you know, Life Activation, meditation. They were huge for me in developing myself to be better at being more responsive and responsible when it came to growing with my child, and helping my child grow. It was really all on my plate. Or all within myself, I should say. (Participant 8, D.A.)*

For Participant 9, a non-Waldorf parent, her process included specific focus on processing the grief that she felt around the type of schedule her family would have, and how to recreate her expectation so her children could flourish within their atypical schedule. For Participant 9, the recognition that she was not doing anything wrong was crucial, in reconciling her parenting style and lifestyle. Participant 9 said it was important to, additionally, ask:

*What am I doing, right? Like, I'm totally parenting outside of the box, and how is that going to help them and so what comes along with it is that we don't have a conventional schedule. And so I [have] had to work through that. (Participant 9, S.S.)*

### ***Internal Process Amidst Crisis***

Participant 2, another Waldorf parent, spoke to not realizing that she needed help during the intensity and crisis of Covid-19, and that the process of recognizing where she had been and where she ended up was an important part of her own process. She shared, “*I wasn't able to*

*internalize things until I was through it. [Once the] intensity [of Covid] was over, I think that's just realizing that [I was able to] give myself grace” (Participant 2, H.M.).*

### ***Modeling Internal Processing for Children***

Another Waldorf participant, Participant 4, shared that a personal practice was fundamental in dealing with difficult situations, specifically in taking the time to work through instead of rush into action. Included in this practice of taking time is to reflect out loud, and share the process with herself and with her children and then take some action towards the work of transforming the difficulties that she and her children experienced:

*I found that to be very helpful, reflecting out loud saying ‘things happen for a reason, we're in a difficult situation.’ I often hear [my children] saying that a lot now, too, [that], things happen for a reason. So, you know, maybe we'll know the reason at one point, maybe we [won't], but things do happen for a reason. So now how do we take steps to work out of this difficult situation. (Participant 4, C.K.)*

Seeing one's practice reflected in one's children was a positive and affirming experience for Participant 4, as she observes her three children take time to reflect, to move slowly, to get different perspectives from different people. She shared that seeing this in her children “*was something that I wanted, I felt like that was one of my approaches.*” (Participant 4, C.K.)

### ***Gathering Evidence from the Actions of Others***

This recognition in her children allowed Participant 4 to continue to reflect on her own practices more deeply to continue to take time and think and then to share with others. For Participant 5, a Waldorf-inspired participant, a similar kind of recognition of other people's behaviors gives access to her own approach and practice. She shared:

*I've watched people [and] how other people have approached things, and I either like that, or I don't, so I don't want to be like that. Okay. I approach things very matter of factly. I gather the evidence, I report the evidence, I share my reaction to the evidence, and then I put out there what needs to happen, either my desire of what needs to happen, or what I'm going to do to change. (Participant 5, J.E.)*

Participant 5, a Waldorf-inspired parent, also spoke profoundly on how this practice comes from her desire to do right by her children. She shared, “*That's where I get my courage*” (Participant 5, J.E.).

Like Participant 5, Participant 6, a Waldorf-inspired parent, spoke about coming from a place of observing other people in their parenting and how it clarified her own practices with her children, in particular other parents’ refusal to change no matter what was happening with their children.

*I've seen some parents like that, and I've seen what happens with them [and] their kids, and we've been a haven for some of those kids, who say, 'It's nice to be here, because it's hard over there.' I would say that would be a tipping point, sensing that something could really break. (Participant 6, D.M.)*

Participant 6 shared her sense of danger and harm that can show up in relationship with your children, that there is a kind of power a parent has that can cause damage, resulting in a child that is “*damaged and untethered. Unmoored out there*” (Participant 6, D.M.). There is a commitment that comes from that recognition of potential harm that allows Participant 6 to be careful, to look for “*tipping points, [as in] starting to read the room or take the temperature and be like, 'Oh, this is one of those places, where as a parent, you can break something, 'and [instead] backing off*” (Participant 6, D.M.)

### ***The Desire for Safety and Living Without Fear***

Along with her desire to do right by her children, Participant 5 acknowledges that at the foundational level safety needs to be considered. She goes on to share that:

*We needed to feel safe, they needed to feel safe, and they're going to pick up on how we're feeling. If I can't see you, I can't keep you safe. That's a very practical way of helping them to hold on to their own responsibility and the piece of it. (Participant 5, J.E.)*

The self-knowledge that comes through a practice enacted internally and externally can be a profound tool for confronting fear, in oneself and for others. Participant 5 spoke to a path of self-knowledge:

*My initial reaction to difficult situations is to avoid, that's my knee jerk reaction of what I want to do. I served many years of therapy and through my own commitment to myself, I learned many years ago that I could either continue to live my life based in fear or I could step into confronting that fear and whatever the fear is. And I slowly built up my confidence in being able to confront whatever fear it is. And then I also learned that when I did confront fear, the fear no longer had power over me. And the more I did it, the more evidence I had to support that. It's worth it. (Participant 5, J.E.)*

Participant 7 continued further into her process of asking questions of herself and her capability to offer help in various situations, followed by “*surrendering acceptance to the circumstances*” (Participant 7, R.M.). For her, if she wants to move into action first, she will shift to learning more about all sides so she can understand how to help more effectively. From her process and perspective, she observed:

*Everyone wants to know that they matter. Everyone wants to know that they're important. Everyone wants to know that their thoughts, their feelings, and their fears are heard and*

*validated. And that when we're separate from each other, that's when we hurt the most.*

(Participant 7, R.M.)

Participant 7 shared that she strives to create safe space for others to be, where they can be accepted for who they are, regardless of perspectives, beliefs, or practices. As a result, her children have seen her personal work, and she shared that she feels “*there's a deeper respect from them towards me*” (Participant 7, R.M.). Despite her own internal process, her children have witnessed what action she takes. Participant 7 explained how she observes her children respond to her own growth, and now she observes their change in response to that model:

*I think that [my children] have seen me tackle more challenges. I've seen them growing to that mindset of, 'How can I make things better? This isn't necessarily something that I have to settle for.'* (Participant 7, R.M.)

### ***Parenting in Partnership***

For Participant 8, the process of taking on responsibility as a parent came with understanding how his partnership with his wife was important, to come together, to remember that it has taken both parents to create this child, interweaving energy, love, and intention:

*As parents, [it] took both of us to create this child, so it takes both of us to help grow this child, to help nurture [this] being into who they truly are. So by going back and forth with [my wife], it's like I shine light on certain things and then she also reflects certain things back to me.* (Participant 8, D.A.)

### **Spiritual Connection**

For Participant 1, a Waldorf parent and teacher, spiritual connection can provide ways of looking at others that offer hope, even when there are, for a child, unhealthy situations. When a

child is not fed well, not cared for well, emotionally and physically, a spiritual connection can, for Participant 1, frame a way to act in that situation:

*You may not be able to save that situation, but you can always plant a seed. And if you plant a seed, I think that it can, it has the ability to awaken something that is already in the child's destiny. (Participant 1, J.K.)*

Participant 1 continued in thinking through the planting of a seed in a child's destiny, that if you are fortunate enough to have people who are there to plant seeds, then:

*It can awaken those abilities [and] ways of perceiving sooner in your life rather than later. So, a child can grow up in a very difficult situation. But all it takes is that kind person on the bus, right? For that teacher who came in as a sub for one day and who saw you for who you really were in the moment that you really needed them. So never underestimate the power of just one act, one connection, one moment. (Participant 1, J.K.)*

For Participant 1, there is an emphasis on destiny and a spiritual orientation that gives room to learn. She shared, “*Because I have that spiritual grounding and connection already, I'm so grateful that I got to a place that I could never have imagined when I was younger.*”

### ***Connection to Nature***

Spiritual connection comes in a variety of ways. Participant 5, a Waldorf-inspired parent, looked to the deliberate point of a routine that is connected to nature: “*I think that that is an incredibly important part of self development and is to connect with something bigger than yourself*” (Participant 5, J.E.).

### ***Spiritual Path as a Tool of Empowerment***

The weight and the responsibility to enact a spiritual path can be a healing and clarifying commitment to oneself and to one's family, according to Participant 7, a Waldorf-inspired parent. She shared how this commitment has brought her and her relationship with her kids to a place that she "*never thought in a million years*" would be possible.

A spiritual path has been integral for Participant 7 in grounding the changes in her family dynamic and her children's education, particularly in the challenges of Covid-19:

*[A spiritual path] has helped to make life easier because I know myself better and I've been able to heal [what] kept me disconnected [from] myself. [A spiritual path has made my life] easier in a sense because I know who I am and where I'm operating from. I've been able to let go of things that didn't serve me any more, stuff that kept me stuck in the darkness where I couldn't see the light in the situation so I have more optimism in my life, I see more beauty in the world. [A spiritual path] doesn't take away the challenges of life, it gives you greater tools to empower you more so that you can overcome and not be stuck [in] a paper bag with no way out. (Participant 7, R.M.)*

### ***Connecting Through Imagination and Magick***

Participant 9, a non-Waldorf parent, shared that her oldest son (6.5 years) wants to engage his imagination and magick before he leaves his parents for school, by requesting a certain type of color angel or dragon to protect him throughout the day. Participant 9 noted her son's satisfaction when she meets him in this space of imagination and magick, as well as when other adults he loves joins him. She shared that she'll tell him, for example, "*Okay, I'm sending you a pink Angel, and I'm going to send you a green dragon today, and they will protect you*" (Participant 9, S.S.).

For Participant 9, her oldest believes he has a “*strong force field*,” enacted with his imagination and love for magickal beings. The mother’s spiritual connection is reflected in this capacity to communicate with him and engage in imagination with him, to reinforce his magick. Participant 9 shared that one way that her husband does this is through his intuition and being heart centered in his own communication with the boys. He will say to them, “*Thank you for helping the family*,” which means the world, shared Participant 9, to their youngest, that he can contribute to the family, and their oldest loves it, too. Another practice of her husband that Participant 9 shared is when he gives a gold star to their oldest, for doing something well, he energetically puts a big gold star on the boy’s chest. For Participant 9, this energetic enactment ties into the mindset that the family holds, in serving one another and acknowledging one another for that service in meaningful ways. When it comes to behavior, Participant 9 explained that her husband brings in the archetype of the knight to help their oldest connect with a greater sense of service:

*[My husband] came up with this great example of saying [to our oldest], ‘We want you to behave like a knight,’ ‘You’re the knight, and you’re the protector of your brother, [because] he’s too little.’ When we would explain that [our oldest] was the knight, that was helpful for [him] to be proud of who he is in his role, because [our youngest] just worships him still and wants to do whatever [his older brother] does. (Participant 9, S.S.)*

### **Discussion**

When I originally coded the interview data, the process included from two summative categories to fourteen, depending on the participant. The range of wisdom that came from these parents, when asked simple, similar questions, was impressive. The research questions that guided this body of work were:



- How are parents supporting their children's education and overall wellbeing at home?
- What changes have been forced upon them due to outside circumstances?
- What changes have they chosen to make?
- What have they observed about themselves, their family life and their children in this process of change?

With the fundamental questions as:

- Can raising children, including taking on a robust role of guardianship for one's children's overall education and well-being, be just as nourishing for parents as it is for their children?
- How can a deeper engagement in education and raising children be a positive force in a family's life?

From the original research questions, I found twenty-two categories that ranged from healing one's family, to social emotional wellbeing, adjusting for the child, meditating on your family, activities done together, creating the village, communication, love of learning, dealing with unconventional parenting, parents needing support, daily routine, doing differently in schools, depth of curriculum, navigating tipping points, no technology, timing of extra curriculars, parent disengagement, rhythm, speech and vibration, authority, and money in schools. This is a collection of the more specific categories that came out from the same questions being asked, and the organic nature of the conversation.

As reflected in the results section, the original twenty-two categories were condensed into the following five areas which were represented far more in depth with each participant: desire for children's education, home life and love of learning, the impact of COVID-19 on parenting,

internal/external process of parenting, and finally spiritual connection. Within these sections I could see threads of commonality amongst the participants, so many more places where they would complement one another's stance rather than avert one another, which gives me hope. Hope that perhaps we can continue to have conversations around parenting and education that bring harmony and unity rather than more labels that exclude one another. We're all on the same team here, as guardians of childhood. Of core five concepts that frame the results and findings section, two garnered more in depth discussion and reflection as distinct categories. This section below explores these in greater detail as well as present topics for future research.

### **Desire for Children's Education**

In this section, the research questions that were particularly answered are those relating to parents' participation in their child's education and overall wellbeing at home as well as how a deeper engagement in education and raising children can be a positive force in a family's life. Each Waldorf participant noted a greater reflection on how they want to be present for their child, and how they wanted their child's education to be different than what they had. This was similar to the Waldorf-inspired participants who also wanted something they could deeply connect with, that would align with their own family values, or would further support them in developing their family. In looking through the interviews with the three participants who were in the third category—the non-Waldorf participants—there were markedly absent conversations with two out of the three non-Waldorf participants around one's educational desires and the potentiality for a deeper purpose in discovering or creating such an education for their child. Which leads me to question whether this is a conscious choice or a lack of alternative educational options in their area, and how to further inform parents on the variety of options, formats, and accessibility for alternative education choices...

***Appreciation for Professional Expertise***

For participants who were involved with Waldorf education, either directly or in Waldorf-inspired education, there was a clear sense of appreciation for the kind of teachers who are working with their child. Additionally, two of the three non-Waldorf participants noted that teachers are the child care and child development experts, thus welcoming teachers as part of their team in raising their children. This language of “child development experts” was exclusively used by non-Waldorf participants. I found that these participants shared a level of gratitude for education professionals that fulfilled the research questions around parents’ deeper engagement in education and raising children as a positive force in a family’s life.

***Embracing Education and Life Outside of the Mainstream***

Waldorf-inspired parents spoke more to the observations of the problematic aspects of mainstream education and how it seems to not be a fit for their families. There are struggles and difficulties that are acknowledged, with the sense of opportunity being opened through the objective observation of others and how they work with their children. Both Waldorf and Waldorf-inspired parents spoke to the kind of negotiation that is needed to walk into or take on education that is outside of the mainstream, while there are multiple conversations that tend to happen within families that choose Waldorf education, most notably for these families interviewed was financial restructuring to prioritize an education that aligns with their family values. This lends a hand to the research questions about parents supporting their children’s education and overall wellbeing at home, to changes forced upon them due to outside circumstances, and changes they chose to make. As well as more introspective research questions regarding parents’ observations about themselves, their family life and their children in the process of change, and navigating raising children, including taking on a robust role of

guardianship for one's children's overall education and well-being, as a nourishing process for parents and their children.

### **COVID Aftermath**

The second area from the results and findings section to warrant further discussion, here, is the topic of COVID-19. This section particularly highlighted the research questions about changes that were forced upon parents due to outside circumstances, changes they chose to make, and the deeper, more summative questions of what they have observed about themselves, their family life and their children in the process of change, and whether raising children, including taking on a robust role of guardianship for one's children's overall education and well-being, can be just as nourishing for parents as it is for their children.

The pandemic is a challenge we all lived through, and are living through today. As a result there is temporality to my work as well as attentiveness to who we are in crisis and coming out of crisis. These interviews took place with people who had already experienced two years of COVID, meaning they lived through the crisis and are, in some sense, on the other side of evaluating what happened and how to keep going. COVID crossed the boundaries of every category coded, because it affected every aspect of life. COVID seemed to breakdown what was already cracking, in the words of one of the non-Waldorf parents, however many of the Waldorf-inspired parents specifically noted COVID as being a turning point for themselves, in reflection of "*How can I serve my family better?*" and seeking the resources to make that happen. COVID could be viewed through a lens of opportunity, to evaluate what works, but there were not necessarily those opportunities for every participant, which is reflective of those all around us; some used COVID as an opportunity to pivot and others to more deeply excavate the cracks in their own foundation. It seemed important for the Waldorf-inspired parents to come to a point,

a tipping point, where they could enact the acknowledgement of needing something different for their children. COVID-19 was definitely the most important point for change in these families.

Now that there is a collective sigh about COVID-19, more questions can be asked and maybe solutions can be discovered or created such as what do we want in relationships, in work/life balance, in education for our children? Since the current mainstream education system was built upon the economic foundation of the workday being 9am-5pm, if the economy continues to shift towards entrepreneurial endeavors, will that change the school day from 8am-3:30pm? It can be easy to bypass that we are overall under-resourced and under-supported, so bringing these conversations to center stage seemed to be refreshing and inspiring for some of the participants as a redirection and reflection. Now is the time for critique and analysis, of what happened and what can happen, which when digested can produce hope.

### **Topics for Further Consideration and Future Research**

Several topics in the results and findings suggest questions for future research, beyond the scope of this project. These questions include: Is a love of learning related to the parents' own love of life? Do parents find that a love for life supports the continuity of education beyond the school day start and end? If I were to design a follow up study, I would ask parents to reflect on this connection and their relationship to fully engage with life.

Another area for further research, in continuing conversations with parents, would be tying together the significance of parenting as a spiritual journey alongside one's own spiritual practices or path. If parenthood is framed as a spiritual journey, how does that shift the conversation about parenting, responsibility, and children—as viewed in the media, in conversation around the watercooler, and within our own minds and hearts? What if parenting

was released as a burden, seen for its obstacles in appreciation for growth and celebrated for its day to day and overall strivings?

### **Conclusion**

One of the first books I read of Steiner's was called the Kingdom of Childhood, which led me to question if there is a kingdom of childhood then there must be guardians of childhood. Who maintain the gates of childhood, keep it sacred, hold life itself as holy and joyful in order to cultivate depth and beauty in all aspects of life, and finally, guard the forces that allow children to develop into their truest selves without undue influence. Throughout this project there has been an undercurrent of quandary for me of what moves parents towards a level of mastery beyond parenthood, but guardianship of each aspect of their child's life and upbringing—thus inspiring the formation of the research questions, that serve as a lantern to illuminate the bridge from deadened parenting to enlivening guardianship. If there is such a position, as guardians of childhood, then the aim of this project is to empower Guardians of Childhood to make necessary changes in their own life and their children's lives, to have the courage to make these shifts. What happened during this project was an anchoring into values and wisdom, that life experiences allow us to get a glimpse of possibilities that we may not see in our more mundane routines; this was a project of re-enlivening: from parenthood to education.

Over the course of my interviews with the parents and teachers who generously agreed to participate in my project, I came to understand through these conversations it was as if the throne of guardianship was illuminated and rather than abdicating, each interviewee rose to their respective throne. While the stressors of parenthood are constant, rather than avoiding what is constant, embrace it and discover what needs to shift within in order to unveil one's greater capacities to envelop with love.

Throughout this process of writing this thesis, it has been reflective and transformational for me as well. While I had been working on this master's thesis since before COVID-19, it wasn't until fall 2021 when this topic finally emerged. During the ten primary months of conducting interviews and writing this thesis, I found out I was pregnant with our first child six months into this project. Now this thesis took on an entirely new scope and necessity as my husband and I welcomed ourselves into the sacred realm of parenthood preparation.

One of the most important qualities about being a Guardian of Childhood is recognizing one's own spiritual development and path towards spiritual self-mastery as a means to fully encompass who we are as humans, which may be based in daily routine, responsiveness to change and challenging situations or emotions, however one may require dedication to a spiritual path in order to be mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually nimble, to be able to rise up and manage responsibilities and commitments that are central to oneself and the kingdom one creates and protects.

From this research there may be a need for further research of reframing how we think about parenting, as a society, moving from viewing parenthood as a culture of obligation, burden, weight, a chore, towards shifting parenting into a total expression of love and a part of one's own spiritual journey. Parenting as a process of moving you along your own path of destiny and fulfillment, without which, spiritually, you would be a lesser person. This leads me to wonder what the landscape of education, home life, work/life balance, and fulfillment in everyday life would look like in the future. We are at the cusp of change in so many ways, as the world is evolving because of COVID-19. My hope is that this thesis sparks inspiration, conversation, and action.

After this thesis, I plan to continue having fruitful conversations with parents and educators, perhaps through a podcast. Further, I would like to take what I have discovered throughout this project and contribute to assisting the deeply supportive resources that Waldorf education provides for parents moving into guardianship of childhood to be more accessible through a parenting app. Another way I will continue to share my findings of the benefit of Waldorf education and a spiritual path for parents is through publishing in scholarly articles and eventually a book. Oftentimes, Waldorf education is still not that well known amongst parents, and I'd like to do my part in making that change. To this day, I continue to guide parents who are ready and willing to make the whole life changes in order to shift from mainstream education to Waldorf education, including Waldorf inspired homeschooling. It is an honor to walk alongside parents as they awaken to their capacity to create change in their own lives and their children's, for better than they could have imagined. This requires diligent work, from a place of love.

Waldorf School education  
Is not a pedagogical system  
But an art-  
The Art of Awakening  
What is actually there  
Within the human being.

(Steiner, The Younger Generation Lecture 2, 1922).



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## Appendix

### Interview Consent Form

#### Learning as Life: Empowering Leadership for the Guardians of Childhood

##### Consent Form Content

Dear Interview Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about your experience with weaving home life, school life, and work life throughout the pandemic and beyond. This interview will be part of the information I am collecting in order to open up the conversation for learning as a way of life. This research is for my Master's Project in education at Antioch University of New England.

Our conversation will be over Zoom, unless you prefer otherwise. Our interview will last about one hour and will be in a conversational format with prepared questions that I ask each interviewee. You may stop the interview at any time, refuse to answer any question, and see my notes I take during our conversation. The interviews will be recorded, for transcription purposes only and to support my capacity to be present with you during the conversation. To minimize the risk that any quotes are misstated, I will confirm quotes with you that become part of the narrative of the final paper. If you wish to receive a copy of the final paper, I will provide that to you.

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [kboucher@antioch.edu](mailto:kboucher@antioch.edu) or my advisor Alison Henry at [ahenry@antioch.edu](mailto:ahenry@antioch.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Kevin Lyness, Chair of the Antioch University New England Institutional Review Board ([klynness@antioch.edu](mailto:klynness@antioch.edu)) or Dr. Shawn Fitzgerald, AUNE Provost ([sfitzgerald@antioch.edu](mailto:sfitzgerald@antioch.edu)).

I have read and agree to the conditions above.

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email and will serve as your electronic signature. This document is for your records.

Participant Signature/ Date

[Your email response will serve as your electronic signature]

## **Interview Questions**

### **Learning as Life: Empowering Leadership for the Guardians of Childhood**

#### **Interview Questions**

##### *Questions for Parents*

- 6) What choices in your daily routine seem to best support your child's:
  - a) Social/emotional wellbeing
  - b) Self-esteem
  - c) Love of learning
  - d) Resilience
- 7) Have you noticed, throughout your child's life, a time when you needed to address or make a change in order to affect their self-esteem, social/emotional wellbeing, learning, behaviors, love of learning?
- 8) What was the tipping point, from internal and/or external circumstances, towards making a change in your parenting and homelife?
- 9) What was your experience like as you made this transition?
  - a) Internal experience/process
  - b) Dynamic with children
- 10) This is a personal question, which you can of course opt out of: How do you approach or avoid difficult situations?

*These are guiding questions, others may arise during the course of our interview.*