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Steiner Education: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity

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Abstract

Although various aspects of Steiner Education and of Steiner's philosophy and its related teaching approach have been explored in the literature, there appears to be few holistic studies into the ways in which this philosophy is practised and understood by teachers. This thesis moves from the available literature and explores Steiner's philosophical background with the intention of shedding light on the pedagogical theories created by Steiner and how these are implemented in one Steiner school.

The main focus of the research is on how Steiner's philosophical notions of freedom, spirituality and creativity are enacted and understood in practice. The objective was to elucidate the nature and significance of these elements to learning, as well as understanding the physical context, conditions and arrangements in which they occur and are developed. To do this, an ethnographic study was conducted over a period of 9 months in a Steiner school in the UK. Qualitative data were collected through observations of participants, focus group and vis-a-vis interviews with staff, students, and parents, before being thematically analysed.

The findings display a complex picture: on the one hand it appears that Steiner's philosophical background provides a common set of shared perspectives on what education is and this theoretical background appears to inform the practice of the teachers in the school. On the other hand, the three notions of freedom, spirituality and creativity do not emerge as separate domains, but rather as different elements of a unified educational practice represented by a holistic understanding of children's development.

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Declaration

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research journey: background

The choice for my PhD thesis topic has been deeply influenced by my background. I am a former Steiner pupil: I attended a Steiner school for eleven years, from pre-school until the age of 14 when I moved to a state high school. I remember my years in school with affection. At the age of 19, when I enrolled at the University of Milan to study Italian Literature, I also started a three-year training course to become a Steiner teacher. Here, I learned about Steiner's pedagogy and I started to explore his philosophy from a different perspective: I learned about the theories and philosophy underpinning the school I had attended. A six-month internship was part of this training, and those six months turned into a four-year collaboration with a Steiner school in Milan. I taught children from the age of 6 to the age of 14.

In the school, I received support from my colleagues but at the same time I was left free to share my own experiences and implement many ideas. Due to my experience in a Steiner school as student, I was often able to recall my school memories, drawing from them to inform my practice while also reaching a new and deeper understanding of the practices in the school. At the time of teaching, I became appreciative of the school pedagogy, while perhaps being quite uncritical of it due to my age and level of experience. I was fascinated by the teaching approach, which after my experience in a state high school, seemed to me so peaceful and slow. I rediscovered the artistic subjects taught in school: painting, modelling, drawing, music and drama. All these activities, which seemed deeply engaging to the pupils, also gave me new energy and

enthusiasm. My understanding of the aims of this kind of education was shaped during those years by the ethos of the school where I was teaching.

In 2013, I moved to Edinburgh to study for my Master's in Education. Although my academic preparation at the time was in humanities, due to my passion for teaching I opted for a change of subject. I started the degree with some years of Steiner teaching experience, but I soon discovered I had to overcome my lack of formal pedagogical training as I had only studied Steiner's educational theories. My postgraduate journey was very stimulating. I had the opportunity to discuss and explore many different pedagogical ideas with other postgraduate students as well as with lecturers. During that year, I realised that my knowledge of Steiner's educational model was facing a new challenge. I had spent so many years within a Steinerian and Anthroposophical environment (albeit without being an Anthroposophist myself) that I had become unaware of the barriers created by the jargon used in both historical and contemporary Steiner educational circles. I was accustomed to referring to the "three-fold" constitution of the human being, or to the "power of the soul". I was almost oblivious as to how strange such language would sound in an academic context. However, it was refreshing to move away from those habits and to acquire new knowledge and perspectives. This led me to become more critical towards Steiner's pedagogy.

My Master's Dissertation focused on teachers' perceptions of creativity and the factors that can limit or foster it within a school setting. It was an engaging topic, that was not directly connected to Steiner's education while at the same time it maintained a close link with my experience as a teacher. What intrigued me at that time was my discovery of educational theories (such as Gardner, Robinson, Montessori) which departed from

a strong focus on academic achievements per se and explored more broadly the purpose of education. These advocates for an education that did not cater entirely towards the achievement of high marks and test scores, but instead introduced an educational system more open to artistic subject matter and the development of non-academic skills, had a profound impact on me. I started to reflect more carefully on my personal experience in the Steiner school where I had spent time both as a pupil and as a teacher. I came to the idea that some of the practices in the school were of value, while simultaneously becoming increasingly aware of some of its weaknesses. I was not aware of it then, but these were the seeds that would grow into the foundations of this thesis.

1.2 Genesis of the project

Following from my master's degree, I wanted to study Steiner's pedagogy from a new perspective: not that of a former pupil or a former teacher, but that of a researcher. I wanted to explore Steiner from a more critical, detached perspective: while I was actively participating in the Steiner educational environment, objective perspective was not possible. That is not to say that I was uncritical or passively accepting every aspect of this pedagogy, but nonetheless conversations on Steiner's educational philosophy were carried out almost in a closed environment. During my master's studies, my understanding of Steiner Education became richer, parallels were drawn between different theories, and I also became more aware of the weaknesses of Steiner's teaching approach as well as of what I believed to be its strengths. I therefore began my PhD.

It was during the literature review for my PhD, and subsequently during my fieldwork, that I became fully aware of the implications of my background to my study. At the beginning, only the positive aspects of my experience stood out, when I started this research project, I became aware of the ramifications. The challenges I encountered were two-fold: on the one hand, the journey that led me to conduct strong critical reflections about my theoretical assumptions; on the other, the ethical implications arising from my experience as a researcher actively working in a Steiner school. Both of these factors played an extensive role in shaping my thinking, and ultimately my research.

It was necessary to instate a more critical perspective on Steiner's philosophy and to set these apart from my previous experiences, which were deeply ingrained in me. My positive experience in Steiner Education led me to experience a tension in discovering my positive assumptions on Steiner Education and the need to find a new balance. I needed to find a way to negotiate my past experiences with my research. Contained in that disjuncture was the necessity to self-reflect in order to clarify my position. Brookfield (2009) underlines the importance of critical reflection and acknowledges four steps required to reach it. He claims that the first step required to critically engage is to be able to recognise and research our own assumptions. But this is alone not enough: in order to start a reflection, it is important to identify and then challenge our own assumptions. This process can be triggered by what he calls a 'disorienting dilemma', an event that can make us aware of those assumptions that we have come to accept uncritically (Brookfield, 2009, p. 295). The second stage is to assess our assumptions. Only after our assumptions have been evaluated, can the third stage take place: it is now a matter of taking a different perspective on them. Finally, 'on the basis of this analysis, we take informed actions' (Brookfield, 2009, p. 296).

For me critical reflection was important because I needed to find a new perspective which would take into account my positive experience, but that would also account for my assumptions. I believe that was a matter of honesty and integrity. It was important to address one of the main issues with qualitative research — the one of rigour (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009; Brookfield, 2009; Bryman, 2012; Parker-Jenkins, 2016; Schwandt, 2011). It was a long journey, during which I had to negotiate with myself many of my assumptions and beliefs. It was important because ‘critical reflection focuses not on how to work more effectively or productively within an existing system, but on calling the foundations and imperatives of the system itself into question, assessing their morality, and considering alternatives’ (Brookfield, 2009, p. 297), therefore, is the basis for any academic research.

1.3 Challenging my assumptions

As pointed out by Brookfield (2009), the first stage conducive to critical reflection can be a traumatic experience. We become aware that we have never questioned potentially life-long beliefs, and we are forced by new experiences to conclude that they may not be relevant anymore, or even not accurate at all. When I approached my PhD research, I already had quite a strong comprehension of Steiner schools and their practices. I liked the school I attended, and I liked teaching there as well. The disorienting dilemma that shifted my assumptions was encountered at a very early stage in my PhD, and it came from an unexpected source.

The first issue I confronted was to find a way to convey Steiner's theories to a public unfamiliar with his language and ideas. I was challenged to make sense of Steiner's language and to attempt to 'translate' it into plain language for readers of my thesis. This process was extremely helpful because, even though I was never uncritical in regard to Steiner's theories, I was now required to question, assess and verify the very core of my assumptions (Brookfield, 2009). Once I overcame my disorientation, these processes of 'translation' that took place during my first year helped me to gain new perspectives on Steiner. However, this was not a smooth process. I found myself to be less keen to break ties with a philosophy that I was familiar with. This crisis was a philosophical one: I struggled to scrutinise Steiner's theories with a clear mind. I had to go through numerous revisions of written work: aware as I had become of my positive attitude towards Steiner, I then started to notice that I had been indulgent in analysing his thoughts. I still have a positive attitude towards Steiner's pedagogy and — even though this is not problematic per se — I find the need to closely examine my statements. But here, for me, lies an important element: this process of critical reflection does not aim to destroy previous assumptions. Discarding all of them would be foolish. It is, on the contrary, a matter of evaluating our beliefs, and in doing so we can become aware of our position on a topic, and once this is clear, our academic work will be strengthened.

This journey also influenced the research approach I chose. My research draws from a hermeneutic phenomenological approach: because I aimed at exploring the practice of a Steiner school, I wanted to talk about Steiner Education trying to preserve its essence, using the common Steiner language and concepts while at the same time unravelling Steiner's obscure prose. Due to the nature of this research, reflecting on how I made sense of the reality under research became paramount (Wang, 2013). I

never sought some sort of Husserlian phenomenology, so bracketing my own assumptions to seek an unbiased understanding of the world was never my aim (Laverty, 2008; Lester, 1999; Reiners, 2012). For this reason, the step I needed to take was to recognize my premises and move on from that point, clearly stating my perspectives.

1.4 Finding my role

I came across a new challenge when I started my fieldwork. I spent 9 months in a Steiner school, and in these 9 months, I had to negotiate my role daily. Observation of school life, following the activities of various classes and teachers, was my primary means of data collection. Even though I had decided how to present myself, my role proved to be more complex than anticipated.

I opted for a full disclosure with the school gatekeepers: I introduced myself as a PhD student undertaking research and I also disclosed my past in Steiner schools. I believe this was the right choice, although it did put me in a situation of limbo. The purpose of my research was not to evaluate the school and their practice, but to explore specific aspects relating to my research questions. To understand teacher perspectives, I often asked for clarifications about the curriculum and the way things were carried out even when I could either guess the reasons or I was already aware of the philosophy underpinning the pedagogical choices. But what I was seeking was the participants' perspectives and the only means I had to obtain such insight was to question them, often on matters that were already known to me. Was I deceiving the people I was observing by withholding part of my knowledge of Steiner's pedagogy? I do not think

so, but issues related to impression management and deception should always be addressed in empirical research (Greener, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Parker-Jenkins, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Wang, 2013).

Impression management refers to

the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them. Because the impressions people make on others have implications for how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them, as well as for their own views of themselves, people sometimes behave in ways that will create certain impressions in others' eyes. (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34)

Impression management is different from deception which occurs when someone pretends to be someone different in order to gain access to more or richer information (Bryman, 2012). I was careful to avoid deception but was left with a dilemma — not being able to reveal as much of my own knowledge of Steiner theory and practice so that I did not compromise the participants' responses. The school was aware of my role as a researcher. Every morning I signed the visitor register and wore a “visitor's badge”. However, because of the extended period of time I spent in the school, it became apparent that my role was being sometimes overlooked.

The school, with teachers, staff, children and parents, promptly welcomed me, and I very soon became part of the routine and of the school life. I believe I was so readily accepted as a member of the group because, like many Steiner schools, the case study

school hosts a teacher training course for Steiner teachers. For this reason, trainees are often in the school doing observations in the classrooms all year around. Once a semester the school had an open day when prospective students and parents were invited to participate in the lessons. Furthermore, the school was often visited by a range of people interested in the pedagogy, as well by inspectors and people from the Fellowship of the Steiner Schools. I noticed how little disruption was caused by these visitors. Therefore, my presence did not represent a novelty: I was just another visitor. For these reasons, my role was on the verge of becoming blurred and I had to navigate a way to prevent it.

After I spent some months in the school, when it became apparent to the teachers that I was, in fact, aware of Steiner's philosophy, they started asking for my opinion. I was very careful when asked to share my own opinion on Steiner's beliefs, child's development and Anthroposophy and I sometimes avoided providing a full answer. This was a challenge: when I was filling out my Ethics Form, I tried to consider all the aspects, and it was relatively easy to do so at my desk, with abstract ideas, and without knowing any of my participants. Things were more complicated when in the field. I got to know and bond with many of the teachers and some of the older students as well. Even though I maintained professional behaviour, I was invited to school celebrations and social events outside of the school's regular hours. For this reason, I very quickly had to find a way to navigate these situations. I therefore avoided 'imposing' my own opinions on my participants. Had I expressed some strong and controversial opinions on some parts of Steiner's philosophy and practice, I could have risked compromising the responses and reactions of my participants, who might have felt compelled to either hide their true stance on matters or worse to change their behaviours so as to align them with my expectations.

There were various occasions when I felt that choosing not to answer a direct question posed by some students was the best way of action. For instance, during a focus group with a class, we were discussing their experience at school, talking about what they enjoyed. They all seemed very united in expressing mixed feelings about one of the subjects taught in the school: Eurythmy. They were wondering why they were taught such a subject. During the discussion, I was directly asked what I thought of this subject and why it is considered so important in Steiner schools. On that occasion, I told them that I would provide a full answer at the end of the focus group if they were still interested in my opinion. I added that I was interested in knowing their perspectives on the matter, that there was not a right or wrong answer to my questions and that it could have been the case that I actually knew why Eurythmy is taught in the school. However, I suggested that they ask their teacher for some further clarifications. Being present during the interview, he nodded in appreciation.

Throughout my field research I had to negotiate with myself the boundaries of my actions. The ethics guidelines provided me with a strong structure ("Research Ethics," 2017), and I had decided that my observations would not be participatory. So, on the one hand, my actions as a researcher were regulated by the ethics guidelines, on the other my actions as a researcher were left for me to regulate. I had to navigate through a wide grey area, where little guidelines could be obtained from the ethics forms: the experience of this has been a formative one. Doing a qualitative research study, based on ethnographic techniques was for me about more than collecting data. I had to explore my assumptions in a very critical way. I became aware of habits and ways of thinking that were so deeply part of me that they had passed unnoticed for a long time. Furthermore, I experienced the gap between theory and practice personally. Often an

overlooked problem during the planning phase of a PhD, the difficulties arising from fieldwork hit me with great clarity: it was then the case to quickly learn how to navigate the new situations.

1.5 Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how Steiner's pedagogy is put into practice, exploring the theoretical basis for Steiner teaching as well as the implementation of the theories. Moving from the holistic pedagogical approach of Rudolf Steiner, the specific focus is on freedom, spirituality and creativity. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the role of creativity, freedom and spirituality in Steiner's educational philosophy?
- 2) To what extent does the practice in Steiner schooling support the development of creativity, freedom and spirituality?
- 3) How do teachers interpret and implement Steiner's pedagogy?
- 4) What are pupils' perceptions of Steiner schooling?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted observations, interviews and focus groups in a Steiner school over a period of 9 months.

1.6 Outline of chapters

In Chapter 2 some perspectives on Steiner and his theories are provided. The aim of the chapter is to provide the reader with a picture of the literature on Steiner and Steiner Education while addressing some of the main criticisms. This chapter provides the framework for my own research, placing this study in a broader context.

Chapter 3 deals with Steiner's intellectual journey in order to understand some of the influences that other philosophers had on the formation of Steiner's theories. His biography will be briefly sketched, while the core of the chapter will address his understanding of the Spiritual World and the core of his epistemological and ontological perspectives. These elements are eventually drawn together and linked with his pedagogy.

Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical basis of Steiner's pedagogy. It will be explained that his pedagogy is based on Anthroposophy and the connection between Anthroposophy and Steiner Education will be discussed. Steiner's description of what constitutes a human being will also be introduced together with descriptions of the elements that form a human being. The core of the chapter will tie these elements together focusing on how Steiner Education is shaped by Steiner's understanding of the development of the child and what role freedom, spiritually and creativity play in this panorama.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to Steiner Education and its practice. The core elements of this pedagogy will be described. The theoretical elements from the previous chapter will be further tied together with the school practice and an account of the Steiner curriculum will be given. The characteristics of Steiner's pedagogy will be discussed.

In Chapter 6, I will provide the rationale and the methodology for this study. The reasons for the design of the research will be outlined and the main limitations of the study will be discussed.

In Chapters 7 and 8 the data collected for the study will be presented. Chapter 7 will focus on the notion of spirituality, while chapter 8 will deal with the notions of freedom and creativity. An account of the interviews and observations will be presented, the aim is to provide a detailed picture of practice in the school, considering with great attention the elements emerging from the participants.

Chapter 9 will present the findings of the research within the literature and a critical evaluation of the elements described in chapters 7 and 8 will be outlined. Chapter 9 directly addresses the research questions which underpin this research and the findings of this study are discussed.

Chapter 10 is the epilogue of this research. Further reflections on the project are drawn and inputs for further research are given. The important and unique characteristics of this study are outlined to reflect on their possible ramifications.

Chapter 2: Perspectives on Steiner

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine and provide a critical evaluation of the relevant literature regarding Steiner and Steiner Education. The aim is not to examine all the literature available, but rather to argue that there are some main perspectives on Steiner and his pedagogy which have influenced the discourse around Steiner Education. Such perspectives are often, it will be argued, not helpful in creating a climate of understanding because they are polarising. I intend to draw a picture of the panorama regarding the Steiner movement providing evidence to show that, although interest in Steiner's philosophy and pedagogy are evident, the literature available on this author is quite sparse. The main perspectives on Steiner will be discussed, and possible ways to overcome the apparent polarisation present in the academic literature on this philosopher will be introduced. Furthermore, attention will be given to some of the more common critiques of Steiner's education with the intention of discerning legitimate concerns from misinterpretation and false accusations.

There are some 1080 schools and 1848 kindergartens worldwide that follow the pedagogy developed by Rudolf Steiner ("Waldorf World List," 2019; "World List of Steiner Waldorf Schools," 2015). However, only in more recent years has an exploration of Steiner's pedagogy begun to emerge within academic circles (Dahlin, 2017b). Considering the length of time that Steiner schools have existed, rigorous academic literature based on research which discusses the pedagogical practice is relatively scarce. One of the reasons for such scarcity of research might be due to the perceived lack of educational relevance of Steiner's ideas as a consequence of their

perceived lack of scientific evidence (Dahlin, 2017b). Due to his spiritual framework and his esoteric ideas, Steiner's philosophy of education is often perceived as mystical and his 'spiritual science' is considered a pseudo-science. One of the reasons for the scarcity of interest within the academic circle for Steiner might be linked to this fact: Steiner's educational theory is difficult to place within broader educational theory and Anthroposophy can hardly be placed within any established academic field or discipline.

Dahlin (2017b) reasons that many academics are reluctant to get involved with Steiner's pedagogy for fear that their future careers might be jeopardised. He argues that this is because the foundations of Steiner Education are perceived as unscientific — based on Steiner's insights without the support of any current psychological or educational theory to support them. Furthermore, he points out that little help comes from within the Steiner community due to the fact that, even when research has been carried out by Steiner practitioners, Dahlin (2017b) believes that often this research has been perceived by the academic community as lacking a scientific basis. He recognised the source of this problem in the preparation of Steiner teachers who — until recent times — were not well acquainted with the academic standards required for academic research. He reasons that as a result, those practitioners in Steiner schools who carried out research on Steiner Education often produced research studies which were not favourably received by the academic community. What Dahlin (2017b) argues is that the secondary literature produced by those directly involved in the Steiner movement often suffers from the problem of being self-referential, therefore only addressing itself and those already aligned with ideologies and theories discussed in it.. As a consequence, it is argued that these texts are often set apart from the

mainstream academic approaches and represent an obstacle for putting forward any unanimous conclusions on Steiner's educational theories.

However, interest in the Steiner teaching approach has been displayed in academic journals (Dhondt, Van De Vijver, & Verstraete, 2015; Easton, 1997; Oberski, 2011; Oberski & McNally, 2007; Reinsmith, 1990). Furthermore, in 2010 the journal 'RoSE: Research on Steiner Education' was established as an online peer-reviewed academic journal "with the purpose of serving the theoretical and practical development of Steiner Waldorf education in ways that are relevant to our contemporary globalising world" ("RoSe: Research on Steiner Education," 2016). Given that the "Rudolf Steiner University College", Oslo, and the Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences, Alfter, founded this journal, it can be assumed that their standpoint is very close to Steiner's philosophy and ideas.

2.2 Overview of published perspectives on Steiner

I will argue that scholarship has examined Steiner and his work from two central, but very different, approaches: from a theoretical perspective with a focus on his philosophy and in terms of desk-based research, and from a practical perspective with a focus on his pedagogical outcomes. Firstly, there is a range of research concerned with a theoretical focus, which touches on Steiner's ideas and philosophy from a theoretical point of view (Ashley, 2009; da Veiga, 2013; Dahlin, 2009, 2010; Easton, 1997; Lim, 2004; Nelson, Leal, & Carus, 2016; O'Shiel & O'Flynn, 1998; Oberski, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2019; Oberski & McNally, 2007; Reinsmith, 1990; Schieren, 2016; Tyson, 2018). Research of this kind tends to focus on the Anthroposophical

background of Steiner Education and on the theories underpinning the pedagogical outcomes. The second perspective is constituted by research focusing on Steiner's pedagogy, analysed both from a philosophical perspective and from a pragmatic one. This kind of research offers an insight into Steiner school practices — arts, literacy, rhythm of the day, the Goethean approach — or else presenting the concept of learning in Steiner Education in its various aspects, sometimes comparing Steiner schooling to mainstream education (Ashley, 2009; Astley & Jackson, 2000; Bento, 2016; De Souza, 2012; Easton, 1997; J. Gidley, 2008; J. M. Gidley, 2007; Nordlund, 2013; Tyson, 2018; G. Woods, O'Neill, & Woods, 1997; G. J. Woods & Woods, 2008; P. Woods, 1990a, 1990b; P. Woods, Ashley, & Woods, 2005; P. Woods & Woods, 2006).

A further distinction can be made on the basis of the different approaches and backgrounds of the scholars who conducted research on Steiner. Consistent with Dahlin (2017b), who conducted an extensive review of the literature on Steiner, I argue that three main approaches are found in this literature. The first comes from scholars and authors within the Anthroposophical circle who are sympathetic to Steiner's ideas to the point of being uncritical (examples are some articles published in *RoSe*, for instance). The second comes from scholars who seem to relegate Steiner's philosophical framework and consequently his pedagogical outcomes to the realm of pseudoscience, showing an overly critical attitude and accusing him of lacking scientific validity (Ullrich). The third approach includes scholars whose work is more balanced than the former two groups, providing a more neutral presentation of Steiner and his pedagogy, engaging in a discourse and dialogue which place Steiner within a broader community of philosophers and pedagogues that consider his historical background (Dahlin; Oberski; P. Woods et al.).

From the first stream of literature, there are reviews often resulting in hagiographic presentations of Steiner's life, which overlook some of the most controversial statements by him (for example, racism) (Foster, 1984; Ogletree, 1974; Reinsmith, 1990)¹. This is in contrast to the overly critical evaluation of Steiner's pedagogy from the second group, which offers an evaluation that is often biased due to misunderstanding of Anthroposophy — which is considered either as a religion, a pseudoscience, a dogma or simply as intrinsically invalid. Dahlin (2009) reports on the works of some scholars who belong to this group. They are however available in German principally. In the English language an example of this kind of evaluation is Ullrich (2014), who criticises Steiner's authoritarian tone, laments a lack of openness among the Waldorf teachers to academic research and attacks the pedagogical foundation of Steiner Education — Anthroposophy — for being unscientific and merely metaphorical. Ullrich (2014) acknowledges the innovative and creative approach adopted by Steiner Education and the successes earned by many former Steiner students. What emerges from his analysis is more an attack on Anthroposophy rather than a discussion of Steiner Education per se; but given that Anthroposophy is at the core of Steiner's pedagogy, his criticisms do touch on this sphere as well. Ullrich (2014) objects to Anthroposophy for being mystical in its nature and for overstepping the bounds of knowledge. Moving from these assumptions, he concludes that Steiner Education is based on a 'neo-mythology' - a claim that I argue is overexaggerated by Ullrich who asserts that Steiner's work is not relevant as a consequence (Dahlin, 2013a, 2017a, 2017b; Schieren, 2016).

¹ The Ogletree (1974) paper "Rudolf Steiner: Unknown Educator" is significant in that the author provides a description of the main characteristics of Steiner schooling. The foundation of the approach is outlined, perhaps lacking a critical evaluation, but nonetheless it provides a clear description of the practice and the underpinning philosophy. In the same fashion, Foster (1984) presents an introduction to Steiner education, with a particular focus on how the first Waldorf School was organised and managed by the teachers.

Nevertheless, some academic research approaches Steiner's ideas with greater nuance. Oberski (2006) explores how Steiner students learn to think critically and how the art-based training of Steiner teachers influences this process. In a later paper, Oberski (2011) also explores the idea of freedom as a basis for spiritual education. In this research, Oberski (2011) argues that the more holistic approach in the Steiner schools, with their non-denominational nature, can provide a model for spiritual education. In Oberski and McNally (2007) these ideas are intertwined and presented as a study on the Goethean perspective in teaching, seeing this as a potential organic and alternative approach in a school context. More generally, the literature exposes positive remarks about Steiner Education, specifically in relation to the creative teaching approaches that are embraced (Easton, 1997; Fleith, 2000; Nielsen, 2006; Nordlund, 2013; O'Shiel & O'Flynn, 1998), which is mentioned even by critics of Steiner such as Ullrich (2014). Some studies also focus on the wellbeing of Steiner students: this has been associated with strong academic performance (Bento, 2016; Martzog, Kuttner, & Pollak, 2016).

An interesting take on Steiner is constituted by scholars such as Dahlin (2017b), Ensign (1996) and Nielsen (2006) who put Steiner and his theory in conversation with the mainstream system, both from a philosophical/scientific perspective, as well as from a pedagogical one. I argue that this kind of research represents an important source for those within the academic population that are not yet familiar with Steiner Education. This kind of research works to normalise the discourse around Steiner Education, with the aim of presenting a new discourse which is set apart from the dichotomy that sees this philosopher either as a prophetic genius or else as a crank. It is worth mentioning the essay by Ensign (1996), who imagines a conversation between Steiner and Dewey, two educators who developed their pedagogies in the same years,

underlining the differences and common premises of these two authors about education. Dahlin (2009) presents another similar exploration into the theoretical background of Steiner Education, in particular the idea of 'thinking'. A parallel between Steiner and Heidegger is drawn, and Dahlin (2009) argues against a materialist understanding of thinking, comparing and contrasting Steiner's philosophical background with mainstream philosophical ideas.

Lim (2004) delves into the value and meaning of aesthetic education, considering in turn Dewey, Steiner, and Vygotsky, while Yonemura (1990) examines a more holistic approach to education placing Steiner among more widely known educators and pedagogues, such as Maria Montessori. This kind of research shows that an evaluation of Steiner Education and his approaches can be conducted moving away from the preconceived idea of Steiner as an isolated figure and so placing him in a richer philosophical and educational context. In addition, new interest in Steiner's pedagogy has arisen in recent years, probably due to the increasing number of Steiner schools that have opened in addition to the fact that, as in England, some of them have begun to be funded with public money. Steiner Education has entered academic discourse, especially in England, due to the work of authors such as P. Woods et al. (2005). Research of this kind looks at exploring, validating this pedagogy and comparing it with other traditions or educational practices (Easton, 1997; Nielsen, 2004, 2006; O'Shiel & O'Flynn, 1998; Wylie & Hagan, 2003).

To provide a broader picture of the literature regarding Steiner, Steiner Education and Anthroposophy, it is useful to evaluate the perspectives found in the literature in greater depth. The intention here is to explore the relevant literature (including popular media) and to discern legitimate concerns from misinterpretation.

2.3 Evaluating critique of Steiner

One of the main criticisms recurring in the literature is the claim that Steiner schools run the risk of being Anthroposophy-oriented (Dugan & Daar, 1994). Steiner Education is therefore criticised for being a kind of sect or group that is closed to the world and devoid of objective criticism, which produces a literature imbued with Anthroposophical jargon (Ullrich, 2014). Outside of academic circles, in the UK, and specifically in England, Steiner schools have been mentioned in newspapers and journal articles due to the fact that there are four state founded Steiner academies ("Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship," 2019). The content of articles appearing in national newspapers over the last decade in the UK have titles such as “Protests over plans for new Steiner academy” (Guardian, 2008) and “Schools of pseudoscience pose a serious threat to education” (Guardian, 2012). (For more newspaper articles on Steiner school see also: R. Adams (2019a, 2019b); Cook (2014); Finn (2008, 2009); Guardian (2008, 2012); McInerney (2014); Schriber (2007); Sklan (2014); Vasagar (2012). Some important criticisms, however, came from the 2019 Ofsted Report which found three of the four state founded Steiner schools in England and three of the independent ones to be inadequate (Ofsted, 2019) due to a lack of support for students with special educational needs and various other problems regarding the schools’ management and the training of the teachers. This report was considered closely by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, and an almost immediate response was issued:

It is a matter of deep regret when individual schools fail in their duties. There is no compromise where the welfare of pupils is

concerned. Our role is to provide guidance to schools in order for them to ensure all standards are in-line with the requirements set out by the Department for Education (DfE). [...] [W]e are disappointed that six schools have been judged as inadequate and have taken immediate action to ensure that standards rapidly improve as per Ms Spielman's recommendations (J. Avison, 2019).

Although deeply regretful and concerning, this report cannot be seen to reflect the Steiner pedagogy in general, but rather the failures of specific schools. As this thesis will illustrate there are many examples of opposing findings that emphasise the success of Steiner Education as a model (R. Adams, 2019a, 2019b; Weale, 2019; Z. Williams, 2019).

In the popular press, there appears to be little discussion of the philosophical and pedagogical assumptions on which Steiner schools are based. Critical articles tend to focus on perceived problems that, as I argue, are to be attributed to specific, often young, Steiner schools rather than to the philosophical and pedagogical assumptions that inform this method of education. Furthermore, browsing the web it is also easy to encounter web-based polemical literature such as blogs on Steiner schools and the Steiner approach (Colquhoun, 2010; Lewis, 2012). Such literature can prove difficult to analyse, since it is not always easy to verify the identity of the authors. Considering that these articles are often posted on personal blogs or online groups, it does not come as a surprise that they do not follow any academic standards. However, they do provide a valuable insight into how Steiner schools are perceived, and for this reason they will be included in this thesis where relevant. For instance, Cook (2014) voices some of the main concerns and criticisms that are often set against the Steiner educational

movement. Besides a lingering accusation of being unscientific, Cook (2014) attacks the Steiner-Waldorf schools on the basis of their Anthroposophical background, claiming that Steiner schools are in fact faith schools — and considers Anthroposophy as a type of faith. Moreover, a more serious accusation that Steiner had racist tendencies appears in several mainstream publications as well as in some of the academic literature (Guardian, 2012; "Steiner schools aren't cranky – we develop heart, head and soul," 2019; L. Williams, 2016).

These two accusations are common, but not irrelevant to an appraisal of Steiner Education. They emerge from both the academic literature and, with great vehemence, also from webpages where resentful or concerned parents have been able to log their experiences. The problem regarding the Anthroposophical basis for Steiner's education is two-fold: on the one hand, concerns regarding its unscientific aspects emerge; on the other, concerns in relation to Anthroposophy being a religion also appear. It is apparent that Steiner's views have not, thus far, been considered scientific in the mainstream sense. His claims that a Spiritual World is accessible to everyone who is willing to develop the appropriate sensory organs — organs that, he maintains, are dormant in everybody — is not a theory that has been examined by or which stands up directly to any contemporary scientific approach (Steiner, 1996b, 1997e, 2011b). It can be argued that the paradigms of scientific research have changed in the course of history (Dahlin, 2017b). Dahlin (2017b), in particular, argues that science is a human construct, and that what constitutes science is determined by historical and contingent features — features which depend on human evaluations rather than on "some objective, non-human authority, natural or otherwise" (2017b, p. 3). Steiner claims that his research into the Spiritual World is as rigorous as that which has been

conducted in the natural sciences (Steiner, 1997g): he claimed that he only changed the epistemology and therefore the tools he used to explore the field.

In addition, although Steiner in his conferences and books seems to have an assertive tone, he did not expect to be believed without question. He required his audience to test, evaluate and question his claims and was strongly opposed to any dogmatic knowledge (Steiner, 1995b, 1997e). He insisted on several occasions that Steiner schools were not meant to preach about Anthroposophy. On 20th August 1919, in the opening address given on the eve of the Teacher's Seminar for the future teachers of the first Waldorf School, Steiner (1996c, p. 31) said:

Here in the Waldorf School we do not want to create a parochial school. The Waldorf School will not propagate a particular point of view by filling the children with anthroposophical dogma. We do not wish to teach anthroposophical dogma: anthroposophy is not the content of the instruction. What we want is a practical utilization of anthroposophy. We want to transform what we can gain through anthroposophy into truly practical instruction.

Steiner did not advocate for a school of Anthroposophy or a school for children of anthroposophical families. This is not to say that his pedagogy was value-free: education was for him the basis of social changes which were rooted in his idea of social three folding (Steiner, 1997d, 1999). The important element in this social vision was the separation of the three aspects of social life: politics, economics and culture. Education was understood by Steiner as a cultural activity which should not be guided by the same concepts, drives, and goals of economy or of politics (Steiner, 1997d, 1999; P. Woods & Woods, 2006). However, the idea that Steiner schools aimed at

disseminating Anthroposophy rests on a misunderstanding of Steiner's thinking and his aims: Steiner wanted to create a school open to everybody, a free school where no distinctions were made regarding class, gender, or race. (More evidence regarding this point will be provided later in this chapter).

Another very concerning criticism of Steiner's work is the claim about him being a racist and anti-Semite. Dahlin (2017b) argues that Steiner is not alone among the pre-Nazi thinkers to be accused — rightly or wrongly — of harbouring racist ideas. It is reasoned that the way philosophers and thinkers of the time talked about race was very different than nowadays. Steiner does talk about differences in 'race' but does not claim the supremacy of one race over another, nor does he deny human rights to particular groups. It also has to be taken into account that the vast majority of Steiner's works, which are available today are the result of the transcriptions of lectures he gave and that he never revised. Furthermore, claims of racism appear to contradict some written statements, for instance Steiner states (1995b, p. 228):

[...] human beings free themselves from what is generic. If we experience it properly, what is humanly generic does not limit our freedom, nor should it be made to do so artificially. As human beings, we develop qualities and functions of our own, whose source can only be sought within ourselves. What is generic about us serves only as a medium through which we can express our own distinct being. We use the characteristics nature gives us as a basis, and we give these the form that corresponds to our own being. We look in vain to the laws of the genus for an explanation of that being's actions. We are dealing with an individual, and individuals can be explained only individually.

What here is described as “generic” refers to the characteristics of ‘race, tribe, people, family, male or female gender’ (Steiner, 1995b, p. 225). In a lecture on 16th August, 1908, held in Stuttgart, Steiner (1908b) said: “When a person speaks of races today he speaks of something that is no longer quite correct” and “even in regard to present humanity there is no justification for speaking of a mere development of races. In the true sense of the word we can only speak of race development during the Atlantean epoch”. In Steiner’s view, the end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a new era, the main characteristics of which were the need to overcome nationalism and racial discrimination (Steiner, 1908b). Central to his philosophical system was the freedom required by each individual, which cannot be defined by the limitations of gender, race, nations or group connections (see chapter 3). From this basis, Steiner expresses his opposition to the idea of a Jewish nation — hence accusations of antisemitism. He was against the foundation of ethnically homogeneous states due to his belief in every person’s right to self-determination. These statements directly discredit any claims about Steiner succumbing to any kind of racial bias and, if anything, reflect the opposite vision —the need to create a culture where individual freedom could be nurtured and embraced regardless of cultural, ethnic or national differences.

However, Steiner did talk about the evolution of the races and about specific racial differences on some occasions. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, a commission was appointed in Netherlands to examine the matter. On April 1, 2000 a report was published by the Commission which concluded that the number of pages with statements that can be experienced as discriminatory today is less than .05% of the 89,000 pages of Rudolf Steiner’s collected works. They stated that Anthroposophy and social Darwinism are diametrically opposed to each other. Therefore, suggestions that

racism is inherent in Anthroposophy, or that conceptually Steiner supported thinking which paved the way for the holocaust in the 1930s is unfounded (Staudenmaier, 2000, 2008, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). It has to be taken into account that the commission was founded by the Dutch Anthroposophical Society, therefore the people conducting the review were close to Steiner's philosophy. However, they had the distinct impression that, compared with other nineteenth and pre-World War II twentieth-century authors, such as Hegel or Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Steiner has become the victim of "selective indignation" (Kerkvliet, 2000).

The report also expressed the notion that Anthroposophy is not inherently racist, because

it simply does not encompass any theory of mutation and selection with regard to human races. The question of which race is "stronger" or "superior" is therefore irrelevant. On the other hand, Anthroposophy encompasses an idea of reincarnation that considers the possibility that the spiritual-moral core of the human being, in the course of centuries, reincarnates in different bodies (woman/man, white/black, etc.). There is, therefore, no objection against mixing of races, and cultural exchanges among different peoples are encouraged (Kerkvliet, 2000).

Another element emerging from this report suggests that the passages written by Steiner that are controversial are those that more often are misquoted and misinterpreted by the non-academic media. That leads us to another problem in approaching Steiner's work. He is indeed a difficult author: it has been shown that this is due to the nature of his prose, the philosophical reasoning underpinning his writing and the miscellaneous sources he quoted, studied and which have, to an extent,

informed his theories. For this reason, a superficial look at a few lines extracted from a broader text can easily be misread and misinterpreted.

Generally, the academic literature provides a fairer critique of Steiner's work even though some scholars are quick to relegate Steiner and his literature to a specific set of undefined theories (Staudenmaier, 2000, 2008, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Ullrich, 1994, 2014). However, when Steiner is considered as a thinker, placed in a wider historical context, and the results of his pedagogy examined carefully, a useful body of research appears. Examples of scholars that have undertaken such research are: Ashley (2009); Dahlin (2009, 2010, 2017b); Oberski (2003, 2006, 2009, 2011); Oberski and McNally (2007); G. Woods et al. (1997); G. J. Woods and Woods (2008); P. Woods (1990b); P. Woods et al. (2005); P. Woods and Woods (2006).

2.4 Conclusion

Perspectives on Steiner from literature and the media have been explored in this chapter and it can be seen that in recent years this educator's name has entered mainstream and academic discourse. It is interesting to notice how the focus has been shifted from an analysis of the Steiner approach per se, to a critical evaluation of its validity and a comparison with other methods (P. Woods et al., 2005; P. Woods & Woods, 2006). However, I would argue that a complete and more critical account of Steiner's pedagogy is still needed. Critical and empirical accounts of Steiner's ideas linked to practice are still scarce in academic literature. The empirical research on Steiner Education has focused on specific aspects such as school readiness (O'Connor & Angus, 2014) or on the values emphasised by this kind of education that a pupil will

take away with them (Dahlin, 2010). Furthermore, I believe that some valuable lessons can be learned from the Steiner pedagogical experience. As this thesis will demonstrate, when approached with neutrality or a lack of bias, Steiner's work has the potential to offer a unique set of approaches to formal education as demonstrated by scholars such as Dahlin (2009, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2017b), Oberski (2003, 2006, 2009, 2011) and Oberski & McNally (2007).

From an empirical perspective, studies on the outcomes of Steiner Education are useful in demonstrating the positive results of this educational model, and particularly in showing the holistic nature of this approach (Ashley, 2009; Cunningham & Carroll, 2011; Fischer et al., 2013; Flöistrup et al., 2006; J. Gidley, 2008; J. M. Gidley, 2007; Kirkham & Kidd, 2017; Nicol & Taplin, 2012; Nielsen, 2004; O'Connor & Angus, 2014; Oberski, 2009; Reinsmith, 1990; Selg, 2010; Sparby, 2017; Stehlik, 2008; Tyson, 2018; Uhrmacher, 1995, 2004; Vasagar, 2012; P. Woods & Woods, 2006; Wylie & Hagan, 2003). This is not to say that Steiner Education and principles are infallible or immune to problems and controversies. Quite the opposite. It will be part of this study to argue and outline the problems associated with this approach and those characteristics that are less in tune with the mainstream ways of seeing education, which have resulted in various misinterpretations.

However, if we were to approach Steiner within a broader discussion, for instance from the perspective outlined by Robinson (2011), some valuable findings could appear. Robinson (2011) has been arguing for over twenty years about the necessity of reforming the standardised educational system, moving away from a standardised, test-centred approach to an educational mode which is individualised, flexible and

focused not solely on transferring hard skills to pupils, but on enriching knowledge of disciplines. Robinson (2011) has been an advocate of a less rigid form of education, stating that the danger of standardised education lays in the fact that our times are facing changes at such a pace that it would be almost impossible to know what knowledge will be relevant by the time a child has been through the typical years of formal education. Therefore, he has been known for being a supporter of a more creative educational model. He argues that one problem lies in the widespread understanding of human life as a mechanic process, rather than one which is 'organic, adaptable and diverse' (Robinson, 2011, p. 8). In such a context, Steiner Education can provide useful insights. I do not put forth the claim that Steiner's educational model should be replicated as it was originally conceived, but rather that this pedagogy has been in place for one hundred years within schools all around the world and therefore merits further attention. Consequently, a closer look at the practices used in such schools can enhance the discussion by providing first-hand experiences that can be used as case studies to reveal nuanced information that contributes to a better understanding of Steiner's philosophy of education and its inherent practices.

Chapter 3: Steiner's Intellectual Journey – the Roots of his Educational Theory

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show Steiner's intellectual journey and to discuss some of his philosophical theories while illustrating the influences that other intellectual figures have had over Steiner's thinking. The core of the chapter will examine Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* discussing how this core text explores the foundations of his philosophical views. By presenting Steiner in a broader context, the intention is to lay out certain elements in his theoretical framework so as to better understand his pedagogical theories, which will be further discussed in the following chapter. The complexity of Steiner's intellectual journey may have resulted in a simplification of certain aspects of his life. The elements displayed in this chapter are those which have been deemed relevant in relation to his pedagogy. Elements of his Spiritual Science — Anthroposophy — are only discussed when essential for his pedagogical outcomes. The intention is to show which elements and philosophical traditions influenced Steiner's ideas.

Rudolf Steiner is often referred to as a thinker, philosopher and educator (Bailey & Barrow, 2010; Nielsen, 2004; Pound, 2011; Ullrich, 1994; G. Woods et al., 1997; P. Woods et al., 2005; P. Woods & Woods, 2006). He was a polymath, his interest spanning a variety of fields. He claimed to have worked to reform economics, politics and social life (Steiner, 1997d, 1999), as well as agriculture (Steiner, 1993, 2004a), medicine (Steiner, 1997f, 2010b, 2011a), the arts (Steiner, 1997a), religion (Steiner, 1997b, 2010a), and education (Steiner, 1996b, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b). In 1919, he

opened the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, following a request from Emil Molt, Director of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory.

An account of Steiner's philosophical beliefs and background is important as a means of illuminating crucial aspects of his educational framework and its outcomes. An explanation of Steiner Education and schooling will be presented in the next chapter, but to understand the approaches common within a Steiner school, Anthroposophy needs to be examined as it is a key component which underpins the curriculum and overall approach applied in Steiner Education. However, approaching Steiner's philosophy and thinking can be a puzzling experience. In fact, notwithstanding his claim of having used a scientific approach in his research, his way of demonstrating his philosophical and scientific outcomes is not conventionally scientific. For this reason, I will provide a description of the key ideas of his thoughts that are essential in assessing his works. The aim of this thesis is not to prove any of Steiner's statements or beliefs, but to provide a rich description of his philosophical assumptions.

I believe that "a willing suspension of disbelief" is necessary at this stage. As a first step, it is important to realise that Steiner's thought process has been shaped by the culture of his time. He was reacting to a widespread materialistic attitude in sciences — or, in other words, to a positivistic approach to the sciences. I am not calling for a suspension of critical evaluation or critical thinking, but rather to begin with the texts themselves and to examine them in accordance with their own internal logic.

Steiner's interests and writings spanned from education to agriculture, from medicine to the arts. At first, such a vast range of research into so many different fields can

appear chaotic. However, through all these different fields, Steiner aimed to obtain the same result: a transformation of society. Indeed, his pedagogical ideas stemmed from his aspirations to improve society. He suggested a radical reinterpretation of the notions of liberty, equality and fraternity. The separation of culture (freedom), rights (equality), and economics (fraternity) are at the centre of his oeuvre — and they are referred to by Steiner as a social threefold system (Steiner, 1997d, 1999). Freedom was the essential element, and from this view Steiner's ideas of education towards freedom were built. Education was intended, in Steiner's opinion, to serve the child, not the state, and in so doing, the component of freedom and autonomy of students in their learning process as well as the teachers' freedom in their reaching were crucial to Steiner. The purpose of education is to educate free individuals capable of fulfilling their dreams. Steiner (1997d) expressed these ideas vehemently:

we have such suffering today because cultural slaves have become mere servants of economics and governmental powers. Since the rise of modern technology and soul-numbing capitalism, modern workers have been harnessed to the economic process. As a result, they cannot view things comprehensively. Those who are not harnessed in that way, but in a more spiritual way, know what is necessary to bring wellbeing to human development. They recognize that cultural life must be emancipated. They know it is impossible for people to develop the capacities, human talents, and everything human beings bring into the world through birth, while at the same time serving what has resulted in modern times from the government and the economy. The first task is to free culture (Steiner, 1997d, p. 110)

Here, the factors that influenced his philosophy will be provided in order to expose the intellectual path that led to his development of Anthroposophy and of his educational theory.

3.2 Steiner's life

Providing a clear account of Rudolf Steiner's intellectual life is not an easy task. Firstly, the main source of information on Steiner's life is his own autobiography — *Autobiography Chapters in the course of my life: 1861-1907* (Steiner, 2005). He began to write this in December 1925 during the last months of his life after many people had urged him to do so (Hemleben, 2013). Secondly, Steiner can be an unreliable narrator. Steiner said that he worked at this project against his own inclination, but due to a request and in order to answer criticisms of alleged inconsistencies between his early and later works (Steiner, 2005). The reasons behind his autobiography can partially explain the fact that his whole life is presented as a journey and, clearly, he tried to explain some of the incongruences in his life and oeuvre, and in doing so to present his life in a linear chronology. A critical biography of this author is much needed, as too many modern enquiries into Steiner's biography present his life events in a romanticised way, and theoretical pitfalls are overlooked so as not to tarnish his idealised image. An example of such a discussion is the work by Shepherd (1954).

Rudolf Steiner was born on February 25, 1861 in Kraljevec, a small town in what was at the time the Empire of Austria-Hungary (today Croatia) . His father was a telegraph operator on the imperial-royal railways. After lower school he lived in Vienna for twelve years, immersing himself in the contemporary life and culture of the capital,

attending the cultural salons, working and studying. He was appreciated and loved by those who knew him but, as some friends testified, he lived in “two parallel worlds”, that is to say with spiritual perception always active alongside sensate experience (Steiner, 2005). As he explained in his autobiography, for him spiritual experiences were real occurrences. In these years, Steiner occasionally attended philosophy lectures at the university. He became particularly close to Carl Julius Schröer and their friendship came to have a very special significance for Steiner. Schröer was a lecturer on German Literature at the Vienna Polytechnic and his focus was on Goethe. Goethe would later have a significant influence on Steiner’s thinking.

Steiner broadened his knowledge by studying philosophy, psychology and history. However, he recalls in his autobiography that even though he was driven towards an intense intellectual activity in order to find answers to his questions regarding cognition, he also kept himself busy with practical tasks — he learnt how to bind books, he spent time working in the garden, and shopping for groceries at the local market. Steiner also started to learn mathematics and became well-versed at analytic geometry and differential and integral calculus. This was partially due to his work as a tutor, for which he had to prepare lessons. He became interested in the pedagogical perspectives of tutoring as he claimed: “because I had to pass on to others what I had absorbed from a lesson, I had to wake up, as it were, to the subject” (Steiner, 2005, p. 20). Furthermore, he started to consider carefully the needs of his students, and in light of his later research on pedagogy and education, these early experiences can be viewed as formative. He notes that “tutoring forced me at an early age to concern myself with practical psychology. Through my students, I learned the difficulties connected with a human soul’s development” (Steiner, 2005, p. 21).

At the same time as he was developing his philosophical and scientific ideas, he kept tutoring, often preparing students for doctorates, coaching especially in maths and the sciences. This was a way for him to be informed on the current views on pedagogy. Interestingly, from Schröer he received ideas on pedagogy. Schröer had been Superintendent of the Protestant School in Vienna and he had tried to reinvent the education in the school, collating his ideas in a book eventually published entitled: *Questions about Teaching*. Steiner was particularly fascinated by some of his ideas, because “he spoke out often against merely giving information in teaching, and he spoke of the necessity for developing the whole human being” (Steiner, 2005, p. 50). These ideas, of what can be called holistic education, will be at the very foundation of Steiner’s pedagogical movement.

Steiner was a curator of the scientific works of Goethe in Weimar, a scholar of Fichte in Naumburg and he edited the writings of Nietzsche. Steiner’s thesis, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* (Truth and Science) obtained in 1892 at the University of Rostock, comprises a first study of this material, which later merged into his work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (‘Philosophy of Freedom’) (Steiner, 2005; Ullrich, 1994). He then moved to Berlin in 1897, where he started his career as an author, orator and teacher. Here, he directed the literary magazine *Magazin für Literatur* and taught for a time at the Popular University, also in Berlin.

It is in these years that he started to gravitate towards the Theosophical Society, which was internationally led by Annie Besant. Between 1902 and 1912 Steiner became General Secretary of the German division. In these years he travelled widely, and he delivering lectures and seminars. In 1912, he founded the Anthroposophical Society,

after he abandoned the Theosophical Society due to irreconcilable conflicts, the most prominent of which was on the interpretation of the figure of Jesus Christ. In a climate of change and renewal, Steiner built the first Goetheanum, the Centre of the Anthroposophical Society, in Dornach near Basel (Pound, 2011; Steiner, 2005).

In 1919, he opened the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, after he was requested to do so by Emil Molt, director of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory. During the course of 1924, Steiner's health worsened and on September 28th, he gave his last public lecture. He continued to write his autobiography until the very end, dying the following year on March 30th 1925.

3.3 The nature of the spiritual and material reality

The five fundamental works required to approach an understanding of Steiner's teaching are *Philosophy of Freedom* (1894), *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and in the Cosmos* (1904), *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation* (1904—5), *The Way of Initiation* (1908), *Occult Science — an Outline, an account of the evolution of man and the universe in terms of spiritual realities* (1910). While many of Steiner's other texts attribute his thinking to specific domains, in these texts he outlines the central elements of his philosophy including his ideas on epistemology, cosmology, and Anthroposophy. In the rest of the chapter, I will explore the important influences that shaped his thinking about the nature of the Spiritual and material reality, the nature of knowledge and human consciousness, and Steiner's journey towards the creation of Anthroposophy.

Talking about his childhood, Steiner notes that two factors deeply influenced him: geometry and the liturgical cult (Archati, 2005; Steiner, 2005). His interest in what concerns the spiritual sphere stemmed from his attraction to liturgical cults and to music which had a powerful effect on him, which led him to investigate the question of existence. Geometry, to Steiner, was a perfect representation of the interconnections between the real world and higher realms² and this would be important to his own philosophy. Steiner wrote:

I felt that knowledge of the Spiritual World must in fact be carried within the soul just as geometry is. The Spiritual World's reality was as certain to me as the physical world's reality. But I needed a justification for this assumption. I wanted to prove to myself that experiencing the Spiritual World is no more an illusion than experiencing the sensory world (Steiner, 2005, p. 9).

While studying in Vienna, Steiner attended Schröer's exercises in public speaking and writing composition. It was in the context of these events that he set himself the challenge to explore a topic that appealed to him greatly — To what extent is a human being free in terms of actions? This exercise could be considered as a first draft of what later became Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*. Steiner notes that his main struggle at the time was to find a way to reconcile the existence of a Spiritual World with the physical one. This represented a struggle for him because he believed that a rational justification was essential, and he was not satisfied with the explanations coming from religion. At the same time, Steiner was concerned that none of the

² Steiner was, in the span of his life, quite inconsistent with his terminology. However, his vision remained fairly consistent. Higher worlds and Spiritual World are some of the ways he used to refer to the suprasensible world he believed he could perceive.

philosophers he was studying would help him to gain access and understanding of the Spiritual World.

The Spiritual World, for Steiner, referred to an inner spiritual life, but also to a real Spiritual World, which was granted its own existence within and in parallel to the physical world. In this lies the fundamental distinction between Steiner's perspective on what he called the spiritual and that coming from a Christian tradition, for instance, and more generally from any religious institution. He struggled to find a rational explanation for his spiritual insights. On this matter, he stated:

I felt that I had to grapple with the phenomena of the sensory world in order to gain a perspective of the Spiritual World that was naturally visible before me. I was convinced that one could come to terms with the Spiritual World through the soul as long as thinking assumes a form capable of grasping the true nature of physical phenomena (Steiner, 2005, p. 17).

He believed in the spiritual individuality of each person, but he claimed that he could not find anyone who wanted to hear about this (Steiner, 2005). At most, he would find someone who would talk about the world of spirit in a religious, spiritualistic way, but for Steiner this was absurd. He claimed to have had a scientific approach to what concerns the spiritual even at this early stage.

As argued by Reinsmith (1990, p. 8) “in developing a ‘spiritual science’³, Steiner called for a disciplining of the intellectual faculties that would lead to awareness of the inner reality behind phenomena”. What Steiner did was to describe the world and the person from his ‘Spiritual Science’ perspective so that all of his philosophical and educational outcomes, as well as his suggestions and practical advice were derived from this framework. Steiner (1997g, p. 14) says:

The human power of cognition tries to become involved with this content [the content of his Spiritual Science] in the same way that it would otherwise become involved with the world’s natural scientific content. It is the intent of spiritual science to free the methods and attitudes of scientific research from their particular application to the relationships and processes of sensory facts while preserving their way of thinking and other attributes.

Steiner hoped that “one day the union of natural science and knowledge of spirit would reveal itself” to him (Steiner, 2005, p. 32). This statement sounds almost like a confession and Steiner touches once again one of the cardinal points of his philosophical development: being convinced of the existence of the Spiritual World, the riddle he struggled with was therefore not about the reality of this invisible world but rather how the physical world and the Spiritual World are related to each other (Hemleben, 2013). His perspective, however, stood in opposition to the way that the natural sciences were taught. In this regard, Steiner’s worldview can be ascribed to that of idealism. The fascination with this philosophy is stated by Steiner (2005) himself, by Fichte and then Schelling, he derived his own way to justify the union

³ *Geistesswissencraft* in German, it is Steiner’s method to achieve knowledge of the world. “Spiritual Science attempts to speak about non sensory things in the same way that natural sciences speak about sense-perceptible things” (Steiner, 1997g, p. 14).

between the material and the spiritual, the sensory world of hard sciences and his own spiritual perceptions. Sparby (2016) observes that “Steiner’s interweaving of German idealism, Nietzschean individualism, and western esotericism represents, in and of itself, something unique in the history of philosophy”, and I agree that the fusion of these elements make for what became Steiner’s unusual philosophical foundations.

For Steiner ideas were a manifestation of the spirit within the human soul. Steiner defined this standpoint as ‘Objective Idealism’:

By this I wished to express that, as I experienced it, the essential nature of ideas is *not* that they appear in the human subject, but that they appear on the *spiritual* object, similar to the way colour appears on physical objects, and that the human soul — the subject — perceives that there, just as the eyes perceive colour on a living object (Steiner, 2005, p. 46).

After years spent in philosophical studies, seeking a way of thinking that could be carried over so far as to become a perception of the Spiritual World, Steiner seemed to slowly develop a theory that could justify his unique beliefs, and consequently he came to believe in a new relationship between the physical and Spiritual World. Steiner faced challenges in reconciling the spiritual and material, arising from the study of physics and especially in regard to the studies concerning light and sound. Against what was taught, Steiner considered that “the concept of ‘sound’ is merely an *abstract* expression for the totality of all individual occurrences in the resounding world; and ‘light’ represents a concrete reality distinct from the manifestations in the illuminated space” (Steiner, 2005, p. 47). For him ‘sound’ was a collective abstract

concept, 'light' a concrete reality. In this context, he experienced the contrast between Realist and Nominalist, as it had been developed in Scholasticism.

The Realists maintained that concepts are living realities, exist within the things, and are drawn out only by human cognition. Nominalists, on the other hand, thought of concepts as merely the names human beings had devised to sum up the manifold qualities of things, though they have no existence in the things themselves. I felt that sound experiences would have to be regarded according to the Nominalists' view and the phenomena experienced through light according to the Realists' view (Steiner, 2005, p. 47).

This example shows one of Steiner's main attitudes and approaches to his philosophical and scientific questions: he was prone to mix together many different sources and philosophical positions even when these originated from different if not opposite traditions. This is one of the factors that makes Steiner's philosophy quite obscure and complicated to penetrate. Steiner was moving from his own inner impressions, striving to find a way to justify his beliefs and assumptions. It highlights the contradiction between what Steiner said and what he did. His idea of adopting a scientific style of enquiry into natural phenomena — natural phenomena that for him comprised both the human soul and the physical realm as well as —led him to the constant reworking of ideas and scientific theories that could explain his theory that the Spiritual World could be shown to exist just as the physical world does.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, natural sciences were developing. Technical and scientific inventions and discoveries were appearing in increasing

numbers. To Steiner, philosophy seemed to have been closed in itself, incapable of overcoming the Kantian dogma of the impossibility of *a priori* knowledge of the things-in-themselves (Archianti, 2005; Steiner, 1995b, 2005). There seemed to be too neat a separation between science and philosophy, between reality and the sphere of religion, between knowledge on the one hand and ethics and human values on the other (Archianti, 2005; Sloan, 2012; Steiner, 2005). As a result of this apparent separation, the limits of human knowledge, within the borders of science, had become more visible. As argued by Sloan (2012), hidden in this belief is the assumption that quantitative measurement and abstraction are the only methods possible to scientifically study nature and reality. A sharp distinction between *primary qualities* (all qualities pertaining to measurement) and *secondary qualities* (all qualities pertaining to sensation) has been made, so that qualities and forces that cannot be measured and directly perceived by our senses were to be excluded (Sloan, 2012). The sphere of spirit was devolved to the realm of faith. Steiner's struggles derive from this background and from his strong belief that the human faculty for reason could penetrate these boundaries. He said:

For modern science considers sense experiences to be the foundation for all knowledge. Anything that cannot be built on this foundation is taken to be unknowable. From the impression of senses, it draws deductions and conclusions. What goes on beyond them is rejected as lying 'beyond the frontiers of human knowledge.'[...] From the stand point of spiritual science, such a view is like that of a blind person who only acknowledges as valid what can be touched and the conclusions deduced from the world of touch — a blind person who rejects the statements of seeing people as lying beyond the possibility of human knowledge (Steiner, 1996b, p. 6).

For him such a materialistic approach eliminated one of the distinctive human factors, since nature is presented as an indifferent, dead mechanism, solely obeying principles of cause and effect (Sloan, 2012). This approach for Steiner is misleading, and quite useless in discovering the nature of human beings, which is, in Steiner's opinion, spiritual.

Steiner was dissatisfied with the mainstream scientific view, and his encounter with Goethe's scientific work marked an important moment in the development of the philosophical view that would influence his pedagogical ideas. What proved to be appealing to Steiner was Goethe's approach to science: Goethe moved away from a quantitative, materialistic approach to things in nature while stressing the importance of direct experiential contact (Seamon, 1998; Steiner, 1988, 2000a, 2008). Steiner credited Goethe for the discovery of how one thinks about the organic in order to understand it. About Goethe, Steiner wrote: "I discovered that the *mechanical science* applied to the inorganic satisfies the human need for knowledge, because rational concepts built up in the human mind are thus realised in lifeless nature. To me Goethe established a 'science of organics' that relates in this same way to living nature" (Steiner, 2005, p. 56). Steiner wanted "to demonstrate *the way* one must cognise in order to understand the phenomena of life" (Steiner, 2005, p. 57). Steiner believed that contemporary epistemologies were influenced by contemporary science but that what scientists had to say about cognition was only true for inorganic nature. Therefore, he believed one needed a new epistemology in order to understand Goethe's works. Steiner read Goethe's work as a "science of nature that leads to a scientific spirit" (Steiner, 2005, p. 57). His insight into Goethe's works resulted in 1886, in the publication of *Theory of Knowledge implicit in Goethe's world conception*.

Goethe described his method as *delicate empiricism*. Only in the 20th century, with the philosophical articulation of phenomenology, do we gain a conceptual language to describe Goethe's approach. Steiner borrowed Goethe's scientific methodology, particularly in regard to Goethe's theory of knowledge. For Goethe any knowledge or conception of an object is gained not by forcing one's thought and ideas on it. Rather, it is provided by the object itself and received by the observer (Steiner, 1988, 2000a, 2008). This particular epistemology was to be further developed by Steiner in his *Philosophy of Freedom*, which will be further discussed later in this chapter. However, what probably appealed most to Steiner is the holistic nature of Goethean science (Oberski & McNally, 2007). In his essay *The Experiment as Mediator of Object and Subject*, Goethe sets out the main characteristics of this approach. His interest is in defining the relationship between the whole and its parts, as well as between the observing subject and the observed object. Goethe's view put a great stress on the active role of the observer: he believed that a better understanding of natural phenomena could be reached when the observer was put in direct relationship with the natural object. Goethe held the conviction that to understand an object, it was important to observe it in its wholeness, thus moving away from the scientific view of his time which had the tendency to understand objects by describing them in terms of their parts (Oberski, 2003; Oberski & McNally, 2007; Seamon, 1998; Steiner, 1988, 2008; Wellmon, 2010). As a result, it was difficult to gain a meaningful understanding of objects and phenomena in their wholeness.

Oberski (2003) argues, consistent with Goethe's view, that although the scientific methods of hard science work within science and technology, for the living world they are limited. He says:

It is not difficult to see the limitations of this method to understanding, for example, a plant. Of course, we can see a plant as built up of root, stem and leaf and this may be useful for practical purposes, such as food or medicine. However, the living and growing plant as it is, is not actually built up from a root, stem and leaf. At no point in the plant's growth and development are these three parts put together to form the whole plant. Root, stem and leaf gradually form in the process of growth in which they are continuous with one another and the plant as a whole. The plant as a whole cannot therefore be fully understood by explaining it in terms of its parts only (Oberski, 2003, p. 336).

Goethe's notion was that it was important to let the phenomenon under observation arouse our intellect, so as to form a deep and rich understanding of the object. "Seeing" is active, and the process of observation is crucial. Goethe considered this process an active one because the person observing a phenomenon within the living world needs to participate within his or her existing mental framework. This concept is further elaborated by Steiner in his *Philosophy of Freedom* and it also represents the scientific method he used within his model for education: considering the whole of a phenomenon before breaking it into parts is the basis of how scientific subjects are taught in Steiner schools today. The stress is placed on active observation, when the pupils are asked to observe and experiment and to describe it in its wholeness, without drawing at first any assumptions on it. Only after the phenomenon has been described as it has been experienced does the teacher then leads the students to make sense of what it has been presented.

Steiner carried out experiments to test Goethe's ideas and to contrast them against Newton's viewpoint on the nature of light (Steiner, 2005). He came to the conclusion

that “colours do not, as Newton believed, come from light; colours appear when light encounters an obstacle in the course of its own free development. This proved to me that *light* does not belong to actual physical entities. It presents itself as a stage between reality which is tangible to the senses and reality which is spiritually perceivable.” (Steiner, 2005, p. 48). This perspective was supported by Goethe’s theory of colours, which, even at Steiner’s time, were seen as outdated. The reasons why such theories appealed to Steiner should therefore be sought not in terms of their inner validity, but rather by way of the approach adopted by Goethe. Goethe's dispute with Newton and his theory was indeed anachronistic even at the time (Barsan & Merticariu, 2016). It can be argued that Goethe took a phenomenological approach to the sciences, an approach which left room for a spiritual dimension. This spiritual potential was expressed in the method of investigation created by Goethe, a method which looked at the natural world with a sense of wonder, and which was permeated by the idea that the sciences were based on a positivistic, quantitative approach that failed to penetrate reality fully. It was probably these elements that made such a perspective appealing to Steiner. This was a position that could, somehow, support Steiner’s efforts to justify the existence of a Spiritual World — a world not perceivable by the physical senses, and yet, so he claimed, nevertheless real.

In his autobiography, Steiner (2005) states that he started to create a picture of the human being from a spiritual perspective, which led quite early on to a first imperfect version of the ‘three-fold’ nature of the human being (see chapter 5 of this thesis). However, Steiner was still not publicly talking about these early insights, in fact “at the time, I found no one with whom I could speak to these things. When I occasionally hinted at them, it was viewed as mere philosophical theory, whereas I knew it was the result of unbiased knowledge of anatomy and physiology, based on experience”

(Steiner, 2005, p. 49). It is during the years in the Theosophical Society that he finally publicly addressed such matters and many elements from theosophical discourse can be found in Steiner's Anthroposophy. Steiner developed what he called an Occult Science, capable of exploring and understanding the Spiritual, immaterial world that lies "hidden" behind the physical one. In *An outline of esoteric science*, Steiner (1997g) devoted an entire chapter to the nature of the human being. Steiner viewed the human being as an amalgam of a physical body, an "etheric" body, a "sentient" or "astral" body, and the I (see chapter 4 for more). The main result of this view is that a human being is essentially a spiritual being in a physical body, and this is used by Steiner to justify his theory of knowledge on the one hand, and his pedagogy on the other (see chapters 4 and 5). However, the cornerstone of Steiner's philosophy is his theory of knowledge. It is on this early theory that he built Anthroposophy.

3.4 The nature of knowledge and human consciousness

Steiner's theory of knowledge is based on the rejection of what he named "naïve realism" (Steiner, 1995b, p. 70) which sees reality as something completely external to and independent from human consciousness. The result of "naïve realism" — as understood by Steiner — is to view the mind and the reality as two completely different entities: phenomena which exist in and of themselves, and the mind can only form reflections of these phenomena as close approximations. Steiner suggested a view in which the mind plays an active role in the process of knowing and in the formation of reality. This is the main point of departure between Steiner's and Kant's theories of knowledge. Particularly, by providing human consciousness with an active role in the process of knowing reality, Steiner blurred the distinction advanced by Kant between

epistemology and ontology (Steiner, 1995b). For Steiner the human mind can access all realms of knowledge, since its apparent limits are the product of a thinking power that has not been correctly understood (Steiner, 1995b). For this reason, Steiner aimed at disclosing what he considered the secret of the universe while at the same time providing tools that anyone could use to develop the higher senses, which allow the direct perception of what Steiner himself describes in his works⁴.

Another important aspect of Steiner's theory is the nature of human consciousness. A significant influence on Steiner's thinking came from his study of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Steiner, 1995b, 2005, 2008). Schiller's descriptions of the various states of human consciousness represented for Steiner an image to which he could relate. Steiner's understanding of Schiller provided a new way to approach the Spiritual World and a new path that Steiner had been seeking for a very long time. Steiner (2005, p. 34) says about Schiller:

Schiller distinguishes two states of consciousness that allow human beings to develop a relationship with the world. If we surrender to what affects us through the senses, we are compelled by nature; our life is thus determined by our senses and drives. On the other hand, when we are subject to the laws of logic and reason, we are compelled by spirit. But we can also develop an *intermediate* state of consciousness — an “aesthetic disposition” that neither surrenders one-sidedly to the compulsion of nature nor to the necessity of reason. This aesthetic disposition allows the soul to live through the senses but brings something spiritual to physical perception and to our

⁴ Steiner gives indication of some exercises that in his opinion would help to develop our senses in his book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* (Steiner, 2011b).

actions stimulated by the sensory world. We then perceive with our senses as though they were permeated with spirit. When we act, we surrender to what pleases our immediate desire; but we have ennobled our desire, so that what is good pleases us and what is bad displeases. Reason has intimately united with the physical. Goodness has become instinct, and this instinct may now follow its own inclination because it is spiritualised.

For Steiner this idea was fascinating: “Schiller spoke of the state of consciousness needed to experience the world’s *beauty*. Is it not possible to consider such a state of consciousness for meditating the truth in the nature of things?” (Steiner, 2005, p. 34).

Steiner’s focus became, consequently, to investigate the state of consciousness that allows a person to enter into in relation to the world so that “things and facts reveal their real nature” (Steiner, 2005, p. 35), which for Steiner meant their spiritual nature. He argued, based on Schiller’s ideas, that the experience of the Spiritual World depended on the state of consciousness of the subject. Steiner indicates that we enter a state of consciousness which allows a true understanding of the things in the world when we experience the *thoughts in themselves*. Rather than thoughts merely portraying external things and events, Steiner (2005, p. 35) argues that when we direct our thinking towards thinking itself, the quality of thoughts is different, and one can discover that “the spiritual reality comes to meet us within this life of thoughts”. It is at this stage that Steiner started to carefully consider what creates an individual, and he came to the conclusion that the human *I* is a reality. He had often to dispute and defend his idea against the widespread beliefs which considered the *I* as a manifested form of a process or activity. For him, “the human *I* is concrete reality that can be

surveyed inwardly” (Steiner, 2005, p. 41). This idea became the centre of his *Philosophy of Freedom*.

The *Philosophy of Freedom* offers an alternative epistemology which becomes important to Steiner’s educational theory. The three key ideas of freedom, spirituality and creativity are deeply intertwined in both Steiner’s works as well as in the practices undertaken in Steiner schools in general. Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom* offers the starting point and basis of his philosophical framework. The complexity of his philosophy, which represents both its strength and its greatest weakness, lies in the mixture of traditions and elements that Steiner drew upon. The *Philosophy of Freedom* is divided into two parts: in the first part Steiner deals with the problem of knowledge, arguing for the existence of the possibility of “a self-sustaining view of the world that can form the foundation of our knowledge” (Oberski, 2019, p. 19). Answering this first question provides the basis to address the opening question of the book: “Is the human being spiritually *free*, or subject to the iron necessity of purely natural law?” (Steiner, 1995b).

Steiner identifies thinking, a human faculty, at the centre of his deliberations. The subsequent sections of this thesis will deal with Steiner’s philosophical discussion. Through this book, Steiner outlines two characteristics of thinking (Steiner, 1995b):

- Individuality of thinking: thinking is carried out by single human individuals. This activity is in full control of the individual and does not lie under any external agent. Thinking is a product of the self (what will be later referred to as the *I*) and it is an act of pure will.
- Thinking is universal: although the act of thinking relies on the single individual

in order for it to be carried out, it is not purely subjective. The personal and particular execution of such an activity is still carried out — according to Steiner — as an inherent lawfulness which is universal. Upon this assumption sits Steiner’s conclusions on the possibility of human insight and deliberation.

This question regarding the relationships between the self and the world has been examined in the history of philosophy in two different ways. One approach (dualism) seeks to find a connection between these two experiences, the other approach (monism) aims at showing that even though we experience the self and the world as two separated entities, they are in fact manifestations of the same principles (Oberski, 2019). Each of these approaches have different interpretations within themselves. Steiner refutes what he names “naïve realism”: the notion of reality as a form of existence completely independent of and external to human consciousness.

A core element emerging from the *Philosophy of Freedom* is that knowledge is not a fixed process that occurs once, and thereby exhausts its function. Rather, new perceptions meet with concepts following new observations. Therefore, knowledge will never be complete as it always has the potential to be expanded (Steiner, 1995b). Steiner argues that everything needed to explain a world phenomenon lies within this world. If I cannot achieve the comprehension and explanation of phenomena it is due to a temporary deficiency in my organisation. According to his reasoning we cannot speak of limits to cognition. Circumstances can prevent us from achieving the understanding of given phenomena, but the limits determined in this way are only accidental and temporary (Oberski, 2019; Steiner, 1995b).

It has been shown how many elements influenced or else inspired Steiner in his life and how Steiner's search for a justification for the existence of a Spiritual World led him to encounter the writings and texts of many philosophers and scholars. This research was motivated by Steiner's desire to explain the human faculty of cognition and ultimately to understand the extent to which human beings can be free in their decisions, actions and thoughts. On the grounds of this the *Philosophy of Freedom* finds its origins and central thesis. I argue that the *Philosophy of Freedom* represents both the end and the starting point of Steiner's philosophy. His philosophical and spiritual research moved on fast from this point; but in this text, Steiner sets out the core of the work's epistemology and ontology, which became the very foundations of all his later findings and claims. In the next chapter, following on from what has been said so far, I will illustrate and discuss some further components of Anthroposophy.

3.5 Theosophy and the development of Anthroposophy

Rudolf Steiner's philosophy, known as Anthroposophy, is a complex philosophical and esoteric framework drawn in part from Theosophy. Its principles are set out in the works: *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* (Steiner, 2011b) and *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (Steiner, 1997g). Anthroposophy, from the Greek terms ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*, "human") and σοφία (*sophia*, "wisdom") is used by Steiner to mean 'wisdom of the human being' (Steiner, 1999).

Steiner was deeply influenced by his experience within the Theosophical Society, and many ideas and Theosophical theories found themselves in Anthroposophy. Like Theosophy, Anthroposophy blends together many different philosophical and spiritual

traditions. Alongside a core Christian element, emerging for instance from the central position that Steiner had allocated to the figure of Christ (Steiner, 1997b, 1997g), elements of eastern philosophy can be recognised, starting from the ideas of karma and reincarnation (Steiner, 1994, 1997g, 2004c). Thus, in Anthroposophy, assumptions rooted in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and some ideas about clairvoyance are combined (Pearce, 2015).

Steiner did not consider Anthroposophy as a religion that needed to be accepted as an act of faith but rather as alternative to the mainstream culture of his time that moved in the direction of materialism and had a positivistic scientific attitude towards the exploration of the natural as well as the human phenomena. Anthroposophy rests on Steiner's pivotal assumption that the existence of a Spiritual World was hidden behind the physical one, hidden but nonetheless accessible to anyone willing to exercise latent abilities through his or her own individual journey to knowledge (Steiner, 1997g, 2011b; Ullrich, 1994). Anthroposophy is not a system of beliefs but should be understood as a body of research — and Steiner remarked on this key aspect underpinning it on several occasions (Steiner, 1997g, 2005). Steiner's spirituality is not based on dogmatism, nor revelation. He was in fact deeply against such an approach. The kernel of Steiner's philosophy, on which he developed Anthroposophy, was rooted in the theory of knowledge (explored above).

At the core of Anthroposophy — and as the element that most strongly breaks from Theosophical influences — is the understanding that human faculties of knowledge are potentially without boundaries, and as a philosophy Anthroposophy must aim to promote the self-determination of free individuals. The spiritual, suprasensible worlds

are understood not solely as one's inner spiritual life, but as a world fully accessible through a proper exploration gained through the development of suprasensory organs. Anthroposophy therefore advocates a particular form of self-development based on reflection about the self and observations about the material world: a blending of introspection, observation and contemplation.

Steiner's aim was to develop free individuals: this is both the aim of Anthroposophy and of his educational outcomes - the motto of Steiner schools all around the world is *education towards freedom*. Freedom is intended by Steiner in a very specific way, addressed more fully in Chapter 4, strongly connected to Steiner's epistemology and ontology.

The idea of freedom was paramount in Steiner's worldview and in the advent of the Steiner school model he found a way to put these concepts into practice: his idea was to create an "art of education", where the prominent importance given to the teacher and the pupils are key (Steiner, 1965, 2004c). In Steiner Education, the self and individuality become the centre and the starting point of the educational process. The concept of selfhood — arising from the *Philosophy of Freedom* — has come to influence the way teaching is delivered in the contemporary context of Steiner schools operating today in 2019. The self is where an individual can experience freedom (see Chapter 4). The importance of free development of the human *I* is the element around which the entire approach revolves. The centrality of the notion of freedom was expressed by Steiner in a way that indicated that teaching should create an environment fertile for the development of the self of the children:

The most important thing for which we can prepare a child is the experience of freedom, at the right moment in life, through the understanding of one's own being. True freedom is an inward experience [...]. As a teacher, I must say that I cannot pass on freedom to another human being—each must experience it individually. Nevertheless, I must plant something within the person—something intact because I have left it untouched—to which that person's own intact being feels attracted and into which it may become immersed. This is the wonderful thing I have accomplished. I have educated within the human being what must be educated. (Steiner, 1997e, p. 66)

3.6 Steiner and the progressive educational movement

Steiner presents his pedagogy as derived from his work and study of Anthroposophy, rather than developed and built upon the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. There seem to be only two exceptions: Steiner's pedagogy was influenced to some extent by the work of Herbart (1776-1841) and the scientific writings of Goethe (1749-1832) (Kenklies, 2012; Kim, 2015; Steiner, 2005). Although some interesting comparisons between Steiner Education and other theories have been written about in academic literature (Ensign, 1996; Gidley, 2007; Lim, 2004; Pearce, 2015; Sparby, 2016), I could find no evidence of him being influenced by contemporaries and could find no references to other pedagogues in Steiner's own work (with the exception of Herbart, although he was never cited directly in Steiner's works regarding education. Steiner mentioned him in his autobiography). In the wider literature I read for this thesis, I did not find Steiner referenced by other educationalists of his time.

Steiner's personal library helps to draw a clearer picture of possible influences. Steiner's library survived him and Paull (2018) completed an analysis of the English-language items. The library is reported to comprise 9000 items; 327 items are identified as English language. The majority of these items (n=164) falls in the category of Theosophy, followed by religion (n=67) and Social Sciences (n=33). Steiner's books in the latter category show his interest in the issues of his time, with topics covering social change, women, labour, economics, and war. Authors such as Dewey are not present, and the presence of English items on pedagogy or education are also not evident (Paull, 2018). However, at the time Steiner was opening the first Waldorf school and developing his pedagogical ideas, an educational movement was developing in Europe and the United States of America. Drawing from the work of John Dewey, this movement became known as the progressive education movement (Bailey & Barrow, 2010; Howlett, 2013; Nielsen, 2006; Pearce, 2015; Stewart & McCann, 1968).

The 19th century was a time of contrasting ideas. Nielsen (2004, p.46) argues that

social, political, economic and educational ideas of the Enlightenment had taken the shape of particular ideologies, such as conservatism, socialism, empiricism, naïve realism, logical atomism, analytic philosophy and scepticism.

In this context, some educational thinkers found a source for renewal in the philosophical ideas of Romanticism, almost as a reaction against the impetus of reason (Nielsen, 2004). Dewey drew on the works by educational Romantics such as Froebel and Pestalozzi in terms of the philosophy of educating the whole child (Howlett, 2013).

He also drew from the field of psychology, particularly William James, and it was the psychology of education that Dewey helped to develop that became instrumental in his theory of education, along with Dewey's ideas on child-centred pedagogy and the role of experience in education (Dewey, 1923, 1933). As Dewey saw it, schooling needed to become more effective and function towards educating a democratic citizenry. This was one of the core values on which progressive education as a movement focussed: education for democracy through a child-centred, experiential approach (Howlett, 2013).

Steiner can be placed broadly within this movement for several reasons: he too originated his philosophical ideas from German Idealism and Romanticism, and the characteristics of the pedagogy he developed shared some of the values of the progressive educational movement. He too had the goal of creating a child-centred pedagogy, with the aim of nurturing the academic, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the child. His pedagogical ideas also had important social implications, summed up by the motto "education towards freedom", and Steiner saw his pedagogy as a tool for social change (Steiner, 1997d, 1999). However, his educational theories and practices stemmed from Anthroposophy, which provides the frame and roots of his philosophical stances on education. It is the nature of Anthroposophy and Steiner's methodology for his scientific enquiry (see Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis) that sets him apart from the thinkers of the progressive educational movement.

The progressive educational movement shared the commitment of providing a holistic education, believing that teaching should attend to the whole person: shifting from education seen as knowledge-centred towards education seen as child-centred (Pearce,

2015). Most of these educational theories arose out of a dissatisfaction for the rigid rationale that underpinned educational theories at the time, especially against the view that saw education as a tool for the transmission of information (Pearce, 2015). What can be seen as a common element of the progressive educational movement is the characterisation of education as not simply as a way to convey knowledge, but rather to develop the whole human being usually seen as a part of a wider whole, natural or societal (Nielsen, 2004; Pearce, 2015; Stewart & McCann, 1968). Commitment to holism is therefore the core element shared by these theorists, although the understanding of what constitutes a human being may differ as well as the methods adopted to achieve this aim. By the same token, there are differences in the various degrees to which these thinkers relied on science and from what basis their theories originated. I argue that Steiner is unique in the way he originated his theories — his educational theories did stem from observations of the child and their development, but it is not possible to overlook the Steiner’s idiosyncratic approach to psychology and science (as I will explain in Chapters 4 and 5).

At the time Steiner was operating, Dewey was the most influential educational thinker. However, it appears that there was no contact between Dewey and Steiner (Ensign, 1996). Montessori was another contemporary thinker of Steiner, and although they were both members of the Theosophical society, they never met or discussed their theories (Steiner, 2005; Wilson, 1985). Moreover, they both, independently, opened and ran new schools for children of low income households (Foschi, 2008; Steiner, 2005). Kilpatrick, who was a progressive educator and follower of Dewey, met Montessori in Italy, but the impressions he reports are critical of her work: “Her doctrine of education as unfolding is neither novel nor correct” (Kilpatrick, 1914, p.66). Kilpatrick’s analysis of the Montessori method was arguably one-sided and

failed to portray her method fully, overlooking its strengths and focusing on those elements that he perceived to be weaknesses (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). What this testifies, however, is that progressive educators like Dewey and Kilpatrick were aware of Montessori and connected with her work, and in Kilpatrick's case with her in person. Steiner did not do this: he did not seem to connect with any other educator as far as it appears.

It may appear curious that Steiner, whose interests were so broad as supported not only by the conferences and essays he wrote but also by his library (Paull, 2018), did not connect with those progressive thinkers that arguably were operating in similar conditions and were striving towards comparable aims. For instance, working in the United Kingdom, A. S. Neill too is among those renowned thinkers who worked to reform education in the 20th Century on the principle that education should be child-centred (Humes, 2015; Stewart & McCann, 1968). His educational work moved from remarkable principles that resonate with those of Rudolf Steiner and both shared the notion that human nature is good, that freedom does not mean absence of rules, and the believe that self-determination and character are more important than formal knowledge for the students (Humes, 2015; Stewart & McCann, 1968). The Summerhill experience by A. S. Neill shares many elements with that of the first Waldorf school, as well as some differences. For instance, "Summerhill is intended to be, in the true sense of the terms, an anarchic community in which children may grow up" (Stewart & McCann, 1968, p. 292), which does not resonate with Steiner's approach to education.

However, what this shows again is the disconnection of Steiner's experience and practices to those movements that were operating to reform and change the educational system during the same period of time. It is noteworthy that Steiner did not attend the first New Era International Conference on Education held at the College Sophie-Berthelot in the summer of 1921, which paved the way for the foundation of the New Education Fellowship (Stewart & McCann, 1968). A. S. Neill attended this conference, as well as Dr Montessori and Jean Piaget among others (Brehony, 2004). Steiner's absence can have several explanations: Germans were not admitted to the French conference at the time (Stewart & McCann, 1968) and of the 150 attendees, the majority appeared to be from England (Brehony, 2004). The New Education Fellowship's foundation can be traced back to 1915 with the establishment of the 'Theosophical Fraternity of Education', and although the role of the Theosophical Society was made consciously inconspicuous Steiner had in 1912 detached himself from the group (Brehony, 2004).

Steiner, on the other hand, did visit the UK in the summer of 1922 (15-29 August) delivering a series of lectures known as the Oxford conferences (Steiner, 2004d). These were organised by Millicent Mackenzie, a retired Professor of Education. She had previously met Steiner in Berlin, and in 1921 she organised a delegation of teachers who attended the Christmas conference held by Rudolf Steiner in Dornach (Paull, 2011). It was in this occasion that Steiner was invited to attend the 1922 Oxford Conference organised by Mackenzie. These conferences represented the threshold of Steiner Education in the UK (Paull, 2011).

It appears, then, that Steiner did not seek to confront himself with other theorists of his time. The Steiner Education movement seems to have been closed in on itself for a long time. Steiner Education literature was not readily available in English until the 70s, and as noted before in this research, what was available was not easily understood outside the Anthroposophical circles (Mazzone, 1999).

3.7 Conclusion

At the core of Steiner's spiritual science is a holistic description of reality. Lim (2004, p. 477) points out that Steiner "did not consider each intellectual area as a separate subject, but approached each area holistically, in order to account for the fullest nature of human beings". His approach was to research reality exploring the objects going beyond their sensible characteristics to their suprasensible or spiritual forms (Reinsmith, 1990). He believed that everyone could have reached that which his consciousness could perceive. In fact, Steiner claims that in every human being there are latent qualities that, when properly developed through a training of the mind, can enable one to see beyond the material reality (Reinsmith, 1990; Steiner, 1994, 1995b, 1996b, 2005, 2011b). For Steiner, this exploration was a necessity, since it was not a mere intellectual exercise, but rather the basis for making proposals for practical life.

In the words of Holdrege (1994, p. xiv):

Rudolf Steiner was acutely aware not only of the significance of modern scientific thought, but also of its limitations. He strove to overcome the reduction of the scientifically knowable world to those aspects of reality accessible only to outer empiricism and mathematical quantification, while at the same time

upholding the rigor and objectivity that distinguishes science from opinion.

For these reasons, it seems it would be a mistake to label Steiner's works as entirely unscientific. In the preface of the Third Edition of *Theosophy*, Steiner (1994) said:

This book cannot be read the way people ordinarily read books in this day and age. In some respects, its readers will have to work their way through each page and even each single sentence the hard way. This was done deliberately; it is the only way this book can become what it is intended to be for the reader. Simply reading it through is as good as not reading it at all. The spiritual scientific truths it contains must be experienced; that is the only way they can be of value.

These words can refer to any piece written by Steiner. Here lies one challenge in approaching and analysing his works. Another difficulty can be faced when one approaches Steiner's works with a contemporary mind-set. It has been discussed that he believed that science was failing to address the problems related to human beings in the right way. The approach of natural science focussed on material phenomena: Steiner sought a holistic approach, which would include material constructs, but also took account of the Spiritual World. Steiner was aware of the difficulty in this, and he explicitly addressed the issue, noting that:

[My works] cannot be assessed from the vantage point of current science unless the appropriate perspective has been acquired by means of the book itself. If its critics can adopt this point of view, they will realize that what is presented here is in no way

contradictory to a truly scholarly and scientific approach. I am sure that I have set down nothing that would conflict with my own scientific scruples. (Steiner, 1994, p. 8)

This quote shows Steiner's awareness of the problem and that he was conscious that some readers could have been uncomfortable with a text such as *Theosophy*.

In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to the implications that Anthroposophy has had on the formation of contemporary Steiner schools. I will focus in particular on the aspects of Steiner's theory that relate to the nature of the human being.

Chapter 4: Educating the Human Being

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will address some of the most significant traits of Steiner's Anthroposophy as it applies to the human being and explain how this relates to Steiner's educational theory. The aim is to clarify the vocabulary used and to shed light on some information that is useful in understanding Steiner's ideas on education. A distinctive feature of Steiner's description of reality is his understanding of what constitutes a human being. As I explained in Chapter 3, he believed in the reality of the Spiritual World and therefore believed the human being to be essentially a spiritual being incarnated into a physical body. This conception of the human constitution has particular relevance for education. The task of education for Steiner is to take into account the spiritual element of the child and to help this element to fully explore and enrich its potential. Therefore, Steiner Education is not built over a series of techniques and teaching methods, but rather it stems from the necessity to accommodate the educational practice to the needs of a developing human being — the pupils in school — so as to favour the harmonious growth of their faculties. Because of this basis, an account of Steiner's description of the human being is necessary.

4.2 The three-fold and four-fold views of the human being

Steiner saw the human being as a spiritual entity, with a soul and a spirit alongside the physical body (Steiner, 1995b, 2009). As a result, he believed that human beings are far more than just “clever” animals, but rather that they are *constitutionally* different from the other three natural kingdoms (mineral kingdom, plant kingdom and animal

kingdom) to which they share only some common elements (Steiner, 1996c, 2009). Steiner describes a human being as a “three-fold entity” constituted of Body, Soul, and Spirit (Steiner, 1994, 1996c, 2004e). Steiner uses these three words in a very specific way:

By body is meant the means by which the things in our environment [...] reveal themselves to us. The word soul designates the means by which we link these things to our own personal existence, by which we experience likes and dislikes, pleasure and displeasure, joy and sorrow. By spirit is meant what becomes apparent in us when, as “quasi-divine beings,” to use Goethe’s expression, we look at the things of the world. In this sense, each person consists of body, soul and spirit (Steiner, 1994, p. 24).

This understanding of the way a human being is constituted is extremely important in understanding Steiner’s educational outcomes because his model of education seeks to nurture and develop harmoniously certain constitutional elements. Although Steiner later suggested a four-fold description, this should be considered as a further explanation of the three-fold viewpoint, and not as a separate theory.

The *physical body* is the part of the human being that is visible to our physical senses. It is the element we have in common with the mineral world. Steiner made clear that “everything that differentiates us from minerals cannot be considered part of the physical body” (Steiner, 1997g, p. 31). In other words, the physical body is a corpse: the constituent of a human being that is subjected to the laws of physics as in the mineral kingdom. Nonetheless, during our life there is a force that prevents the

physical substances from disintegrating. This part of the human makeup, which is an independent element, Steiner names the *etheric body*⁵ or *life body* (Steiner, 1994, 1996b, 1997g). Steiner clarifies the use of the word ‘body’:

[...] the word body should also not be misunderstood. After all, we have to use words taken from ordinary language, words that express only sense-perceptible things, to designate the higher things of existence. In sensory terms, of course, the etheric “body” is nothing bodily at all, no matter how fine or delicate a body we might imagine (Steiner, 1997g, p. 33).

This etheric body is the one that allows life processes and growth. We can see its forces expressed at their full potential in the plant kingdom. Every living thing has its own etheric body. However, in human beings this body is organised so that it can support what Steiner called the thinking spirit. The etheric body permeates the physical one in all its parts, and is its architect. The physical body and the etheric body together form the complete body, in the three-fold view of the human being.

However, if a being is only constituted by a physical and an etheric body, sensations cannot take place (Steiner, 1994): ‘the forces of the etheric body are incapable of illuminating themselves with the light of consciousness’ (Steiner, 1997g, p. 37). If only these forces are present, only a plant-like existence would be possible, and a being would live in an on-going dreamless state of sleep, similar to the one that according to Steiner is experienced by the plant kingdom. A waking state is possible due to the

⁵Ätherleib or Ätherkörper in German. In the English translations it is referred to either as Ether or Etheric body.

presence of yet another body, the *astral body* (its definition is synonymous with the term *soul*).

The astral body, which human beings have in common with the animal kingdom, allows us to have sensory perceptions (Steiner, 1994, 1997g). To better understand the activity of the astral body we can refer to what happens when we sleep. When asleep, the sensory perception seems to disappear. What changes is our state of consciousness: when asleep, the forces of the astral body loosen their influences on the etheric and physical body, so that sensation is reduced (Steiner, 1997g). Steiner said that

As far as sensory perception is concerned, the effects of the astral body disappear when a person falls asleep. To supersensible observation, however, the astral body is still present but appears to have separated from the etheric body or lifted out of it. Sensory perception does not deal with the astral body itself but only with its effects on manifest elements. These effects are not directly present while we sleep (Steiner, 1997g, p. 37).

It is fundamental not to be mistaken when considering what consciousness means for Steiner in this instance. He explained that the deciding factor in consciousness ‘is not the fact that a being responds to stimuli, but the fact that it inwardly experiences something new in addition to the mere response’ (Steiner, 1997g, p. 37).

The fourth element mentioned by Steiner has nothing in common with the other kingdoms, and this is the element that truly belongs to the human being. This fourth element is the *I* or *Ego*: in the three-fold system this element is the spirit. For Steiner

the presence of this element can be observed when considering the causes and motivations underpinning human actions compared to animal behaviours. Steiner argued that animals experience the influence of the outer world with regularity and that they live under the influences of what comes to them from the outside (warmth, cold, pain, pleasure, hunger and thirst). This is not entirely true for what concerns human experiences. Steiner said:

[w]e can develop desires and wishes that transcend all this. It would always be possible, if we were able to go far enough, to demonstrate where the cause of an animal's action or sensation lies, whether within its body or outside of it. This is by no means the case with human beings. We can produce wishes and desires that are not adequately accounted for by causes either within or outside of our bodies (Steiner, 1997g, p. 38).

This element is fundamental, in fact it is a result of this faculty that, according to Steiner, human beings can be free. It is due to our ability to think that we become aware of our actions and our choices, and in this way we unleash ourselves from 'the iron necessity of purely natural law' (Steiner, 1995b, p. 5).

Without the *I*, sensations would take place in the astral body, 'but there would be no sense of anything permanent in all of this' (Steiner, 1997g, p. 39). The feeling of *I* becomes clear when we experience something permanent in the flow of our inner experiences. Memory belongs to the *I* and Steiner is very precise in defining what he meant by 'memory'. He said: 'In this book, the perception of the past — and not merely its reappearance, even in a changed form, at a later time — is what will be called memory' (Steiner, 1997g, p. 43). Furthermore, it is the element that permits human

self-awareness. As human beings we have consciousness, but we also have self-consciousness: we can reflect upon ourselves. Finally, the *I* represents the spiritual aspect of the human being. It is immortal and everlasting, and it is the element that in Steiner's view endures after death, and that undergoes rebirth following the cycle of reincarnation. It is what makes each and every person on the earth a unique individual (Steiner, 1994, 1996c, 1997g). What is important to notice here is that for Steiner the *I* is the true bearer of human nature, and the human individuality

It can be seen from the description above that the human beings, in their inner essence are for Steiner, spiritual beings, living between two worlds: the Spiritual World, and the material one. The spirit, that is the *I*, comes from the Spiritual World and obeys spiritual laws (described by Steiner as 'karmic laws' (Steiner, 1997g)); the physical body comes from the material world, the world ruled by the laws of physics (Steiner, 1996c). For Steiner the *I*, descending on the earth, incarnates into an earthly form. In doing so, two streams converge together: the spiritual one (entelechy), which embodies the individual qualities and which, in a way, represents the real individual, joins the physical-material line (hereditary power), coming from our parents, and more broadly from what Steiner defines as genus: the ethnic group, race, tribe, people, family, male or female gender (Steiner, 1995b).

What is important to notice here is that for Steiner the *I* is the true bearer of human nature, and the human individuality. What comes from the material does not always suit the true nature of the *I*, but Steiner said that it is important not to be limited by the obstacles coming from our material origin (Steiner, 1994, 1995b, 1996c). In fact, he said:

The view that human beings are capable of self-enclosed, free individuality seems to be contradicted by the fact that, as human beings, we both appear as parts within a natural whole (race, tribe, people, family, male or female gender) and act within that whole (state, church, and so forth) (Steiner, 1995b, p. 225).

The sentiment expressed in the quotation, suggests that the relationship between individuality and genus is complicated. What is discussed here is the issue of specifically to what extent one's environment and genetics may influence an individual. In an educational context, as I will explain, this has particular importance for Steiner.

Between the Spiritual body and the physical body, Steiner argues exists the soul, which acts as a bridge between these two worlds. The soul serves as a mediator during the human life of the individual while he or she is on the earth between the physical body and the spirit (Steiner, 1994, 1996c).

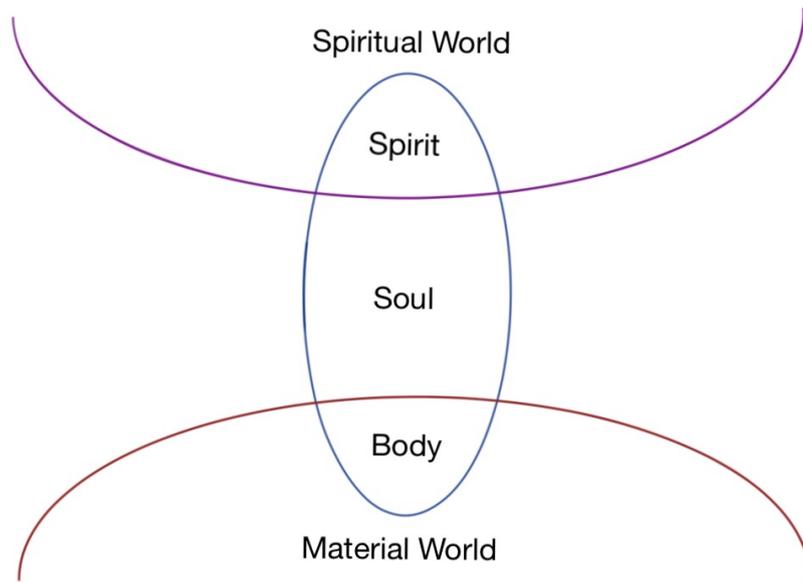


Figure 1, The Soul as a Mediator⁶

According to Steiner, three faculties are harboured within the soul: Thinking, Feeling and Willing. Each of these three elements can be associated with one of the three components of the human being (Steiner, 1996c). (See Table 1 below.)

These three forces are active at three different levels of consciousness (Hogenboom & Woodward, 2013; Steiner, 1996c). (See Table 2 below.)

⁶ Based on *The soul as a mediator* by Hogenboom and Woodward (2013)

Soul force	Human element
Thinking	Spirit (the I)
Feeling	Soul (Astral Body)
Willing	Physical Body

Table 1, The Soul Forces and the Human Elements

Steiner (1996c) stated that these three forces are linked to the three parts that constitute the human being and to the three states of consciousness, and Steiner states that during our earthly life there are different developmental stages: it is only in accordance to these phases, as I will explain in the next section, that education can be structured.

Soul force	State of consciousness
Thinking	Awakeness
Feeling	Dreaming
Willing	Sleeping

Table 2, Soul Forces and State of Consciousness

4.3 Development and education

Steiner's educational theory and practice are drawn from his philosophy and his ideas about the constitution of a human being. His educational ideas are grounded in the understanding that the school years can be roughly divided into three stages of seven years, corresponding to three different stages of a child's development — birth to age seven (early childhood), seven to age fourteen (middle childhood), and fourteen to twenty-one (adolescence). Each of these stages is characterised by a different way in which children approach the world. This concept is rooted in Steiner's interpretation of childhood development — a development which takes into account the child from an intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual perspective. This is important because it is the framework upon which the teachers and practitioners in a Steiner School work from and where their teaching derives from. In this section the stages of a child's development are described with appropriate references and examples that refer to the practices and to the specific roles that teachers play. Each of the three elements — body, soul and spirit — play a prominent role in one of the three stages of development, and the teachers will operate in such a way as to fulfil the age-specific needs at each stage. The aim of education, for Steiner, was to harmoniously develop and enrich the child's development at all three dimensions of thinking, feeling and will.

According to Steiner, the three elements that form a human being — body, soul and spirit — mature at a different pace. The first seven years are devoted to the maturation of the physical body, the second stage sees the maturation of the soul and the third stage of the spirit, which is the bearer of individuality and for Steiner holds the potential for individual freedom. The individuality of a person emerges, according to Steiner's theories, when the Spirit — the *I* or Ego — is matured. During these early

school years, the *I* of the child is believed to be still quiescent, therefore it is not through appealing directly to the faculty of abstract thinking that teaching is believed to become fruitful or effective. The child will learn to rely on the language of the imagination and Steiner claimed that learning would take place out of love and curiosity (Steiner, 1996b, 1997c, 2000). Love for both the subjects being taught and the teachers delivering the subjects.

In the classroom, Steiner believed the authority of the teacher was one of the most crucial elements. Steiner said: “The authority is taken for granted by the child from a dim feeling that in the teacher there is something that should exist in himself [or herself], too” (Steiner, 1985, p. 3). To understand what Steiner meant, authority here has to be interpreted according to its Latin roots, *auctoritas* from the Latin verb *augeo* “to enrich”, “to enlarge”. *Auctoritas* describes the set of qualities typical of an institution or of a single person to which individuals voluntarily subject themselves to achieve common goals. So, the authority of the teacher is not understood as an imposition, it is not obtained through intimidation or coercion: on the contrary, in order to teach out of authority, a teacher must possess the certain necessary qualities (therefore Steiner’s understanding of teaching in the form of self-education and learning by example). Therefore, “a teacher with real authority should be conscious that what he or she says clings to the habit life of the children’s souls” (Steiner, 1996b, p. 151). In other words, the claim by Steiner practitioners here is that primary school children retain a bias towards authority, but this is not motivated by a desire for imitation (as it was for the first stage), but rather because they recognise a major role model in the adult (Avison & Rawson, 2014). If this belief is looked at from the opposite perspective, then it will result that in delivering a healthy and good education — according to Steiner’s principles — it falls upon the teachers to be good role models,

because their authority is conditioned by the one important element they must master (see chapter 5).

One feature that marks the years between the age of seven and the age of nine, is that children have a strong desire to learn, “without any need to form their own judgement” (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014, p. 25). Therefore, memory, imagination, and enjoyment of rhythmical repetition all play a pivotal role in the teachers’ practice. After the age of nine, children will experience a tendency to challenge the teacher’s authority; this for Steiner is a sign that their critical thinking faculties are awakening. Between the age of nine and twelve, Steiner observed that children develop an acute capacity to think causally. For this reason, the teaching of physics starts around this age. Steiner thought that discovering the laws of physics, which exist independently from humanity but yet are discovered thanks to the human faculty of thinking, is believed to be a source of satisfaction. He thought that such subjects will be studied with interest because — even though they now require abstract thinking — they resonate with this newly discovered quality within the pupils. (Steiner, 1996c).

Between the age of twelve and fourteen the imaginative forces upon which teaching had relied up until this point, according to Steiner, undergo a metamorphosis. The rational, abstract power of the intellect emerges from this moment of change (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Technical subjects are introduced as a means of responding to these new needs (to explore the world and its laws). The teaching of myths and legends gives way to that of history and that of causal relationships. Their intellect needs to be challenged. However — in the name of achieving the balance among all the human faculties — a renewed importance is placed upon practical and technical professions and work. Steiner considered it crucial to educate the will of the child at this stage. At

the same time, it is at this point that Steiner noted that the young students need help to orientate their attention from within themselves towards the world, discovering connections between the natural laws and the ways in which they function. There is a need for the students of this age to understand that older people, like themselves, are struggling with the same inner battle, which stems from a questioning, doubting and fighting with existential questions regarding the inner limitations of human nature and this can lead to inner frustrations (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014). Relying on traditional disciplines such as science and maths can help teachers during this process.

4.4 Education and spirituality, freedom and creativity

For Steiner freedom does not mean to follow our basic instincts and passions, but rather to rise to greater heights. True freedom is informed by a moral life (Steiner, 1995b), but individuals behave with varied degrees of freedom. He argues, however, that freedom of action may only occur when there is freedom to think. He distinguishes four levels of action, each with a corresponding level of freedom. At the first level, actions are the result of *perceiving*, particularly the perception of the senses. At this level, these actions are derived from an impulse or *drive*. There are the actions related to our basic instincts of survival. The second level is constituted by those actions that are motivated by *feeling*, such as pity, or anger, or else shame. The third level are those actions resulting from *thinking and creating mental pictures*. The highest stage is conceptual thinking. At this level the motivational power of our actions is *pure thinking* (Steiner, 1995b). Freedom, then, was a central feature of his pedagogical model, and a great deal of the ideas regarding freedom streamed into his teaching concepts. Freedom is not a means for teaching, but the aim of education itself. Steiner's education primary educational goal was therefore to nurture individuality and thereby

to enable each student a chance to fulfil, through freedom, their own individual potential.

In addition to freedom, Steiner's concept of education is directed towards nurturing of the selfhood of children. Creativity and the spiritual elements emerge from this approach not by being directly addressed as isolated skills to acquire and master, but because encouraging these elements is necessary for the well-balanced growth of a human being in the Steinerian view (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). For these reasons, the relevance of creative elements in the classroom become very important as does the way subjects are taught. Artistic elements are an integral part of the Steiner school approach, and this is believed to be a means of nurturing the natural creative element which exists in every child. Drawing, singing, painting, acting and poetry are not used in isolation, but artistic elements are combined with other subjects with the aim of nurturing the feelings of each child. Creativity in a Steiner context is therefore linked with the idea of something artistic, and imaginative (Kirkham & Kidd, 2017). In the literature, it emerges that the notion of creativity can be approached in three different ways: as a set of processes, as personal characteristics and attitudes, and as a means of describing a product. Creativity, as an idea, is therefore considered from two main perspectives: as a process and as a product (Amabile, 1996; Cropley, 2011; Hennessey & Amabile, 2011; Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010; Plucker & Makel, 2010; Sternberg, 2006, 2011). In Steiner Education, the idea of creativity is close to that of a process, but it is not addressed separately in itself, but it is instead integrated in every subjects taught at school.

Spirituality, which does not mean religion or secularity, is intimately connected with thinking. For Steiner thinking is the most human and truly spiritual activity of which a human being is capable (Steiner, 1995b, 1996c). Steiner links the spiritual element to a general idea of morality, but wanted teachers to avoid imparting moral teaching by preaching and chastising:

It would be very incorrect to remind children constantly to be thankful for whatever comes from their surroundings. On the contrary, an atmosphere of gratitude should grow naturally in children through merely witnessing the gratitude that their elders feel as they receive what is freely given by their fellow human beings, and in how they express their gratitude. In this situation, one would also cultivate the habit of feeling grateful by allowing the child to imitate what is done in the surroundings. If a child says “thank you” very naturally—not in response to the urging of others, but simply by imitation— something has been done that will greatly benefit the child’s whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world (Steiner, 1996a, p. 146).

In the school, the spiritual element of a child is believed to be reinforced when autonomy, social connections, and enthusiasm are stimulated and when the physical and psychological well-being of the pupils are nurtured. It is believed that this can be achieved by providing the children with the right contents and the right activities. A sense of awe is always preserved in the lower class through storytelling for instance, and care is given to provide role models. This is done both through presenting the content of any subjects as the discoveries of great men and women that through their power of thinking, research and effort achieved great results (Steiner, 2000b), and also through how the teachers conduct themselves in the classroom.

The three notions of freedom, creativity and spirituality are intertwined in Steiner's work. The overall teaching approaches are directed at nurturing all these qualities, together, as an interconnected whole. I argue that this is because these concepts are not seen as competences, but rather as elements that exist within the human being.

4.5 Conclusion

The core of Steiner's view on spirituality and freedom lies in the *Philosophy of Freedom*. The implications for his later pedagogical research are nevertheless noteworthy. What is relevant in terms of the pedagogical practice produced is Steiner's attempt to establish an educational approach which looks at the child as a whole. What results from the Anthroposophical basis of Steiner's pedagogy is an approach which aims not solely at caring for the academic needs of the pupils, but which has a broader scope to provide an education which addresses holistically also the psychological development of the children. Ultimately, Steiner aimed at creating an education toward freedom, which he understood as an educational approach that would provide the new generation of pupils with knowledge, but also with the possibility of becoming more self-aware. The foundation of this approach lies, I argue, foremost on Steiner's ontology and epistemology, as described in *The Philosophy of Freedom*.

What emerges as a consequence of Steiner's ideas is the fact that each human being is unique, is an individual. For him this was an important aspect which should be taken into consideration in a school setting. He aimed at strengthening the autonomy of the individual's power of thinking and for this reason he believed in a reformation of the

school system to depart from a method of teaching imparted in a pure top-down way. In his pedagogical conferences and publications (Steiner, 1985, 1995c, 1996b, 1996c, 1996e, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d) he refers to pedagogy as the “art of education”. He was a supporter of an educational system and of a pedagogy which responded to the needs of individuals. A pedagogy that was crafted, rather than engineered. As a consequence, it can be argued that in a school environment this element has to be taken into account, since it means that every pupil, as a separate and unique entity, may need a different learning approach.

In the next chapter Steiner’s educational theories will be presented with a focus on their practical implications. The practice utilised in Steiner schools will be outlined, and the main characteristics of this approach will be explained.

Chapter 5: Steiner's pedagogy and Steiner Schools

Sometimes one sees in the school simply the instrument for transferring a certain maximum quantity of knowledge to the growing generation. But that is not right. Knowledge is dead; the school, however, serves the living. (Einstein, 1973, p. 60)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the pedagogy behind Steiner Education will be explored and some examples of the practices used by Steiner schools will be sketched. Particular attention will be paid to Steiner's theories on the development of the child and links will be made to demonstrate the relevance of these theories to their educational purposes. An exemplification of some of the most common practices and activities used in Steiner schools will then be presented with the aim of showing the characteristics of this approach with references to Steiner's educational theories.

The schools that follow Steiner's guidelines are largely referred to as Steiner Schools, Steiner-Waldorf Schools, or Waldorf Schools (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014; Clouder, 1998b; Clouder & Rawson, 1998; Wylie & Hagan, 2003). This is explained by the fact that the schools are named sometimes after the educator who created this pedagogy, Rudolf Steiner, and sometimes after the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, where the first school was opened in 1919 (Foster, 1984; Steiner, 1997d). To avoid confusion, I will refer to *Steiner schools*, *Steiner's pedagogy*, and *the Steiner teaching approach*, but I will not change the terminology used by others when quoting them, even in instances where they may use another term, which denotes the Steiner pedagogy or educational framework.

I prefer to use the term “approach” and synonyms for approach when talking about Steiner’s pedagogy because, in my opinion, this best conveys the idea of a pedagogical framework that is not distinguished by a method or a set of rules to be followed precisely. Steiner remarked that pedagogic and philosophical ideas must not be fixed but should remain fluid. He said that: “[...] life can assume the most diverse forms, [...] it is continually in flux, and [so] whoever wishes to follow its course must adapt his thinking and feeling to its flow” (Steiner, 1999, p. 13). So, my choice of terms is made as a response to Steiner’s intentions in mind, as he had expressed them when he was training the teachers for the first school in Stuttgart. It has been recorded that he often reminded his audience that his ideas were only to be guidelines, and were to be verified through and should therefore be adapted to suit different times and needs (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b, 2004b).

5.2 What is Steiner’s pedagogy and curriculum?

As noted earlier, Steiner’s pedagogy is informed by, but separate from, Anthroposophy. This separation is important in understanding how a Steiner school operates and how the curriculum is created. Rudolf Steiner remarked on several occasions that the Anthroposophical ideas — on which his educational views are based to an extent — were not to be shared with the pupils and it was not the aim of any Steiner school to become a means of spreading Anthroposophical teachings. The apparent contradiction here can be bypassed if we consider that any pedagogical view is based on a theory, concept or ideological framework. It would be a misunderstanding to argue that a set of values and theories should not be included in educational policy and the curriculum that emerges from such policies (Gillies, 2006;

Priestley & Minty, 2013). Alongside Gillies (2006), I argue that value-free pedagogy is impossible, because education is not a natural phenomenon but rather a human construct.

In terms of the curricular and pedagogic approach, an exploration of Steiner school websites in the UK shows that the schools make clear that the understanding of a child's development, the human constitution, and the broader worldview that is emphasised are all derived from Steiner's work. For instance, on the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship website one can read:

The curriculum itself is a flexible set of pedagogical guidelines, founded on Steiner's principles that take account of the whole child. It gives equal attention to the physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual needs of each pupil and is designed to work in harmony with the different phases of the child's development ("What is Steiner education?," 2019).

The Steiner school approach is characterised by a creative attitude to pedagogy, but there is not a fixed Steiner curriculum as such, because Steiner's pedagogy is based on the understanding that a teacher should respond to the needs of the specific set of pupils he or she is teaching, and the children's natures will vary from time to time, place to place and across different ages. What constitutes the curriculum in a Steiner school is a body of knowledge and publications which document the experiences of those involved in Steiner Education over a period of many years. The problem arising from this situation is that often this knowledge is passed on orally from teacher to teacher, although a wider literature, often produced internally for the use of the practitioner of each school, is also available alongside the core texts on education which include

Steiner's lectures on the matter. In addition, a wider literature is available to new teachers via the library of each Steiner school, the Fellowship of the Steiner School, and through the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum ("Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum: Literature," 2018; "Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship," 2019).

Due to the absence of a fixed programme, each teacher is called upon to be an active agent and should be able to access Steiner's collected works and conferences and interpret them, drawing from them according to his or her pedagogical insight. What results is a framework-curriculum that is ongoing, not standardised, highly personalised and dependent on how each teacher wishes to teach it (Rawson, 2017). As a result, each teacher, and consequently each school, will differ. However, for the public, some texts addressing the curriculum of Steiner schools are now available (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014; Rawson, Masters, Avison, & Collis, 2013; Stockmeyer, Steiner, & Everett-Zade, 1991).

Other publications represent a collection of the experiences and practices of former Steiner teachers (K. Avison, 1995; K. Avison & Rawson, 2014; Carlgren, 2008; Clouder & Rawson, 1998; Lievegoed, 1987; Rawson, 2017). These texts provide aids to teachers on an array of different pedagogical aspects: from critical explanation of a child's development, to poems and songs, from samples of contents on a variety of subjects, to reflections upon years of practice as a Class teacher.

Steiner provided the practitioners of the first school with some key elements of theory, philosophy and pedagogy (all linked with his description of the faculties and development of the human being) but not with a curriculum as such. The task of

creating the content of the lessons fell upon the practitioners. Steiner believed that the challenge of reforming the education system was being undertaken — at his time — “without really recognising life’s foundations” (Steiner, 1996b, p. 2). He called for a different approach, claiming that to fruitfully reform the education system “a superficial knowledge of life” was not enough: those who were undertaking the task of carrying out this reformation needed to “to investigate its [life’s] depth” (Steiner, 1996b, p. 2).

Moving from the assumption that human nature is in a state of consistent change and evolution, Steiner said that the task of educators was not to invent programmes, “but read them from what is already there” (Steiner, 1996b, p. 4), that is to say that the observation of the pupils should give the teachers inspiration on how to present the contents of a lesson. When he was explaining to the public the ideas behind his school, Steiner (1996b, p. 4) stated: “We shall not set up demands nor programs, but simply describe child-nature. From the nature of the growing and evolving human being, the proper viewpoint for Education will, as it were, result spontaneously.” For this reason, the practitioners of a Steiner school are required to use a discretion and ingenuity in their practice and it becomes apparent why the relationships with the pupils (and parents) play such an important role: in order to deliver the lesson and build the curriculum, they need to know and understand the pupils they have before them, and it is important not to forget that the teachers themselves are “growing and evolving human being[s]” (Steiner, 1997c). Thus, proving that for Steiner teaching is self-education.

For many years a Steiner curriculum was not published (Clouder, 2016). What was available was a brief manuscript published by one of the founding teachers of the first

school, in which the practices of the first teachers and the content of the lessons were briefly outlined (Clouder, 2016). Other texts were drawn from Steiner conferences on education by other practitioners, but they were never systematically organised (Clouder, 2016). Steiner schools around the world produced, over the years, their own curriculums both for their own internal use and for the local and national authorities — given the necessity for accountability required by respective governments where the schools were located. Within the Waldorf movement there was some tension and doubt about publishing an official version of the curriculum. It was believed by the Waldorf Fellowship that the risk of having it used as a “straightjacket by future generations of teachers and governmental officials” was too high (Clouder, 2016, p. 2). It was only in 1995, that a general curriculum for Steiner schools was published, it can be speculated that behind the formal organisation of a printed curriculum there was a greater need to be accountable. However, as argued by Clouder (2016, p. 2) “the ideal of taking creative risks and responding to the perceived needs of the children entails an unavoidable tension with the contemporary requirement for accountability and transparency in the teaching process”. So, nowadays, a curriculum that provides guidelines and works as a framework is available.

5.3 Steiner schooling and the developing child

In the following paragraphs Steiner’s position on childhood development will be presented, with a particular focus on the development of children between the age of 7 and 21, being that this is the age group considered for this research. Normally, in a Steiner school, pupils would start school at the age of six/seven and progress from class 1 to class 12. The classes are normally organised based on the age group in this way:

Steiner Class	Age	
Class 1	6/7	Lower School
Class 2	7/8	
Class 3	8/9	
Class 4	9/10	
Class 5	10/11	
Class 6	11/12	
Class 7	12/13	
Class 8	13/14	
Class 9	14/15	Upper school
Class 10	15/16	
Class 11	16/17	
Class 12	17/18	

Table 3, Steiner School Classes and Age Group

5.3.1 Early Childhood – Developing the limbs through doing

From birth to approximately age 7, the forces acting within a child are those linked with will-power and with volition. The child, during the early years, is primarily *active* according to Steiner (Steiner, 1996c). These forces and faculties are expressed primarily within the physical body, which is undertaking considerable changes. Within the Steiner movement it is understood that, although there are individual differences within this period of seven years children live primarily through their senses and learn best through imitation (Steiner, 1996b). Particular care is taken, therefore, so that children of this age group are surrounded by an environment in which “good habits of behaviour — such as memory, reverence, orderliness, listening and enjoyment of the natural world — can be established” (Avison & Rawson, 2014, p. 23). Play is pivotal during this stage and no formal teaching is intended until a child is ready for the first grade. Through free play children are believed to develop imagination and initiative. What is absorbed by the child happens through imitation and doing (Steiner, 1995c). This approach is believed to set the basis for formal learning in later years, through the strengthening of the will and the creation of good habits. The experiences in this phase are absorbed at an unconscious level and learning happens through implicit rather than explicit teaching. This is possible if the environment provides meaningful activities that the children can imitate. So, experiences turn into activities, establishing the development of the child’s own maternal language, habits and behaviours: the rhythm of the day is particularly important for this development.

5.3.2 Middle Childhood – Developing the heart through imagination

When the child is ready to enrol in primary school, the focus and the teaching approach changes, even though the process happens slowly and again relies on the will of the

pupil and imitation of activities and good habits. School readiness is something that is particularly important in Steiner schools, and Steiner practitioners look at specific signs to determine whether a child is ready for primary school (Steiner, 1995c, 1996b, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b, 2004c). Steiner's understanding of the development of the human being is once again the basis for interpreting when a child is ready for school — in other words, when he or she is ready to participate in a formal education setting.

While in early infancy (ages 0 to 7 years-old) the child is understood by Steiner (1995c) to be living in an intimate connection with the world, almost in a dream-like state, in the second seven-year period the children are believed to begin a different journey and they start to relate differently with the reality and their surroundings (Steiner, 1996c). They still have a dream like consciousness, which will awaken during the period of puberty, but they have a clearer sense of self. When Steiner refers to a 'dream-like state of consciousness' he means that before a certain age (around age 12) the child is not fully capable of abstract thinking, and that they perceive the reality and the world in a more imaginative way, Steiner said that "before the approach of the twelfth year the concept of causality does not exist in the mind of children" (Steiner, 1996a, p. 109). In order to respond to this stage of development, the children therefore have the need to receive not rigid and fixed concepts but images that correspond with their inner reality (Steiner, 1996b, 1996c). Steiner explained this by saying:

Above all, one will avoid sharply defined or rigid concepts. It is really appalling when a teacher's ideas and concepts have been worked out to the degree that they are no longer adaptable or flexible. They would have an effect similar to the effect of iron gloves forced onto a child's little hands, preventing them from growing naturally. We must not chain children's minds to

finished concepts, but give them concepts that can grow and expand further. We must give them living concepts that can be transformed. But this can be achieved only through an imaginative approach in every subject, certainly until the twelfth year; then the method of teaching I have thus far sketched for you will encourage you to use language creatively, to draw helpful drawings on the blackboard or to take up a paintbrush to make colorful illustrations of what you want to communicate (Steiner, 1996a, p. 109).

At this stage, learning engages with the feeling the children have thus far and has the power to enliven their creative forces. Imagination is a key quality, and art and music play a pivotal role in the child's experience in school (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014).

At this level, it is possible to understand the value of fairy tales and fables, mythological sagas, and stirring biographies of historical figures that reveal to the children a world of thought through images. It is through this narrative approach that children are believed to have the possibility of accessing a rich and complex knowledge (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). The school contents are therefore presented in a simple and synthetic way through images and metaphors. It is through narrative and pictorial thinking that Steiner teachers deliver their lessons. The idea is to present the contents of a lesson in a way that children can relate to directly (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Whatever the teacher does must be sufficiently *alive*, so as to reach every child in a personal way regardless of the size of the class. This is the age when the astral body is undertaking the greatest changes and it is believed to be necessary to take care in educating the soul in particular — the emotional sphere of the child — and it is appealing to this sphere of emotion and feelings that the curriculum is based upon (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b).

In addition to this general artistic configuration of teaching, Steiner schools also avail to the tools of real artistic activities:

In Steiner teacher education programs, much as 50% of the contact time can be related to artistic work of one sort or another. This can be in forms of eurythmy (movement activity akin to dance), drama, music, singing, creative writing, storytelling, development of speech and declamation, painting, drawing, sculpture, a rich variety of handcrafts and art history. (Clouder, 2016, p. 10)

Particular care is devoted to manual activities: knitting, sewing, embroidering, crochet, making a sock, in a path that will lead, in the middle-school classes, to the use of a sewing machine and the creation of a piece of clothing. The academic subjects (the mother tongue, math, history, sciences, etc.), are presented in an artistic way and revitalized by the teacher so that the children can welcome them and feel them alive within themselves. Great importance is given to artistic and manual activities, that respond to the nourishment of the complexity of the human being who is not only head-oriented — that is to say intellectual —, but who also comprises heart-feeling (the sphere of feeling, linked with the emotional intelligence) and hands-will (volition and the development of independence) (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Steiner educators come close to claiming that the more varied and diverse the teaching is, the more the child will have the opportunity to find him or herself in the material and establish himself freely (Selg, 2010). In this stage, the task of the teachers is “to transform all that the child needs to know about the world into the language of the imagination, a language that is as accurate and as responsible to reality as intellectual analysis is in the adult” (Barnes, 2001, p. 3).

5.3.3 Adolescence – Developing the mind through discernment of the world

Age fourteen to twenty-one marks the development of the faculty of ‘thinking’. It is when the individuality of a person unfolds according to Steiner (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b) and the first prominent expression of critical thinking is demonstrated. This new stage comes with the newly released faculties of judgement and discernment of the world. The students are now capable of abstract thinking and reasoning. As a result, they try and test their ideas and principles, and often seek for an objective truth. It is the stage where the spirit, the *I* or else ‘thinking’, comes to maturation. In order to approach this process appropriately, teaching switches from the previous style based on imitation and the nurturing of the emotional sphere and an increased autonomy is enabled to the students in their education, while overseen by the teachers, which are specialists in their fields. The focus is not to nurture the student’s inner life with ideals. The teaching at this point is increasingly conceptual and cognitive. The aim is to provide the students with the tools required to explore and see the world from different perspectives:

In classes 1 to 3 the teacher had to be the master of the ‘language of the universe’ and make it audible for the children. In the second phase he or she had to articulate the dialogue between world phenomena and the human being. Now, as the youngers fall silent outwardly in the third phase, the teacher must develop the capacity to hear their inner speech, the young people’s hidden words (Avison & Rawson, 2014, p. 27).

As was pointed out, it is the duty of the practitioners to create and formulate a curriculum that draws from requirements of the different stages of childhood development as put forth by Steiner.

To summarise, the foundation of Steiner's pedagogy resides in Steiner's understanding of the development of the child. The teaching is based on those theoretical assumptions, based on Steiner's "spiritual research" (Steiner, 1996c). Therefore, it has emerged through this analysis that Steiner's pedagogy aligns with the pupil's physical and emotional development and the educational activities used in Steiner schools are planned in relation to the specific maturity -level of students in a given class. There are, however, certain general elements which are common to every class in a Steiner school. The teaching is based on some shared principles that can be listed as follows:

- Experienced-based learning: a phenomenological approach underpins the teaching throughout Steiner Education. This aspect is very prominent in the early years when (age 3 to 14) sensory experiences are emphasised. For this reason, the objects, materials, colours and more generally the overall aesthetic aspects of the school environment are carefully organised and looked after.
- Teaching 'through images': Steiner warned against too high a level of abstraction in teaching. In a Steiner school, teaching involves the use of what Steiner (1996d) called 'living concepts', and teachers resolve to use images and metaphors. The idea is to present the content of a lesson as it appeals to the emotional predisposition of the student because, according to Steiner, appealing to the student's

feelings encourages the individual to become deeply involved with the content of a lesson, which consequently stimulates their learning.

5.4 The role of the teacher: ensuring balance and rhythm in learning

Each class has a class teacher that follows the same pupils, ideally, from class 1 to class 8. He or she teaches the main lesson — the first two hours of each day — and often some other classes during the day. Specialist teachers teach subjects such as foreign languages, music, eurythmy, handwork, etc. to each class. In the upper school, where each subject is taught by a specialist, the figure of the class teacher transforms into that of a guardian. Each class has a Guardian, a teacher that follows the same class through the years in the upper school and provides the same care that the class teacher provided in the lower school. Both a guardian and a class teacher have the task of maintaining the classes focus as well as creating continuity over the years. The class teacher (or guardian) becomes the focus of the learning experience, but his or her task is to foster social awareness among the pupils and to assume responsibility for their wellbeing. Particular attention to the social aspect occurs when a new class is formed: the class teacher will take care of the class and attempt to instigate bonds between the pupils. This process is enhanced by the long-term presence of the class teacher or guardian for the class as they matriculate.

One of the main characteristics of Steiner Education is the main-lesson (sometimes referred to as the morning-lesson). This lesson occupies the first two hours of every morning and it is carried out in the lower school by the class teacher. There are different subjects taught in blocks over several weeks. This is a feature of all classes

from class 1 to class 12 (age group 6 to 14). The subjects taught vary according to the class, which follows the principle of teaching subjects that are age-specific and which match with the children's developmental stage.

The class teacher is responsible for choosing the material so as to respond to the needs of the specific class he or she is teaching. This practice becomes the rationale behind Steiner's education:

The subjects you teach will not be treated as they have been up to now. In a way, you must use them to develop the soul and physical forces of the individual correctly. The important thing for you is not to transmit information as such but to utilize knowledge to develop human capacities (Steiner, 2000, p. 1).

The idea behind the main lesson is to provide the pupils with the time to connect with the contents presented in the class and to create links across different subject areas. Each main lesson has a structure designed to contain a range of different activities, so as to balance intellectual activities with artistic ones.

A typical main lesson contains a range of the following activities:

First part

- Morning verse, recitation of poetry, musical activities (such as singing and instrumental work), mental arithmetic. These activities often go under the name of 'Morning Circle'
- Recalling of the previous material in the form of questions relating to the previous day's work

- Work derived from the re-telling of the previous lesson, in the form of writing, mathematic exercises, or an artistic task.

Second part

- Presentation of new contents by the teacher followed by a discussion.

Third part

- Individual work stemming from a question, or task. Or else a narrative (such as storytelling) or the practice of basic skills.
- Finally, the pupils are left with some considerations to carry home (not necessarily in the form of formal homework, but often just as ideas that will be reconsidered the following day).

Rhythm in learning is an important pillar of the Steiner Education approach. It is indeed considered a vital element in the learning experience. The structure of the school day is organised so as to bring a balance between concentration and relaxation, intellectual and practical work, movement and rest, listening and participating, looking and doing — in other words to bring balance between the three faculties of thinking, feeling and willing (Steiner, 1997c, 2000b).

A class teacher has a great degree of freedom in organising such activities to best suit the class and he or she can spontaneously change them according to need. This rhythm of the day is flexible and can be directed by the teacher, for instance Monday mornings may have a different quality than Friday mornings (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014). A broader rhythm is followed during the year, a rhythm that follows the change of the seasons. Steiner's idea was that such an annual rhythm, which followed the seasonal

festivity, would provide a sense of continuity and it would help to build a sense of community as well (Steiner, 2003).

Rhythm is believed to act also within the learning process, and it is considered by Steiner to be beneficial for such processes to be carried out as part of a rhythm. There are subjects that are taught regularly, because they need a regular practice, such as foreign language, music, maths, spelling, etc.), and others that are introduced as new contents in the main lessons that follow a different approach. This differentiation is based on the assumption that “acquiring new skills and practicing them until they become ability are two different processes requiring different rhythms” (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014, p. 31). Teaching the main lesson in blocks means that for a period of three or four weeks every morning is dedicated to the study of a particular subject that is then stopped for a period of time allowing it to rest before being recalled and brought back to consciousness at a later time (Steiner, 1996c, 2003).

In this practice the two elements of concentration and relaxation are applied not within a single class, but over the course of a year-long programme. For Steiner allowing the content to settle down was an important part of the learning process. Rhythm in this context has to be understood, not as a fixed and inflexible repetitive process, as that would be the very opposite of what Steiner had described, but rather as a balance between chaos and rigidity. The rhythm, both within the daily routine and the annual one — is created by the tension between rigidity and chaos, between past and future. Rhythm has elements of the past in it: for something to be rhythmic it has to repeat something that has already occurred. But rhythm is also open to aspects related to the future, because the previous structure could be varied and therefore incorporate new possibilities, but only in a balanced way, otherwise the rhythm would become too

irregular. A good example to clarify how rhythm is understood in the school environment is the heartbeat. In a healthy person, heartbeat is not a rigid rhythm, no beat of the heart is the same as the following one. They are rhythmic, but not fixed. The same occurs with breathing: it is also variable. For this reason, both functions can be adapted to an infinite number of different conditions. In the case of the heartbeat, both a condition of a fixed heart rate or that of an irregular one, represents a pathology. The rhythm of learning and teaching can be considered in this same fashion. There are elements that repeat themselves, but innovative ones are integrated in order to maintain a balance, and once again it is the responsibility of the teacher to find this balance.

Memory plays an important role in this context, and the Steiner approach relies on the nature of different types of memory. A child undergoes changes in memory during the developmental years during this time the child evolves his or her memory, maturing from situational memory to reflex memory and then on to adopt abstract memory (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Exercising memory is believed to be particularly important in education and in life. In the lower classes rhythmical memory is strengthened by memorising by heart poems, songs, multiplication tables, and foreign language vocabulary. The exercise of recalling past contents from a recent class is practised for the same reasons. Activities that enhance memory are encouraged as it is a pillar of the learning experience. During the main lesson — and in any lesson when it is deemed appropriate — teaching follows a three-stage pattern. The first stage occurs during the first day. The second, normally during the second day, and the third stage may stretch over the following weeks, or even years.

In stage one, new material is presented by the teacher. The pupils experience the new material in a class. Steiner's rationale was that at the end of the lesson the new content

presented during the class would sink-into the memory from superficial understanding into the deeper layers of consciousness and memory (Steiner, 1996c). The second stage takes place on the second day of class. After the pupils have ‘slept on’ the previous days contents, the material is recalled from memory. This occurs in a discussion process, where the whole class participate as a group, and each individual is invited to express their opinions and feelings on the contents learned. The aim of this practice is to work so that the pupils are led to recall the material from the previous lesson so as to individualise the knowledge and make the contents their own. Steiner talks about the importance of letting the lessons sink-in during sleep, because it is his belief that during the night the day’s experiences are transformed and become organically part of the knowledge of the individual. The third phase can span for several years, and it is about building on former knowledge. Especially in the lower school, seeds of knowledge from the first stage are expected to grow and metamorphosize through a process of “experiencing, forgetting, creative remembering and individual expression towards the flowering of concepts which are lively, mobile and founded in reality” (K. Avison & Rawson, 2014, p. 33). The contents introduced pictorially to the younger children, are revisited and transformed in the upper classes.

The importance and centrality of the class teacher cannot be overlooked. The class teacher is the guarantor of the continuity of the learning experience, the attention is on building strong social relationships, helping the children to appreciate each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and helping them to work in a group as well as individually.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter some of the core features of Steiner Education have been presented. It has been argued that education focussed on sensory activities is a core focus of Steiner Education that is consistent in both the lower and upper school approaches while at the same time formal academic material is emphasised less, especially in the early school's programme. Learning in a Steiner school is intended to be a non-competitive activity and marks assume the form of a kind of formal informative feedback. From the discussion, it emerges that teachers play a central role in Steiner Education having the task to create and adjust Steiner's guidelines so to create a curriculum which aims at being tailored to each class. The development of a child from age 3 to age 21 was outlined in relation to the significant role this plays in the teaching approach and selection of content applied to each age group/class. It can be concluded that academic subjects are introduced by the teacher in such a way as to nurture not only the academic abilities of the pupils, but also the "feeling and willing" aspects of each child, approaches which are central to Steiner's guidelines for teaching.

This chapter outlines some of the key theories and practices underpinning Steiner school education and will serve as a theoretical background, which will aid in the analysis of the primary source data that has been collected during the field research undertaken for this thesis and in doing so it provides a more nuanced understanding of the Steiner educational model and its strengths and weaknesses. The rationale is not to evaluate the practice of the school I visited against Steiner's theories, but rather to enrich the existing body of contemporary research on the teaching approaches used by Steiner schools.

Chapter 6: Methodology

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how Steiner's pedagogy is put into practice, exploring its theoretical basis as well as its implementation. Moving from an analysis of the holistic pedagogical approaches put forth by Rudolf Steiner, the specific focus here will be the central themes that define his pedagogy: creativity, freedom and spirituality. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the role of creativity, freedom and spirituality in Steiner's educational philosophy?
- 2) To what extent does the practice in Steiner schooling support the development of creativity, freedom and spirituality?
- 3) How do teachers interpret and implement Steiner's pedagogy?
- 4) What are pupils' perceptions of Steiner schooling?

This study is relevant for several reasons. First, as shown in the discussion of literature, the Steiner teaching approach is still under-researched and this research should provide new insights into this pedagogy. Furthermore, this research may be relevant for the public and for practitioners for the following reasons:

- 1) By observing how theory is put into practice the study can potentially engage with wider debates on primary education. For instance, in Scotland, the study can be relevant in relation to the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

2) From the focus on freedom and creativity, this study can inform professionals and other researchers in the field of education on how a teaching method that sees teaching as a means to foster and to develop children's inner abilities in an environment that caters for the needs of children rather than the demands of the state or economic forces is carried out (Robinson, 2011).

3) From the focus on spirituality, the study can provide insights into how this element is treated in a school that is non-denominational.

4) The distinctive way in which the school is run (there is no fixed hierarchy and decisions about the school life are made democratically by all teachers) can provide a new model for understanding institutional governance — where all staff members play an active role in the management of the school at every level. Findings will contribute to research understanding of schools that do not apply hierarchical approaches to their management.

5) This study will also benefit participants themselves. In fact, by exploring aspects of the Steiner philosophy the study can help Steiner practitioners to focus on crucial matters and to reflect on possible issues.

6) Those who are training to become Steiner teachers can benefit from this study also, since it can give them new insights into the approaches they are using and will help them to understand how they can mediate Steiner's philosophy into an applied practice.

In this chapter I will discuss the research design: the research questions, the philosophy underpinning the research, the methodology, the sampling, the data collection and its analysis, and the main ethical issues faced in my work.

6.2 The importance of the philosophical assumptions underpinning social science research

In this section, I will reflect on hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method for research within a school setting, and I will outline why this approach suits the present research. To have a deeper understanding of social research it is important to examine the philosophical assumptions that underpin the research itself, because these assumptions constitute the author's background and her or his construction of knowledge within the social world. Furthermore, these assumptions influence the methodology and subsequently the methods applied (Bryman, 2012; Mack, 2010). For this reason, the epistemological and ontological views behind a research project are paramount, as different ontological and epistemological assumptions lead to different research approaches (Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pascale, 2011; Pring, 2000; Robson, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Thomas, 2013).

Concerning the epistemological perspective, an *interpretivist approach* underpins my research. Interpretivism can be described as a view contrasting with positivistic assumptions about research (Bryman, 2012; Burns, 2000; Christians, 2011). This

perspective takes into account the differences amongst people (Schwandt, 2011) with an important aim being to understand the meaning of social phenomena (Mack, 2010). The activity of interpretation is considered by those who support this paradigm as the very condition of human inquiry itself (Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2011). Broadly speaking, I assume that people create the social world and that this is a process rather than something fixed (Bryman, 2012). From an ontological point of view, this perspective can be defined as *constructionist* in its essence (Bryman, 2012). Avoiding labels that can often be misleading, what matters most in the context of this research is to seek to understand perceptions and experiences, that is to say a primary aim is to understand relationships within the social world. The aim is to describe and understand how the people in a Steiner school make sense of Steiner's theories and put them into practice daily.

6.3 Why qualitative research?

As pointed out by Laverly (2008), quantitative or empirical enquiries have been widely popular in many areas of academic research. Also, in social science, the positivistic paradigm has been quite common, and it has produced valuable research. In the early 1980s a greater disenchantment with the limits of logical-empirical research methodologies grew (Laverly, 2008). But, as Sandelowski (1986) argues, the attitude towards qualitative research still remained an area of marked uncertainty among the academic community. The main issue identified with qualitative research is the one of rigour; it is argued that qualitative inquiries are charged with a lack of scientific approach (Sandelowski, 1986). It has been shown that the considerations required of qualitative research have to be different from those used for quantitative methods

(Bryman, 2012). Such a position seems fair, and Sandelowski (1986, p. 28) astutely argues that ‘applying the criteria of one research tradition to another is nothing more than self-justification, since these criteria inevitably favour the research tradition that generated them’. Furthermore, it is important to consider the fact that the research method is strictly linked to the aims of the inquiry. That is to say, for an inquiry focused on description and meaning rather than on prediction, control and measurement — such as the present research — a qualitative approach is more appropriate (Lavery, 2008).

Another element can also be considered: the “objects” under observation in social science research are the human beings in their setting and with their social interactions. For this reason, it is arguable that attempting to apply methods of the natural sciences to human issues can offer only partial results (Lavery, 2008), a view which I endorse. On this matter, Husserl says that when we are working with living subjects, they are not simply reacting to external stimuli, ‘but rather are responding to their own perceptions of what these stimuli mean’ (Lavery, 2008, p. 22). Seamon (1998) argues that a quantitative approach may hide the risk of treating human interactions, not as interactions driven by autonomous beings “with their own constellations of experience but as Cartesian automatons whose behaviours can be explained by instincts, stimulus-response mechanisms, evolutionary concepts, genetic programming, or some other imposed system of explanation” (Seamon, 1998, p. 86).

6.4 Phenomenology

In response to the positivist paradigm, that sees reality as ordered, rational, and logical, the naturalistic paradigm presumes that reality is not fixed, but subjective. It can be seen as a countermovement to the positivist paradigm (Reiners, 2012). Close to the naturalistic paradigm is phenomenology. Lester (1999, p. 1) says that ‘the purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify particular phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation’.

Phenomenology is rooted in Husserl’s (1859-1938) work and later in Heidegger’s (1889-1976) philosophical tradition, a philosophical tradition has been central in the continental European tradition throughout the 20th century (Smith, 2018). The two traditions, Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, although often referred to interchangeably are not the same. Husserl wrote that by “understanding the lifeworld” we experience pre-reflectively, that is to say without categorisations or conceptualizations (Lavery, 2008; Reiners, 2012). He believed that it was necessary to suspend all suppositions and that all personal opinions have to be bracketed in order to seek an unbiased description of everyday conscious experience (Reiners, 2012). The focal point of descriptive phenomenology is the pure content of observation. This bracketing process, also known as *εποχή*⁷, is described as a three-fold process: exemplary intuition, imaginative variation, and synthesis. His goal was to see things ‘as they are’ through intuitive seeing (Lavery, 2008, p. 6). Husserl was focused on epistemology, and he rejected the Cartesian dualism of reality being something ‘out there’ and separate from the individual’ (Lavery, 2008, p. 5).

⁷ *εποχή*, suspension of judgment.

Heidegger developed hermeneutic phenomenology. He was Husserl's student, but when he started teaching, he disassociated himself from Husserl's work (Lavery, 2008). As in Husserl's phenomenology, a hermeneutic approach is concerned with the lifeworld as it is experienced, however Heidegger rejects epistemology, and adopts ontology, the philosophy of being. He aims at investigating the "things" as objects experienced by subjects (Reiners, 2012). He is focused on the beings in the world, rather than on the ways the subjects know or comprehend the world, and in doing so he adapts hermeneutics to serve his position on the subject. Furthermore, Heidegger differs from Husserl on one other important point: he did not seek *εποχή*, rather he believed that it was impossible to negate our experiences as they relate to the lifeworld. He rejected understanding which stems from an epistemological perspective, but he considered understanding as the basis of human existence — understanding the world is in fact the way human beings are, rather than the way human beings comprehend (Lavery, 2008; Reiners, 2012).

Thus, pure phenomenological research, based on Husserl's philosophical assumptions, seeks essentially to describe rather than to explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Lester, 1999). On the other hand, interpretative (hermeneutic) phenomenology seeks to bring understanding, to interpret the phenomenon without the researchers bracketing their own biases (Lavery, 2008; Lester, 1999; Reiners, 2012). As Reiners (2012, p. 1) says "phenomenologists assumed that knowledge was achieved through interactions between researchers and participants. Therefore, phenomenological research was considered subjective, inductive, and dynamic". Since the aim of my research is to understand the social context in which Steiner Education occurs, it is appropriate to draw on a phenomenological perspective, in particular Heidegger's interpretative

phenomenology. I aim at including fresh, complex, and rich descriptions of the phenomenon as it is concretely lived, and a general, normative, description of the phenomenon is not primarily my concern (Finlay, 2012).

This approach has been accused of lacking rigour, and there are some questions about whether it can be considered scientific at all (Armour et al., 2009; Finlay, 2012; Sandelowski, 1986). Sandelowski (1986, p. 29) says that “the artistic integrity, rather than the scientific objectivity, of the research is achieved when the research communicates the richness and diversity of human experience in an engaging and even poetic manner”. Thus, in the case of a qualitative research of this kind, if the stress of the research is on the meaningfulness of the research product rather than on the control over the process, the results can provide rich outcomes (Sandelowski, 1986). The outcomes of phenomenological research, which are seen to wield rich experiences and perceptions, are a strong means to challenge negative assumptions about its use (Lester, 1999).

6.5 Research design

Since this research has been informed by an interpretative phenomenology, it seemed appropriate to immerse myself in Steiner philosophy so as to start at the very beginning. Thus, this research initiated by studying and analysing Steiner’s core texts, becoming familiar with his language and his ideas, and by letting the texts themselves lead the research. A critical evaluation of Steiner’s approach and an analysis of the literature supporting his method were considered only after I managed to become familiar with the primary sources in his oeuvre. This research presents, therefore, a

two-part design: a textual analysis of Steiner's most significant written works and a period of fieldwork within a Steiner school.

I also considered whether to conduct an ethnographic study or a case study. The definitions of ethnography and case study are indeed blurry and often change from one author to another (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008; Thomas, 2013; Walters, 2007). Walters (2007, p. 89) notes that "the lack of clarity arises partly because the terms 'ethnography' and 'case study' can be used to describe a research strategy, a research focus (the choice of phenomena to be studied), the research methods (or procedures) used and/or the results of a research study". Reeves et al. (2008, p. 512) define ethnography as "the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities", and they add that "the central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature". Thomas (2013, p. 156) claims that "ethnographers study a situation from within. They try to become part of the situation they are studying, to understand it like the other 'players'".

To define my research, I will adopt some of Bryman's approaches. Bryman (2012) acknowledges that the definition of ethnography is not straightforward, but he outlines some characteristics that resonate with my work.

Ethnography will be taken to mean a research method in which the researcher:

- is immersed in a social setting for an extended period of time;
- makes regular observations of the behaviour of members of that setting;

- listens to and engages in conversations;
- interviews informants on issues that are not directly amenable to observation or that the ethnographer is unclear about (or indeed for other possible reasons);
- collects documents about the group;
- develops an understanding of the culture of the group and people's behaviour within the context of that culture;
- and writes up a detailed account of that setting (Bryman, 2012, p. 432).

Given the huge differences in the understanding of what constitutes an ethnographic study, what matters now is to find a definition to describe the present research. With my primary research, I aimed to understand the life of the teachers, students and parents in the school I visited over a period of 9 months, observing their practice, conducting interviews and focus groups so as to clarify obscure elements I had observed. Given these elements, this study is deemed to be ethnographic research.

6.6 Literature review

Steiner was a very prolific writer, therefore, approaching Steiner's works appears to be quite difficult. This is partially due to the huge amount of conferences and essays he undertook during his lifetime — his collected works include over 360 volumes, some 6000 essays, a great number of which are available in English (Holdrege, 1994; Reinsmith, 1990), partially due to the wide range of topics he covered: Steiner's interests and writings spanned from education to agriculture, from medicine to arts (Steiner, 1977, 1993, 1994, 1995b, 1995c, 1996b, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1997f, 1997g, 1999, 2000b, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b). It is also important

to consider that the collections of his conferences, which represent the majority of his work, were not ever revised neither by himself nor any of his contemporaries, and this poses a problem of verifiability.

For these reasons, decisions about how to select the relevant texts needed to be made relatively early on this project. Keeping in mind the disciplinary focus on pedagogy, I selected those essays, conferences and books that could shed light on pedagogy in general and on Steiner's ideas on education. However, it soon became apparent that I had to take into consideration Steiner's early works, which were necessary in order to build a solid basis for understanding his thoughts on education. Therefore, some of those books that contain Steiner's core philosophical assumptions have been consulted in the first instance. Given the interest in the idea of spirituality and freedom, the very basis was provided by *Intuitive thinking as a spiritual path: A philosophy of freedom* (Steiner, 1995b), also published as *Philosophy of Freedom*. This work was first published in 1893 and, in a nutshell, it gives an account of Steiner's epistemological and ontological perspectives. However, it soon became apparent that to gain a better understanding of this core and complex text, it was necessary to explore Steiner's background further. The text that provided clues to unravelling Steiner's world has been his own autobiography, published with the title *The Story of My life*, in 1928 (Steiner, 2005). This is a detailed account of Steiner's life up to 1907. It provides insights into Steiner's personal development and it gave me some perspectives for understanding the sources of his late philosophical conclusions.

For what concerns education, scholars approaching Steiner's ideas on the matter have before them a huge number of conference papers. Often, the topics covered in these

conferences overlap, due to the fact that Steiner, during his tours around Europe, would cover the same topics several times, and the transcriptions of these conferences have been collected and published under different titles. It was therefore necessary to find a specific approach to investigate these papers to create some kind of order. Consequently, the decision was made to start from the collection of lectures that Steiner delivered in Stuttgart to the teachers of the first Waldorf school, which took place in 1919, two weeks before the school officially opened (Steiner, 1996c). They are collected in three books: *The Foundations of Human Experience* (Steiner, 1996c), *Practical Advice to Teachers* (Steiner, 2000b), and *Discussions with Teachers* (Steiner, 1997c). Even though these lectures do not represent the first report of Steiner's ideas on education, they are nonetheless the most comprehensive collection of pedagogical advice. These texts, which are the transcriptions of the lessons Steiner delivered to the first teachers, are still of great importance within Steiner schools, and they provide the core readings for the teacher training courses required by Steiner Schools currently. These works still serve as instructions for schools in the 21st Century all around the world and represent the material perspectives teachers must consult to gain the information necessary to support the current educational approach. Other essays on education, often resulting from transcription of Steiner's conferences, have been examined, because they have helped to clarify some of Steiner's statements further.

To have a better understanding of Steiner's Anthroposophy and better clarify the extent to which his anthroposophical theories influenced the resulting pedagogical works, those texts that seemed to provide answers to questions and doubts arising from the analysis of the pedagogical works were taken into account. For instance, to have a better account of Steiner's ontology, and to decipher an accurate description of

Steiner's cosmology, some help was provided by *Theosophy: An introduction to the spiritual processes in human life and in the cosmos* (Steiner, 1994), *An outline of esoteric science* (Steiner, 1997g), and *Knowledge of the higher worlds* (Steiner, 2011b). Alongside the study and analysis of Steiner's works, the literature on Steiner schools was also examined, so as to gain an impression of what it was said about Steiner schools and Steiner's pedagogy.

The form of critical analysis used for this research is referred to by Bryman (2012) as a 'narrative review'. Bryman (2012, p. 111) states that:

[...] narrative review can be more suitable for qualitative researchers whose research strategy is based on an interpretative epistemology, and for them systematic review should not be automatically accepted as a better way of dealing with the literature.

Inputting keywords such as 'Steiner school', 'Waldorf', 'Steiner-Waldorf', 'Steiner's pedagogy', and 'creativity and freedom and spirituality and Steiner Education' into the Glasgow University Library Search has been one method used to explore the literature. Similar keywords have been inserted into the ScienceDirect Database, and other articles selected for their similarity and relevance have been examined. Various online search engines including Google Scholar have been used. Regarding journal articles, recent publications have been favoured, and no exclusion criteria were applied because the intention was to include a complete overview of the topic. Alongside the academic journals, I have also used Google search engine to look for blogs and newspaper articles related to Steiner Education. These sources have been considered

because they provided insights into how this pedagogy is perceived by the public and they help to highlight the most controversial aspects of this educational model.

6.7 Data gathering

The primary goal of this research is to investigate and understand rather than to formulate a new theory (Finlay, 2012; Thomas, 2013). To do this, I used a mix of participant observation, focus groups, interviews and document analysis in order to construct a picture of the school and of the school practice (Bryman, 2012; Reeves et al., 2008; Thomas, 2013). The school selected for this study is in the UK and it is a school that is well established. At the time of the data collection 265 pupils attended this institution (52 kindergarten, 141 lower school, 72 upper school). The members of staff employed at the time were 61 (50 teachers, 11 members of staff).

An important note has to be made in relation to the fee-paying nature of the institution selected for this research. Steiner Education in the UK belongs for the vast majority to the private sector. Steiner Education was never intended to rely on private fees, Steiner was very clear about the fact that Steiner Education was to be free and open to everyone who wanted to access it (Dahlin, 2017b), however Steiner schools in the UK require parents to pay fees. In respect to its fee-paying nature, it would be possible to describe Steiner education as elitist education. However, if Steiner Education is posed in the context of alternative or progressive education, the reasons that can be found among the parents who send their children to a Steiner school may lie not in the elitist nature of this approach, but on the underpinning view of what teaching and learning mean. (Uhrmacher, 1995). In this sense, Steiner Education may represent truly an

alternative to mainstream education for those parents that believe that “there is still a high measure of uniformity within the mainstream state system” (Humes, 2015b, p. 358). Steiner schools can therefore be described as “alternative education spaces” (Kraftl, 2014, p. 130), based on an alternative pedagogy which considered the developmental stages of the pupils in the light of Steiner’s philosophy.

6.7.1 Observation

Observations, informed by a hermeneutic phenomenology, were an important method of data gathering. The aim was to provide a thick description of how the participants acted in the school environment. According to Heidegger’s phenomenology — as explained earlier in the chapter — I did not suspend all of my suppositions, nor did I try to neutralise all of my personal opinions by bracketing them. On the contrary, I described the events as I experienced them, making clear which was my viewpoint and describing what could be my potential biases (see chapter 1). I took notes both while I was present at the school and every day immediately after I left the campus, so as to enrich my own notes while my memory was still fresh and I still had vivid images in my mind (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001; Pearce, 2015).

The observations were developed in two distinct phases: during the first weeks, I sought to familiarise myself with the school life and therefore to describe the school routine and the rhythm of the day. The aim was to gather enough information to build an accurate picture of how the school was run. During these first weeks notes were taken to help me to further scope my observations. Only after I had reached a point where I had obtained a strong familiarity with the school, I aligned my observations with my original research questions. This period of broad observation allowed me to

gain a good understanding of how the school works: I familiarised myself with the schedule of the school, I had the opportunity to observe different classes and talking to the class teachers I made myself aware of the schedule of the main lessons. Furthermore, these preliminary observations served the purpose of verifying whether the elements I had selected through the study of the literature were relevant.

Attention was given to those elements which informed educational understandings of creativity, freedom and spirituality. I took the field notes in the form of a diary. I chose to carry my notebook around for different reasons: first, I wanted to be able to take down many of the things the teachers would say in the classroom, what turn of phrases they would apply and the specific words they used. Given that English is not my first language, it is very hard for me to remember and recall specific figures of speech, therefore I preferred to be able to take a quick note every time something I deemed interesting was said. Secondly, I decided that carrying around a notebook would have helped to remind the people around me about my role. No one questioned my choice; I cannot recall any time when it was brought to my attention or discussed. My notebook, however, drew curiosity particularly from the lower classes, especially in class two, a boy approached me one day — I had started my observation just a few weeks previously — and he asked me what I was writing down. I responded to him by stating that ‘I was taking notes on what they were doing, so that I could remember things later.’ He seemed satisfied with my answer, and somehow also amused.

During my first weeks at the school, my notes were very rich due to the novelty of the setting. After this initial period however, my notes became more schematic, partially because the routine of a school day was repeating itself — and therefore I began to

instead note those elements that distinguished themselves from the routine. I had also started to participate more in the class activities at this point and therefore I began to take notes immediately after the lessons rather than during. However, due to the nature of my research questions, it seemed clear that a single method of data gathering would not suffice (Bryman, 2012). For this reason, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with pupils, teachers and parents were conducted. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to modify the questions according to the situations that arose (see Appendix 4). Thus, it was possible to follow the ideas of the participants, giving space to their points of view and to gauge what they considered to be important (Bryman, 2012).

6.7.2 Focus Group

Focus groups are an appropriate means to collect data because they provide an opportunity to explore participants' points of view, allowing them to lead the discussion towards topics they feel are relevant (Bryman, 2012). Grønkjær et al (2011) state that:

The rationale behind the use of focus groups is that knowledge is created through the diverse experiences and forms of knowledge of, and interaction between, participants. Focus group participants provide an audience for each other, which encourages a greater variety of communication, and therefore different contents, than other qualitative methods of data collection (Grønkjær, Curtis, de Crespigny, & Delmar, 2011, p. 16).

I used a set of questions as a guideline, but I allowed myself to change the order, the phrasing and the topics according to what was emerging from the group. The questions had been prepared in advance and were based on both findings from the literature and the observations that I had conducted for months before in the lead up to the interviews. It has been particularly useful, during my later analysis, to observe whether those topics linked to my research questions were spontaneously emerging from the group.

The focus group model is believed to be a good way to explore how a group of people make sense of a predetermined topic, and it is believed that answering questions in a group encourages participants to make riskier decisions (Thomas, 2013). However, it is also fundamental to consider that often people are less likely to disclose personal information in front of their peers. The nature of the topics and questions I was to ask my participants were not of a sensitive nature, therefore this method of data gathering was seen as appropriate in this case (Gaižauskaitė, 2012; Kitzinger, 1995; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). However, during a focus group with one of the upper school classes, one question in particular appeared to cause discomfort: when the group was asked what they would change or improve about their experience in the school, one girl who started to express her opinion on the matter stopped half way through her reply. It appeared clear that she was about to refer to a specific situation and a specific teacher. However, she said that she was not comfortable to answer that question. I took charge and I moved on with the discussion and assured her that she did not need to respond to that question if she did not want to. This incident showed that when it came to criticism of specific aspects of the school, that some students became more inhibited in their responses and that perhaps students harboured certain views that were not entirely positive.

6.7.3 Interviews

To collect more information and have a deeper insight into the school practice, interviews were held with those teachers who agreed to participate in the process. The majority of the interviews were semi-structured and took place in an informal context. Data and insights were collected and recorded throughout the duration of my visit to the school. Information was gathered during informal conversations with teachers in the staff room, while on a break from formal teaching, or as part of a wider conversation that I was invited to join. In these circumstances, even when I had my notebook with me, it was not used as it was felt that this would have distracted from the flow of the conversations. It was therefore, that information in these circumstances was not recorded digitally, but these conversations were transcribed immediately after. In all of the cases authorisation was given to record events and perceptions from these meetings.

The decision to be present, but not actively engaged, proved useful for many reasons. The teachers and staff at the school came to know that I was often in the staff room, and I was approached by members of staff for various reasons: they often asked me how my project was proceeding, and they were curious about how long I would remain at the school. Sometimes, they asked me more personal questions or even expressed the desire to be interviewed. I recall a very interesting conversation that is worth mentioning here. I was in the staff room, busying myself during a free period when three teachers entered the room. They started talking about the amount of paperwork they had to cope with by the end of the year. This was very interesting because they discussed the reasons why the amount of work was considered to be exceedingly huge, and they believed that such a bureaucratic job was wasting time that could have been spent planning classes and engaging with the students. I just stayed there, looking at

them, almost feeling guilty because I felt like I was eavesdropping. I was very much taken aback when a teacher of the group looked at me smiling and said: “Is this useful for your PhD?”. I nodded, and she nodded in return. This gave me some peace of mind, I realised that thankfully they were aware of my presence and of my role, and that they were keen to share these convivial moments with me. Furthermore, these sorts of interactions show another important element when conducting fieldwork, namely the importance of creating a good rapport with the participants, one of trust and respect.

Formal interviews were scheduled in advance and recorded with two separate recorders. In one instance I was asked by one of the interviewees not to record the interview because he would have been speaking “much more fluently” without the recorder running. In this case, careful notes were taken during the interviews and all the information from the interviews whether recorded or handwritten was transcribed immediately following each interview (Thomas, 2013). The interviews were semi-structured interviews with pre-outlined topics and some crucial questions I wanted to cover, I also had the freedom to adjust the course of the interview according to what seemed appropriate (Thomas, 2013).

The decision was made to conduct the interviews several months after I started my observations at the school. This was done for several reasons: first, I needed time to observe the school and scope my research questions based on what I deemed to be relevant. Second, I needed time to build a relationship with the teachers, so they would be more relaxed during the interviews. Third, after a relationship was built, teachers were keen to be interviewed, and often they approached me to ask whether I was interested in having a chat with them. This improved the scope of the study because it

allowed me to get closer to the phenomenon under study and to understand it through the voices and perspectives of those involved.

6.7.4 Document Interrogation

Document interrogation is a very specific tool for data gathering (Thomas, 2013). During the time I was on placement at the Steiner school, I collected a huge variety of documents from the school that were used to inform my research. For example, I collected the pamphlets distributed during the open days, and the school documents on code of conduct. I also gathered the lyrics from the poems, songs and stories, which added details to my field notes. I was invited to receive the weekly updates on the school sent via emails: these updates also provided me with important information about the life at the school and the events that were taking place in it.

6.8 Ethical issues

It is paramount for any social research to consider ethical implications. In a nutshell, ethics can be defined as “the principles of conduct about what is right and wrong” (Thomas, 2013, p. 38). There are many different positions on ethics, some stricter than others (Bryman, 2012; Christians, 2011; Robson, 2011). Given the nature and the setting of this research, I had to make certain choices with ethical considerations; every decision I made was informed by four key principles (Bryman, 2012):

- Harm to participants
- Lack of informed consent
- Deception
- Invasion of privacy

The research project was approved by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee in June 2016, and the following approvals were obtained, respectfully from both: Disclosure Scotland and the PVG Scheme. However, these approvals do not exhaust the ethical implications. In fact, the ethical issues do not end once one has received the necessary approvals, especially when it comes to research carried out for an extensive period of time.

6.8.1 Preventing harm to participants

To avoid harming, either physically or psychologically, the participants, I first made myself familiar with the code of conduct of the School. During my observations, I was always supervised by a teacher and this was consistent during my focus group with underage pupils as well. In this way, if a problem occurred, the teacher was there to intervene. The interviews and focus groups were carried out in the school at times that best suited the participants. Often, the interviews with teachers were performed in two different moments, so as to accommodate their busy schedules and avoid putting them under unnecessary strain. None of the participants was exposed, during my research, to any risks different from those to that they would have been subjected to during a normal day at work and in school.

6.8.2 Informed consent and deception

Several steps have been taken to guarantee informed consent, so as to safeguard the participants' voluntary participation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). The school appointed a teacher who assumed the role of my personal

supervisor and who introduced me to other teachers and staff during a teacher meeting. In this occasion, I had the chance to introduce myself and present my research to nearly all of the teachers in the school. At this meeting, my intentions were made clear to the teachers and the nature of my research was presented. If any problem had occurred, the school was in possession of my contact details and all the teachers knew that Mr. Smith was my direct supervisor. During this meeting, I also presented my intentions for the interviews and focus groups. A language statement was read in simple and plain English and a copy of it with a consent form was circulated by the office to all the teachers vis-a-vis the school mailing list. I made it clear that any teacher interested was able to contact me. A language statement — age appropriate and approved by the Ethics Committee — was read over before every interview and focus group. For underage pupils, consent forms have been provided to their guardians and verbal consent from the pupils was required (see Appendix 2 and 3). They were always aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could leave at any time during an interview and avoid answering any question if they did not wish to. For older students, a consent form signed by guardians was required, and I presented them with the same consent form to sign. I have chosen this approach given the fact they were legally adults.

Before my period of observation, a letter permitting me to visit the school premises was given to the school by the College of Teachers. The school subsequently informed the parents about my work. As the school often hosts visitors, I came to realise that my presence in the school caused very little change to the school's regular routine. This is due partially to the fact that the school offers a training course, and class observation is part of the course programme.

The school was aware of my role as a researcher. Every morning I signed the visitor register and I wore a visible 'visitor badge' around my neck at all times. Because of the extended period of time I spent at the school, it could have been easy for everyone involved to 'forget' my role and my aims, and I had to continuously be sure that participation in my work was always voluntary (Greener, 2011). In order to do so I kept reminding the people around me what I was doing there: this was done in the hope that by keeping an open dialogue about my research purposes I was able to maintain a strict ethical relation with the participants throughout the whole research period, as was suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

To avoid deception, I also made all teachers and participants aware of the fact that I was familiar with the Steiner teaching approach. The problem of providing a solid background is particularly important for research that embraces a constructivist approach (Armour et al., 2009; Cohen & Manion, 1989; Norman K Denzin & Yvonna S Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pascale, 2011; Pring, 2000; Robson, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). I introduced myself as a former Steiner pupil and former Steiner teacher. Several ethical problems could have arisen from this introduction, in fact by presenting myself as part of 'their group', I could have gained access to more useful information. On the other hand, as a researcher, even though my research does not aim at evaluating the school practices, I had to assume a critical perspective on the practices I was observing. Thus, I made it clear that my perspective was phenomenological, and that I aimed to describe situations as I encountered them, meanwhile maintaining a critical perspective on Steiner's philosophy and theories regarding such practices. The teachers at the school seemed satisfied with my explanation, and no problems arose. I was very careful when asked to share my own

opinions on Steiner's beliefs, child development and Anthroposophy that I restricted myself to non-committal, general statements.

I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach in my research. In doing so I aimed at providing an accurate picture of a Steiner school and its practices today (2016-2019). I wanted to talk about Steiner's educational model and the intention was to preserve its essence. This involved using phrases common to Steiner, some of his jargon, while at the same time unravelling Steiner's obscure prose. Due to the nature of my research, it was important to reflect on how I made sense of the life in the school (Wang, 2013).

6.8.3 Preventing invasion of privacy

Protecting the participants' privacy and anonymity proved to be difficult, and I was aware of this issue at the outset of the project. Due to the research sample, I was aware that there might be difficulties in guaranteeing anonymity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In fact, even though all the participants have been referred to by pseudonyms and the actual location of the school has been concealed, there are quite a small number of Steiner schools in the UK, and the true location of the school could be discovered. In addition, there is the risk that teachers within the school might be able to recognise other colleagues' opinions due to the content of the interviews and the specific turn of phrases used by certain teachers. All of the participants have been made aware of the risks involved in this research, including the issues to do with the sample size of interviewees for the school. However, given the nature of this research, it seemed that this was not regarded as a source of harm for the participants. All participants were

informed about their right to withdrawal and about how their personal data would be treated before taking part in the study (Retention and disposal of personal Data was according to the Data Protection Act (1998)).

The risk of being recognised by other people within the same social group was made very clear during the focus group with class 12. An ethical issue arose after the focus group with class 12. In fact, I promised that the content of the interview would be kept confidential and that I would not talk about it with any of their teachers. This was made clear also to the teachers prior to the focus group. However, it so happened that I was asked by one of the student's guardians about the contents of the interview, therefore I opted to keep it vague: I disclosed the topics we covered and the fact that the class was deeply engaged, and then I made clear that I agreed with them not to report the content of the focus group and reminded her about the original signed agreements.

6.9 Data analysis

As argued by Flick (2009), the interpretation of data is at the very core of qualitative research. Due to the varied nature of the data collected, it was important to find the appropriate way to navigate and interpret these data. For this reason, different methods have been adopted to analyse the data gathered during this research project. One challenge was to define my role within the context of the research. Given the hermeneutic phenomenology of philosophy which underpins the present research, the representation of the author had to be carefully considered. The intention — as previously discussed — was not to bracket my own assumptions and background. On the contrary, the goal was to provide an interpretation of the subject studied that would

take into consideration my prior knowledge and experience of the Steiner teaching approach and the perspectives of my participants. Drawing on Hanson's ideas, consideration was given to the problematic assumption "that an ethnographer learns by and through systematic participant observation, and then suppresses (or disguises) the Self in the telling" (Hanson, 2004, p. 184). Therefore, discussing my role and my position becomes a matter of great relevance, particularly in relation to what Bryman (2012) describes as one of the main criteria in qualitative research, which was to evaluate qualitative research and its confirmability.

Confirmability, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), is concerned with ensuring that the researcher has acted so as to have positioned him or herself objectively, that is to say that one might be seen to be honest in one's actions. So as to show transparency I had to carefully portray my position and sensibly describe my role with my participants. The challenge was to find a way to do so without compromising my data. The position taken relies heavily on a (critical) auto-ethnographic tradition, which provided me with examples and strategies to convey my personal perspectives and the introspective emotions that emerged from the work in the field in a way that did not result in a self-indulgent and narcissistic storytelling. Focusing on the minutiae of everyday life may appear to be irrelevant, but I — alongside other scholars (Delamont, 2009) — argue that it represents the only honest way to conduct an ethnographic study and to provide a complete account of the experience.

In fact, an important factor in qualitative research is for the researcher to discuss and define their position within the group that he or she is studying (Bryman, 2012). Discussing the objectivity and positionality when conducting qualitative research has

been the object of academic discussion for the past four decades (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Collins, 1986; Flores, 2018; Merton, 1972; Zinn, 1979). The relevance of the position of the researcher as an insider or outsider to the group under research poses the question of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the two positions. Research on the insider/outsider positionality seems to focus on the researcher's fixed insider/outsider status, for instance sex, race, gender, sexual identity, and less so on political or social perspectives (Berger, 2015; Chavez, 2008; Collins, 1986; Flores, 2018; Kerstetter, 2012; Merton, 1972; Zinn, 1979).

In Chapter 1, I presented my background and the methods I used to navigate the time spent collecting data. It can be argued that my position within the Steiner culture was that of an insider on the basis of the key advantages associated with being familiar with the research domain, namely: "a superior understanding of the group's culture; the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members; and a previously established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group" (Breen, 2007, p. 163). Each of these advantages, however, involve certain disadvantages as well. Therefore, I decided to describe my position as a researcher with the intent of dispelling these criticisms. My position was that of an insider for what concerns the knowledge of Steiner Education and the events experienced within a Steiner school as first a pupil and later as a teacher. This background placed me in a favourable position in terms of making sense of and immediately understanding much of the jargon, philosophy and ethos applied in the Steiner school where the research was undertaken. However, I was also an outsider in relation to the specific group I researched: I did not know them, and furthermore my experience of Steiner's philosophy was mediated by a different culture (being my experience in such settings occurred exclusively in Italy).

The way I navigated these factors has been discussed in Chapter 1. What is relevant here is addressing how I made sense of the data that was collected. This is one of the problems associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Nielsen, 2004). As argued by Nielsen (2004, p. 109) “while the *collection* of data can be said to be factual, if done within a theoretical framework shaping the inquiry itself, it is often forgotten that as soon as we try to *present* our findings to the outsider, we are transforming the experience we had as the researcher into a type of theory again”.

6.9.1 Interviews and Focus Groups data

All focus groups and interviews have been recorded and transcribed with the exception of two, as the participants were not comfortable with being recorded. Thematic analysis has been chosen as an appropriate means to analyse the data and a phenomenological and critical approach was applied to the data collected. It is said that procedures for Thematic Analysis as a qualitative method only appeared in the 1990s (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Braun et al. (2014) argue that Thematic Analysis should be considered, rather than a methodology, a method in its own right. Considering theirs as a valid argument, this means that Thematic Analysis is a tool that can be used across different methodologies. Following the argument built by Braun and Clarke (2006), I too argue that Thematic Analysis is in itself a method that is independent of theory and epistemology, and for this reason can be applied across a range of philosophical approaches. That is to say, that Thematic Analysis, as intended and theorised by Braun and Clarke (2006) provides an analytical procedure to analyse data, without applying any theoretical framework as to how to collect the data itself.

One of the main criticisms of Thematic Analysis in qualitative research is the lack of sophistication (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In agreement with Braun et al. (2014), I too believe that this accusation is misleading, and it has its origin in a false equation between theoretical flexibility — provided by Thematic Analysis — and absence of theory altogether. Another common weakness ascribed to qualitative research is the lack of an accurate description of the procedures used to analyse the data (Tuckett, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) have, therefore, created a step by step procedure to code and analyse qualitative data. This procedure was applied to the research data in this thesis.

The data analysis represented a particularly complex process: the great amount of data collected, and the qualitative nature of this data were significant factors that affected the process of analysis. Furthermore, the importance of my position as a researcher became apparent once again at this stage. The way I analysed my data relies on the model provided by Braun et al. (2014). They describe a six-phase approach to conduct a thematic analysis. The phases they suggest are:

- Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself With the Data
- Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes
- Phase 3: Searching for Themes
- Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes
- Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes
- Phase 6: Producing the Report

I spent a lot of time reading the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups and listening and re-listening to the recordings of the interviews. I took notes in the margins

of my transcripts as well as on separate sheets of paper using different ink pens in different colours. At the outset, I was not searching for codes nor was I searching for the answers to my research questions. The goal I had was to gain a full picture of the data, while at the same time starting to consider possible implications. I did not select data based on my perspectives, nor did I move from a preconceived theory.

When I did begin to generate codes, I let the data speak for itself. I wanted to capture my participants' voices and record the matters that were important to them. This was done with the aim of overcoming the possible downfall of letting my background affecting this process. For this reason, this phase required many revisions of the data. Generating codes required many revisions. Especially, early codes needed to be revised. This was due to the fact that, as would become clear with the progress of the analysis, the notions of creativity, spirituality and freedom were deeply interconnected. To generate themes, I needed a visual aid. This was due to the amount of data being included and the complex array of connections encompassed within it. For these reasons, I used mind-maps to keep track of the codes and to help myself to make connections between the themes emerging from the different data items. Each theme I found was referred to as a specific data item. This phase lasted a long time. Themes were grouped together, and I had to make the decision to discard some of them because they were not relevant for this research or else to regroup them under a different bigger theme. Eventually, with the research questions in mind, the themes were organised so to address them.

6.10 Limitations of the study

This study attempts to convey the complex nature of Steiner Education from the perspectives of those who are directly involved with it. The idea is to observe how the philosophy which informs the educational practices in a Steiner school influences the teaching approach. The very nature of this study bears some limitations. The qualitative nature of this research and the relatively small sample cannot support the generalization of the findings. It can be argued, however, that although the findings cannot have a statistical significance — and therefore cannot be generalised due to the small sample of participants and the fact that participants from only one Steiner school were involved — the findings of this study can still inform other theories (Bryman, 2012). More issues may arise in this study in relation to reliability, validity, and the difficulty in replicating this kind of research due to the qualitative research methodology applied (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2009; Robson, 2011).

Some considerations must be carried out in relation to the specific nature of the school which hosted this study because overlooking these factors could compromise further discussions. Currently, in the UK, there are 35 Steiner schools, of which 4 are public founded academies in England ("Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship," 2019)⁸. That means that in the UK Steiner Education belongs, in large part, to the private sector. It has been argued how this departed from Steiner's original idea of Steiner Education, which was intended to be free and available for whoever was interested.

⁸ In this list are only counted those schools that are registered with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship.

The fees required for the school selected for the case study in this thesis — vary from kindergarten to high school — were, however, cheaper than the average costs of other schools in the same area. Some students were commuters — some of them would travel up to one hour and a half each day to reach the school. The fact that Steiner schools are private schools presents different ramifications. First of all, the demographic of people approaching Steiner Education seems to belong to the middle and upper class and although the school where this research was conducted had in place a system of scholarships to help those families who could not afford the school fees, it was clear that the students in the school were, in the vast majority, coming from a middle-class background. This introduces another question — how important is the role of family in a child’s education and educational choices (Lareau, 1987; Waldinger, 2006), and to what extent does this influence the environment created in Steiner schools and the approaches taken? It must be said now that exploring the influence of the family socio-economical background on the students school experience, results and satisfaction is not within the frame of this research, however, it will be important to bear in mind such aspects so that — if explored — they may shed additional light on the conclusions from this research.

Dahlin (2017a) supports a similar view on the problem while examining the research on Steiner Education. While commenting on studies conducted in the USA, he suggests that:

there are no attempts to measure the influence of students’ socio-economic status (SES) and other aspects of their family background, to ascertain to what extent the findings are specifically related to the Waldorf methods of education. This

tends to be lacking in most studies of this kind (Dahlin, 2017a, p. 127).

This is certainly a problem which appears in the context of this study. It is nevertheless important to note that the teachers who took part in the study seemed to be aware of the important role that the families of the students have had on their participation at school and on the group dynamics assumed at the school. This was something that emerged clearly from the interviews.

Furthermore, the fact that only one parent was interviewed represents another limitation of this study, not only regarding the socio-economic status of the families that could not be explored, but also for what concerns the reasons for choosing a Steiner school for their children. From the data collected, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the reasons that moved these families to choose Steiner Education for their children rather than another educational model. It appears, from the observations taken during the research, that the whole community shared, to some extent, the same ethos and core values, but it cannot be said whether Steiner's pedagogy was chosen for specific reasons or whether it is individual.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the nature of qualitative research broadly introduces certain issues to the data collected. In the context of this thesis, the means used to collect the data and my position as a researcher who was educated in a Steiner school has an impact on the data and how it has been analysed as well as on the research process as a whole. I tried to address these issues earlier in this thesis. In this chapter, some of the issues related to a qualitative study have been explained and

tackled, while in Chapter 1 I addressed the specific predicaments linked with my background and the path I undertook to find my role as a research within the school. The immersive contact I had with the school allowed me to gain extraordinarily close insights into the school practices and the ways in which the teachers operate. The school in this study was extremely helpful and open to my being physically present there during my research period. I received great support from both the staff and pupils at the school. I was allowed to experience the school not as an outsider, but I was helped to be part of it and to engage in certain events and activities, which informed this study. This shows that I was able to maintain the trust of the participants and this led to strengthen the data that I gathered.

Chapter 7: Data Presentation

7.1 Introduction

This section will present information from the school observations, interviews and focus groups. The data consists of different kinds of information such as: first-hand accounts by Steiner school pupils, staff and parents, and personal notes from my interpretations of specific encounters, while observing, at the school. The different aspects enlightened by the two methods of data gathering will be presented together, so as to create a comprehensive picture of the setting and of the participants' interpretations of their reality. The observations collected during the time spent in the school will serve to corroborate, challenge and enrich the data arising from the interviews and focus group, providing a clear and more vivid picture of the school life. This kind of data will be presented through brief summaries of events in a narrative fashion (Nielsen, 2004): each of these summaries will serve to illustrate a different aspect of Steiner's pedagogy, which will be linked with the themes which emerged through the interviews and its intention is to answer the research questions.

The findings are presented at first as a description of the school environment. This is to provide the context in which Steiner's pedagogy occurs and also because the environment created forms a significant part of the atmosphere intended to emphasise a particular kind of learning. Then brief descriptions of events which occurred in the classroom will be presented in order to clarify the data that emerged from the interviews. This way of presenting the data is seen as necessary due to the nature of this research and the nature of Steiner's pedagogy which, as has been discussed so far,

is not the sum of disjointed elements, but rather the results of different elements which holistically cooperate together and in doing so function to reach a specific goal.

It is important to bear in mind here the nature of the data collected and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research (see chapter 6). It will be shown that among the participants there is a great feeling of being part of a community, and of being 'different'. Many positive aspects of the practice in the school are outlined, and it is important to consider that many of the points I make in this chapter about the role of teachers and how teachers perceive their work could also be said of teachers working in many state or private schools in the UK. However, comparing the practices in the Steiner schools to those carried out in state schools is beyond the scope of this research. My duty is to voice the perspectives of the participants who took part in this study and to analyse their responses with respect to Steiner's approaches on education. I will discuss this issue further in chapters 9 and 10, but in the course of this chapter I will only relate my comments to the teachers in the Steiner school on the understanding that I am not claiming that the characteristics I highlight here are unique to these teachers. However, there are particular aspects of the Steiner philosophy which do lend a distinctive character to the teacher role and the school culture, and the intention is to demonstrate how these characteristics are linked to the three elements (freedom, creativity and spirituality) which are the focus of this research. Furthermore, it will be my argument that these shared values are the pillars of the successful outcomes of the Steiner pedagogy.

7.2 The importance of the school setting and physical context

The importance of the physical context of the school and classroom emerged from the observations and interviews. My first diary entry shows the impact of that the school setting had on me:

I approached the school on a Tuesday at almost 12 o'clock and I have scheduled a meeting with the Class teacher at 12. The school is set in a nice area, trees and nice meadows are at the centre of the four buildings that host classes from kindergartens to high school. The kindergarten building, which stands at the very core of the school area, is somehow separated from the rest of the school by a low wooden fence, which encloses a playground. All around the buildings, there is a garden, with trees and quite a big meadow, where children of the lower and upper school spend their playtime. However, when I arrive at the school, the pupils are busy with daily activities, and no one is playing outside. I approach the main building, where the school office is located: I am required to sign the guests register and to announce my arrival. The buildings that once used to be big residential houses have been converted into classrooms and school spaces. I think this contributes to creating my first impression of entering the school of a warm, welcoming environment. The entrance is airy, old tiles lie on the floor and a big wooden stairway leads on the upper floors. A big watercolour painting, clearly in a Waldorf style (I will explain this), hangs from one of the stairwell walls. Photos of pupils intent in school activities decorate the walls around the office. Quiet talking comes from the classes. Everything looks homey, and a light scent permeates the air in the hall. The school is composed of six buildings. Two of them hold the classes for the Lower School, one — at the very core of the school ground and set apart by a low wooden fence — is the kindergarten, and one

hosts the High School. Physics and chemistry labs, as well as woodworking and workspaces, are grouped in another building. The last building — close to the kindergarten — is the Assembly Hall and theatre.

What is notable here is the impact of the landscape around the school, the trees and meadows which I state twice - the setting struck me as being a warm, welcoming environment because of the surroundings. The use of descriptive terms such as airy, warm, welcoming, the old tiles, the wooden stairway and the painting contribute to the overall atmosphere of a calm organisation. There is a sense not just of warmth but of purposeful activity (the photographs, the empty playground, the quiet chatting). What is interesting in my description is the significance of the natural surroundings at the school and those inside, as in the use of materials and even in the scents of the school.

I write:

The feeling while walking around the school, in the courtyards and buildings is not that of being in a school but rather of being in a familiar space. Noticeable it is the almost total absence of plastic objects or tools. Wood, fabric, clay and natural beeswax are the main materials used in the classroom. Every classroom in the Lower School is painted in different soft colours, in lazure technique, and light curtains decorate the big airy windows. Blackboards and chalks are used in the classrooms, instead of whiteboards and projectors. A gentle scent permeates the classrooms: beeswax, essential oils and that of fresh air.

The scents and use of natural materials combine to give a sense of a friendly home-like environment rather than an institutional (or institutionalised) place.

For Steiner, architecture was of particular interest and among his prolific written works and oral presentations he also addressed architecture (Steiner, 1927). Although he wrote about and designed many buildings — the most famous of which is the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland — he never designed any school buildings (Bjørnholt, 2014). However, his architectural style, which falls under the category of organic functionalism (D. Adams, 1992), over time was reflected in the physical arrangements adopted by many Steiner schools (Bjørnholt, 2014). Although he never designed a school himself, when talking about state schools in Germany, he stated that:

What a pity that we take our children into schoolrooms where they meet with the most barbaric surroundings for their young souls! You need only imagine how it would be for children to learn their times tables in classrooms that were not decorated in the “artistic” way of today, but were decorated by an artist so that everything the eye fell upon was in harmony (Steiner, 1997d, p. 176)

The choice of natural materials, the colour for the walls in each class and the shape of the school too are elements that characterised Steiner's choices for the layout and decor of Steiner schools (Bjørnholt, 2014).

In this particular context, some elements represent a key feature of a Steiner school and bearing in mind the scope of this research, they can shed light on relevant aspects. The school looks like a welcoming environment, almost familiar. Surely, in the case of this specific school, the fact that old houses were converted to become the school

environment played a pivotal role in creating the sensation of an almost intimate space. Each classroom occupies spaces that were once bedrooms and living rooms, and many of the classrooms come equipped with: a fireplace with a mantelpiece and wooden floors, which together combine to create the soft appearance of a big comfortable family home. In the lower classes, the desks are often arranged in a half circle facing the black board, but the arrangement of the desks changes depending on the needs and the activities of the different classes that use the room.

What is also striking from my diary is the language I use of intimacy and homeliness:

The lower classes have even more of an intimate nature than the Upper School: kettles, cups, glasses can be seen on the side of the classroom. The children eat their lunch in the classroom as well. Big chalk drawings decorate at least one of the 3 blackboards usually present in each classroom. These drawings, made by the class teachers, recall a particular moment of the main lesson, or else they capture an image linked with the season or with a particular celebration (for few examples of the drawings see Appendix 1). On the walls, the artwork of the children is hung, and they are continuously replaced with newer ones.

Almost an apparent paradox, one feels at home in an academic environment, thus configuring the Steiner school as an academic home. Of course, in the Upper school things are different, particularly in the laboratories. My diary notes:

The laboratories, on the other hand, have a completely different setup. The walls are painted in white; they are big tidy spaces, there is no artwork on the walls, but rather big posters with the periodic table or the water circle. They infuse a very different feeling than the rest of the school.

So, on the one hand the classrooms are almost intimate spaces. The children study, eat, and live in them. This configures them as domestic spaces. As noted, they do not have the taste of business spaces. On the other hand, although maintaining a friendly and welcoming outlook, the laboratories are technical spaces. Their setup is functional, there are not the everyday objects (such as kettles, cutlery, glassware and so on) that one can find in the classrooms and that contribute to create that sense of domestic environment. The tools present there are appropriate to their purpose. In other words, chemistry and physics laboratories — for instance — are set as such: everything is functional. That is not to say that the aesthetic attention that strikes the visitor of the classrooms is absent. The attention for the aesthetic of the environment is probably one of the main characteristics in the Steiner school. However, visiting the school it emerges that beauty and aesthetic do not originate from fruitless decorations but from an environment that is functional and well-finished.

Overall, what struck me during my first visit and during the first weeks I spent in the school was the fact that the classrooms looked like spaces where more than just academic work was taking place. The classrooms looked more like domestic spaces. The school is lived as a social environment, and the children are encouraged to take care of this space. They do not just come and go from their classes, and this element is actively supported by the school community as a whole.

7.2.1 Running of the school: a living organism

A core feature of Steiner schools is the fact that they are often constructed on the basis of a community both in their internal functioning and programmes and in relation to the physical environment of school setting, they are intended to embrace a democratic way of making decision and to reject hierarchical business models. This is understood to mean that the decisions are made by the teachers, by consensus, and each individual is involved in the life of the school and he or she is required to be a direct agent and to take an active role in the events and decisions that occur there (Rawson, 2011). This relies on the principle of self-administration of the Steiner school (Steiner, 1999). The degree of involvement is voluntary, but it is expected that each agent will help out and decisions should come from everyone.

Brian has been a teacher for many years and recently he has become more involved in the running of the school — although maintaining a role as Guardian for class 10 —.

He states:

The wonderful thing about being involved with a school like this, and it's not... It's almost like a project, you know. Sort of a project, because, you can, you can involve yourself at every level.

The attitude towards the school is that the school is seen as a living organism, in which each part needs to be working in harmony with the whole. As stated plainly by Brian the school by undergoing important changes in its structure, a new balance has been

created. Brian points out that this “republic” way of managing the school, and making decisions by consensus is time consuming:

Yeah. And it relies on everybody being active, so if you, if you're not active in that process, if you opt out of it, it's so much harder to get everybody back because, you know, they miss, miss a meeting, or they miss, just not awake enough, they go, "wait a minute, I didn't know about that", and then they want to know about it, and then you have, it's the whole thing about more chiefs than Indians, you know. But we don't want chiefs and Indians, we want everybody to be part of it and work together. I think consensus means feeling thinking. I think so. So, you gotta feel where it's at in order to think it, in order to make a decision. But it's to find a structure that works, 'cause I'm not in, I'm not into hierarchy, but we need a clear transparent structure.

From the quotations it is possible to infer that the balance between the freedom of a democratic way of taking decisions and the necessity of addressing the practical issues of a business is undergoing a reworking. What also emerges is a positive attitude towards the school, which is a “project” but at the same time, the awareness of the necessity for a clear structure, which allows for the smooth running of the institution:

Brian: And if we all want to be part of running the school, you know, how can we keep that balance in terms of the school being seen as a business or an organism that is, you have to fine tune.

The attitude and the language used to describe the school organisation are quite peculiar and they mirror the fact that the school is organised in an unusual way.

At the heart of the school there is the “College of Teachers”: the vast majority of the teachers in a Steiner school take part in the College meetings, which normally happen weekly. This group has the task of carrying out the running of the school and in particular the teachers in this group have the responsibility of managing the pedagogical leadership of the school. The decisions are made by consensus and in a way this group of teachers has the same function as a headmaster or mistress would have independently. This model of organisation within the school is in accordance with what Steiner suggested when the first school was opened. Steiner said:

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

What Brian is discussing here is the tension between running the school according to Steiner’s principles — based on his idea of the social threefolding (see chapter 3) (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b, 2003) — and the need to answer the call for accountability coming from contemporary society.

Many of the issues associated with running a Steiner school represent a topic that has been well explored and is widely acknowledged by the Steiner teacher community (Rawson, 2011; Schaefer, 2012; G. J. Woods & Woods, 2008). Running the school

“as a business” means running the school in what can be defined the conventional way: having a hierarchical structure, where each role is quite precise and where the decisions are made by the head of the school. That also would go against Steiner’s idea of the threefold organisation of society, for which education should not be under the needs of the economic sphere. That means that each part of the organism has to cooperate in pursuit of a common goal, and when imbalances occur, they are seen as a sign of illness that needs to be attended to promptly. Brian elaborated on this idea saying that:

The ideal is, that a place like this, an organism, we all put in, you know, our worth. And we only take what we really, really need. And that’s a very finely tuned balancing act. It’s a bit like, it’s a bit like nature, isn’t it? And I, I suppose I constantly question, then, whether looking at the structure of the school, whether we should go down the line of a more pragmatic view as to say, this is your job description, this is what you’re employed to do. You do it. Because, if you vary from that then you have to write, and you know, go down this kind of formal route of employment. And I think that’s, that’s in a kind of, that’s this balancing where we are at the moment, it’s just that bit between having that ideal or having the pragmatic view. Does that make sense? Yeah?

7.3 Perception of Steiner Philosophy

A topic that arises consistently throughout the data set was the negotiation and curiosity about Rudolf Steiner as a scholar and historical figure and theorist: who he was and what his position was in the forming of the schools as they are experienced now in the 21st Century. This element constituted a strange landscape within the

school, and it has led to a number of unexpected comments from those interviewed which were not always consistent. The strange landscape is due to the peculiar nature of Steiner's pedagogy, as has been explored in previous chapters. Steiner's ideas can hardly be considered to be emerging from a solid theoretical basis. It is common to look at pedagogical theories which are based on scientific evidence, on psychology or else supported by rigorous arguments. Steiner's philosophy does not align with any educational philosophy. It, instead, originates from Steiner's insights, which are spiritual and philosophical in their essence, although not rooted in any specific denomination. Rudolf Steiner's philosophy has its core and main arguments within an ethical dimension, and this fact is reflected in its pedagogy as well. He aims at creating an "art of education", consequently teachers in a Steiner school are called upon to become artists of a particular craft: education is not engineered, but crafted; meaning that the educational theories are used as guidelines by the teachers so as to build their lessons almost with an artistic attitude in mind. For these reasons, as shown in Chapter Two, Steiner's theories are polarising: it is hard to grasp them using a common framework because Steiner's ideas elude mainstream categorisations and therefore, I argue that Steiner's philosophy appears difficult to penetrate. So, rather than approaching Steiner solely from a theoretical perspective, by examining the practical outcomes of his ideas one can arrive at a different perspective. This approach, while useful, cannot altogether overcome the problems arising from the difficulties of analysing his philosophy, but it can indeed pave the way to better insights and understanding.

Overall, the attitude towards Steiner is positive in the school: teachers, parents and students recognise the validity of his pedagogy. However, students and parents at the school regularly expressed that it is more difficult to find out about Steiner as an

individual and as a theorist, and that the school — and the teachers — hardly discuss him or his work directly. However, the pedagogical rationale underpinning the school is not hidden. Anyone can find information about Steiner’s pedagogy on the school website, which also provides useful outlines of the main characteristics of the school. Information about the lessons, the pedagogy, pastoral care, and so on all appear on the website.

However, despite this, some students voiced questions. Class 12, in particular, expressed a feeling of frustration because the teachers seemed to actively avoid discussions about Steiner even when asked directly by a pupil. Many pupils alluded to the fact that there is a lack of transparency about Steiner. Many students have therefore resorted to seeking answers to such questions on their own. Several students stated that what they do know of Steiner comes from books or from private exchanges with certain teachers. Given that the pedagogy applied in the school is directly linked to Steiner’s ideas and theories, it is not surprising that pupils who have attended the school for many years, once approaching the completion of their education there, are curious about the theories underpinning the education they have received. Therefore, their confusion about Steiner may be seen to derive from the apparent lack of explicit reference to the pedagogical ideas which inform the school’s practices. This raises certain questions about Steiner Pedagogy, but one can also ask whether such difficulties in receiving information does in fact represent a problem or is harmful or altogether irrelevant.

The pupils seemed aware of the fact that the teachers do not talk about Steiner because “they are not supposed to”, because talking about Steiner would be associated with

espousing a particular ideology, and that is not an aim of the school. However, this ambiguity is believed to be more harmful than a proper explanation. Lewis, a pupils in class 12, said:

Because the secrecy doesn't help, I don't think. A kind of, "Can't talk about the spiritual nature." It's like, "Well why am I doing...?"

Although frustrated by not receiving adequate responses or information from teachers regarding Rudolf Steiner many of the students did guess the rationale behind the teachers' choice of partially withholding information about the pedagogy. Lily, from class 12, inferred:

I think it's that... like, Steiner said it's better not to because if you're, like, knowing exactly what's happening to you then it's you're not really learning it in some way.

It is unclear if Lily has been told about the Steinerean principle of not teaching Anthroposophy — perhaps while holding a conversation with a teacher — that this is precisely one of the reasons for which teachers in Steiner schools are reluctant to unfold the rationale behind Steiner's pedagogy. She has presented it as her own reflection on the reasons for the mystery surrounding Steiner's philosophy. This point is of particular interest for several reasons. First of all, it shows us that Anthroposophy is not a subject taught in the Steiner schools, or at least not in this specific Steiner school. One could argue, as some of the students did, that not discussing such topics openly had led to greater feelings of secrecy than receiving straight answers might

have. However, it is important to bear in mind that Anthroposophy was meant to provide the teachers with an interpretation to build their curriculum and their lessons. Steiner schools were not meant to teach Anthroposophy. This context exposes the teachers' freedom in a Steiner school: the teaching is informed by Steiner's notions, but these notions are not inculcated into the students. Due to this aspect, here lays the distinction with a denominational school. Even though it is often the case, parents and guardians of Steiner pupils do not have to subscribe to an Anthroposophical interpretation of the world nor are they required to believe in anything in particular nor is anything prescribed in terms of a spiritual or religious school or path.

However, the failure to acknowledge such ambiguities has resulted in conflicted feelings for many of the students. It could be that creating an open discourse with students around such topics would have a more positive impact on their understanding of the subject. But is it relevant? In fact, why should it be important to share with the pupils the rationale behind the pedagogy applied in the school any more than pupils in regular schools should have a say in the textbooks they are given? Pupils seem willing to accept that some of Steiner's notions are not supposed to be shared for unknown but good reasons. An explanation offered for the lack of communication about Steiner was also that "if they start preaching about Steiner then it seems really cult-y", as Emily from class 12 expressed. This position raised many different perspectives, and it was pointed out again by Aaron "a mask of silence is more cult-y than..." some sort of clarification. Jack, from class 12, noted that "some of the teachers seem to kind of follow the book, the word of Steiner religiously, whereas other teachers kind of seem to be interpreting it based on how they think the system should actually be". This statement is corroborated by the interview and focus group with the teachers, and by the researcher's observation of the school.

However, there is no evidence to support an argument that such lack of direct focus causes any harm to the students' educational experience. It led to uncertainties for many pupils, but no other adverse consequences have been acknowledged or demonstrated as a result. Moreover, a month after the focus group with the students, a previously planned meeting took place with class 12 and their teachers, showing that the teachers were responsive — in the end — to the students' questions. During this meeting Steiner's pedagogy and ideas were broadly outlined, and there was space for the students to raise their own questions. So, even though the principles of Anthroposophy were not examined, through their personal experiences and through the questions asked, the teachers — many of the teachers who taught in class 12 were present — clarified certain aspects of the pedagogy. It is interesting because this was done at the end of the students' educational path within the school. The pupils were about to leave the school, and, in a way, they were now considered adults. It can be recognised that the teachers' decisions to wait until the end of the school path, had been following the ethos of the school by not openly discussing Anthroposophy with their students as part of the taught curriculum but at the same time, they were open and regularly answered the students' questions when asked.

The uncertainty around Steiner and his educational philosophy that was expressed by the students was, to a certain degree, also voiced by the one parent who took part in the interview, Felicia. However, she did not express any explicit concerns for the scarcity of information per se, instead she merely voiced a strong desire to know more about Rudolf Steiner:

Yes. I would like to understand more about the assemblies and other... Yes, because it's quite different to me. And I would like to understand more. To know.

The previous quotes show that there is interest in and a desire to know more about Steiner, in this school, rather than emphasising a criticism for an alleged ambiguity or lack of information received.

When the teachers were asked to talk about Steiner the primary method used to approach him, and his work was from a biographical perspective. Patrick, the music teacher, was the teacher that was most willing to talk about Steiner, and he talked about him with great respect. During our interview, Patrick noted that he was surprised that Steiner was not a famous philosopher. The way he talked about Steiner was almost reverential. He seemed to believe in Steiner's ability to penetrate the Spiritual World and he advocated for a stronger spiritual basis for education. He felt that some of the teachers were not following Steiner's ideas rigorously enough. However, he admitted that no one should be forced on to this path, but that rather it should come out of free will, meaning that he was not advocating for a stricter selection of the teachers based on the degree to which they adhere to Steiner philosophy, nor for more rigorous training with the aim of forging more "orthodox" teachers, but rather that he was hoping for a stronger spiritual basis for education as a result of the individual desire to be closer to what the literature regarding Steiner describes.

When Patrick talked about the "spiritual basis" for education, his words relate directly to a quote from Steiner himself. During the time I spent in the school, it was common to hear the turn of phrase "spiritual", "spiritual education" and so forth. It would be

misleading and wrong to interpret that as equivalent to or a synonym of “religious” and “religious education”, or for it to have anything to do with a specific denomination. Spiritual has to be taken from an Anthroposophical perspective. In this sense, it is linked with the concept of freedom and it is rooted in the idea that the human being is not just a clever animal for which the life is ruled by mechanical and chemical interactions within the brain and the other organs. For Steiner (see chapter 3 and 4), the human being is a spiritual creature in its essence, and these spiritual faculties — which are not an emanation of a deity — are expressed in the faculty of thinking (see chapter 3 and 4).

On the other hand, the perspectives arising from the focus group with the teachers corroborated Patrick’s statement about what concerns the different degree of engagement with Steiner, his philosophy and his life. After presenting my question about what Steiner represents to the teachers, there was a lengthy pause which I left uninterrupted. The question was: “Who is Rudolf Steiner?”. The question could have been interpreted as a request for information about Steiner’s life, but more broadly also as a question about his works, philosophy or education. Indeed, some confusion could have been generated by the question itself and the use of the present simple. So, when prompted by the question, one teacher demanded clarification noting:

Agnes: Who is? Who was?

Me: Who was?

Agnes: Well... there you are. Austrian.

This started the conversation, initially from a biographical perspective. As if by referring to Steiner in the past, a frame for the conversation had been created, almost

as if a distance was introduced between them and the object of inquiry. Therefore, the way in which they presented Steiner was very different from how Patrick had discussed him. Initially, factual material was introduced. For example: the location where Steiner was born was stated, where he had studied, and so forth. They engaged with the discussion from a more neutral position than Patrick had, treating Steiner as a historical figure, and therefore describing him factually. However, they did not overlook Steiner's controversial features, but rather openly discussed them, albeit from a distanced perspective:

Agnes: He said, and others around him felt that there was evidence of it, that he had a sort of spiritual insight in that he saw, as a child, he said, and others felt that he was correct - you know, he wasn't telling a lie or anything - he saw people who had died very recently, so he had that, in the way that a medium might see somebody, he had that sight, which was very confusing and distressing for him, by all accounts, as a child.

The quotation shows that the teachers are in fact discussing some of Steiner's features that may present themselves more problematically, however — unlike Patrick who stated honestly that he believes that Steiner was clairvoyant — they abstain themselves from explicitly voicing their stance on the subject.

The relevant literature (Steiner, 1995b, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b, 2005) shows that Steiner was averse to dogmas and their perpetration. He made clear that even his pedagogical ideas were just the starting point for the teachers, who had the task of working with and applying these ideas and adjusting them to the context in which they were teaching. He always made clear that everything he had said or written should be treated

as a suggestion or else as a work in progress. Steiner reiterated many times that Steiner Education did not “wish to teach anthroposophical dogma: anthroposophy is not the content of the instruction” (Steiner, 1996c, p. 31). It can be easily assumed that to a great extent this is the reason for the lack of explicit references made in the school to what constitutes Steiner’s philosophy, which is connected to Anthroposophy.

As noted by the students, not all the teachers seem to follow Steiner’s works closely, nor to believe in everything he said. This is supported by the observation data and the interviews: even though the school and the teachers subscribe to a loose philosophical rationale, each individual is free to absorb and agree to this philosophy to the extent that he or she sees appropriate. This was demonstrated well by the juxtaposition of the views of two teachers in particular, Patrick on the one hand, and Brian, on the other. The former seems to subscribe to a stronger and closer interpretation of Steiner’s logic and, as discussed, he advocated for a solid implementation of Steiner’s ethos. The latter saw Steiner as a very practical person, with practical ideas. He somehow lamented the fact that through time “[Steiner] has become this precious person which we don’t tamper with”. Brian, talking about Steiner said:

He meant very well for the world. You know, I don’t wanna...
He’s not a guru. Definitely not. Take what he said and work with
it.

Implicit in his claim, and explicit in the two different views presented, one can see how for some individuals Steiner’s work did become something that is not challenged. It has been shown and discussed, that some aspects of Steiner’s theories are accepted with little critical examination, but that others are investigated and used when

appropriate by the individual. It is worth noting that both of these teachers have significant lengthy experience teaching in Steiner schools.

The variety of perspectives shared by the teachers on Steiner and Steiner's philosophy can also explain the perceptions of the students. The loose channel of information that the students perceived for what concerns Steiner's works, philosophy and his ideas can also be explained by this range of viewpoints displayed by the teachers. However, bearing in mind the focus of this research and the research questions underpinning it, what has been described by some participants as a "lack of clarity" can be interpreted in another way. For instance, the decisions of the Steiner school teachers to delay explanations about Steiner can be seen as a display of freedom in its own right: it is a decision to teach what is appropriate at that time depending on the class age and maturity.

This raises another question, if a pedagogy is to work effectively does it need to be explained? This question also relates to the way the teachers in the school were interpreting notions of creativity, spirituality and freedom, which are inherent parts of Steiner's oeuvre. Notably, from the students themselves it was remarked that notwithstanding the scarcity of discussion or commentary on Steiner and his methods and the frustration deriving from it, his pedagogy works, and they showed positive attitudes towards their learning experiences in the school. That is to say that in the students' experience the scarcity of information received about Steiner did not undermine their school experience or learning. Talking about his experience, Aaron (class 12) said:

[...] there's a lot of people who disagree with Steiner's philosophy who agree that the methodology works. Like, I was reading about the Steiner school in India that was started by an objectivist, that's Ayn Rand's philosophy, completely opposite to Rudolf Steiner and he says we think the philosophy, that anthroposophy is a load of bunk, but we agree that the methodology is fantastic. So that should be said.

That is to say that the strength of this pedagogy lies in the fact that Steiner actually negotiated many of these concerns in relation to his desired approach to education. It seems he concluded that, to enable the free development of an individual (which was the ultimate aim of his pedagogy), and to allow creative autonomy and freedom both in the dissemination of knowledge (from the teachers) and in the imaginative reception of that knowledge (by the pupils), a certain degree of objectivity was required so as not to impose any kind of dogma in the classroom. It is due to this characteristic that in the school freedom and creativity can find their place: every teacher is free to subscribe to Steiner's philosophy to a different degree. Steiner's theories provide those who are interested in his ideas with tools to interpret the reality without being subjugated by an exclusive perspective on the world:

Rachel: Do you know, since being at the Steiner School, I retrained here as a teacher, I see so many things. The world hasn't changed, but my ability to see and be aware of them

Here lies a key aspect of Steiner Education. Perhaps its very nature where certain definitions are negotiated by the teachers allows for a positive ethos and underpins the capacity for the core value of freedom to exist.

7.4 School as a Community – Relational Dimensions

The consequences of what was presented so far will be further examined here. The focus is now on the ramifications that the ethos of the practitioners has on the community. Steiner teachers are active agents in their classroom and they actively participate in the running of the school (the school being organised so that the decision-making process is democratic in its nature). Every week, the teachers meet to discuss the running of the school. The absence of a headteacher makes it necessary for all of them to participate in this process.

An overall positive attitude towards the school permeates the primary research gathered in this thesis. This positive feeling emerges in various ways from the interviews. Words such as ‘welcoming environment’, ‘less pressuring’, ‘expressing individuality’, the presence of ‘a better exposure to art and drama’ were used by many students. Indeed, the students express some satisfaction towards the subjects studied at school and about the way the teachers delivered their lessons, furthermore they discussed the freedom they had in following their interests both academically and on a personal level very fondly. In regard to the subjects studied in the school, it was pointed out by one student in class 8, Chris, that “the school is more arty than sport oriented”.

The perspective on the school is slightly different from class 8 and class 12. Class 12 have spent more time in the school and have by consequence developed a more comprehensive view on their experience at school, they are also older and more

objective due to this. They seem prone to recall the time in the lower school with more affection and some nostalgia. Students in class 8 are more critical, and of course the age difference between the two groups is also an important factor to consider. However, similar expressions were used to describe their shared awareness of being part of a special community and it is an element that shows across the different groups that participated in the interviews and focus groups. Parents, teachers and pupils alike expressed a strong feeling of identity. This was demonstrated not only from the contents of their statements, but also from the language used. The use of expressions such as “normal education” versus “Steiner Education”, alongside “normal schools” versus “special school” was commonly used by all the participants. Such expressions are frequently used within the school. Due to the structure of the school, the activities proposed, and the philosophy underpinning the ethos of the school, it is easy for those pupils with experience in other schools to feel the difference between Steiner pedagogy and other pedagogies that they experienced in previous educational experiences. The strong sense of belonging that is assumed and reflected on at this Steiner school represents an important factor that indeed shapes the understanding of those who have experienced this kind of education.

There is a strong resonance among the data sets. Parents, teachers and pupils alike express a strong feeling of identity, which emerges not only from the contents of their statements, but also from the language used. I suggest that this sort of vocabulary, shared among those who take part in the school, has the potential to be both “caused” by the ethos of the school but can also “contribute” to building the sense of belonging that is created there. In fact, in exploring the reasons for such claims, different elements are intertwined. The pupils stressed that the teachers are very welcoming. The school “is a big community”, “It is more homely, everyone knows everyone...”. This stems

from the affective relationships the pupils build with their teachers: the construction of close trust is essential in Steiner's pedagogy, and any of the other features of Steiner Education (freedom, creativity, spirituality) would not be possible in the absence of trust and the close relationships they create within the school.

It was said that the teachers seem to be more open with the students, who feel treated "like human beings" and the kind of help the teachers provide goes beyond the subjects they teach. Sophie, from class 12, said:

I think they have, all teachers have their capacity to care about the pupils but here they do tend to, they focus on you as a person and you can really feel that.

I have often witnessed a particular care for the wellbeing of the pupils in my observations. For instance, every morning there is a moment for everybody to share some news, happy or sad, with the class and the teacher. One morning in particular, in class 2, at the very beginning of the day while the pupils were still getting ready for the lessons, Isabel addressed the whole class with a soft tone: "Boys and girls, please listen. Alistair is a little upset today; his little hamster has died. So, we can be extra nice when he arrives". When he arrives, his classmates are very nice with him approaching him gently. The day proceeded as usual until it is time for them to draw a picture on their books. At that point I noticed that Isabel is next to Alistair's desk. He is in tears and he is quietly sobbing. She bends over the desk and talks to him in a whisper. I cannot hear what she is saying, but she stays there for a little while, and then she sends Alistair to have a glass of water.

Something similar happened in class 12, one morning Madame Vialle — the guardian of class 12 — asked the class at large if they had news from Robert, one of the students who was absent that morning and who seemed under the weather in the previous days. “Please, if he is having difficulties, tell him to come to me. I can help if he talks to me” she comments. After the class she will then tell me that she will need to talk to Robert, because she suspects he is struggling with the workload.

Interestingly, positive remarks are made by many students in class 8, some of whom moved to the Steiner school due to problems with bullying in their previous institutions. What is argued here by the students is that the pastoral care provided by the teachers has a positive effect on them. The role of the teachers becomes almost that of a parent who looks after the needs of his or her children. This seems something which was intended by Steiner: the teachers are central figures in Steiner’s classroom, and they have the tasks to help to unfold the individuality of each pupil, and this process was believed to be possible only within an environment free from fear. A quotation attributed to Steiner, which is often on the website of many schools, says: “There are three effective ways of educating children — fear, ambition and love. We can do without the first two!”.

Therefore, it seems that the kind of relationships and the kind of communities which are built among the students, parents and teachers are essential for Steinerian pedagogy. This approach is holistic in its nature, given that its intentions are to consider the human beings as a threefold entity, where their three main faculties (thinking, feeling and doing) need to grow in harmony — and as a consequence the

attention to not only the academic needs but also the general wellbeing of the students is emphasised as well as their scholastic pursuits. There is a strong consensus among the students that the care they have received has helped them to become stronger individuals. Morag's account — student in class 12 —, summarises this well:

Yeah, exactly. [...] the teachers really do kind of understand you for, like, you and they can see more brighter things about you than just think, you know, you've done one bad thing, okay, you were going through phases, but they kind of look, you know, more like... how can I say this? Like, they kind of look past that. I think, you know, we all try and help like each individual differently and how it'll, like, help them. So, for me, like, they helped me really well and I've, like, to try and find myself, like, properly and I went through, as I said before, loads of phases and they did really help me to kind of settle down, kind of think, 'Right, okay, well, Morag, this is what you need to do. How do you feel?' And they always made sure, like, they check up on you and I'm sure they do that with everyone else, and it's actually, you feel very, like, if you ever have a problem you don't feel that you can't tell anyone. Which is really nice. So, I can tell anybody in the class, I can tell anybody like my teachers, if I have anything that's, like, worrying me or if I feel upset or if I feel angry, like, I can just go and talk to any teacher and just say, "Look, I feel like this. What can you do? What can you help me with?" and they really take out the time to say, "Look, I'll come see you on this day." And they can really, like, reach out to you which is really nice and you can reach out to them which is really nice. How deep!

The ability to feel free to talk with the classmates and the teachers about struggles and problems stems from the ethos of the school. This openness among students and

teachers is another expression of the freedom within the school. The fact that the students can feel free to address even personal issues with their teachers — as has been demonstrated in the data — without fear of being judged leads to trust and at the same time is the result of a trusting environment. It seems as if the school provides a sanctuary, where one can be open with his or her feelings and experiences without fear of repercussions. For example, Felicia — a parent of a pupil attending class 3 — stated that her daughter began to express “all her feelings” both “good and bad” which initially led Felicia to feel “paralysed” because her daughter had not done this in her previous school. Felicia stated that she was glad that the school had done this for her daughter and attributes this to the school being focused on both the academic needs and goals of the students as well as on their wellbeing in equal measure.

As a result of this new balance, Felicia says that her daughter is now calm, she is not anxious anymore and as a consequence she is enjoying going to school and she is improving at school as well. She claims that this is the result of the atmosphere the class teacher created in the class. Felicia shared with me their background and previous experiences in other schools with some detail. Her daughter had been struggling with the school experience and also with meeting the academic requirements. It was suggested by former teachers to consult a psychologist and a speech therapist. The results had not been encouraging. What Felicia is arguing here is that, in her opinion, this change in the approach introduced at the Steiner school helped her daughter greatly. She described the practice in the school as nurturing and aware of the psychological needs of the pupils. Her gratitude for the class teacher was stated several times in the course of the interview. In this sense, there is an argument to support the fact that nurturing the emotional needs of pupils it is not an end in itself, but it is part of the view of the school, which is rooted in its pedagogy, and rests on a belief that

teaching in a caring and stress-free environment produces good academic results and allows the pupils to find themselves (Steiner, 1985).

It has been stated at the very beginning of this section that many of the characteristics and qualities found in Steiner schools are not only prerogatives of Steiner teachers, but also what matters most here is the fact that the practitioners and the pupils seems to be particularly aware of these qualities (e.g. caring, relaxed environment, feeling considered as individuals, caring for more than academics needs, etc.). Not to mention that in many classes I visited there were pupils that joined the school because of negative past experiences such as bullying, or high anxiety at other schools. These pupils were particularly outspoken in pointing out the different quality of the relationship created with the teachers in the Steiner school. This shows a particular perspective on the role that teachers can have, which stem from Steiner's philosophy. Pupils are seen as human beings in the process of their own spiritual and creative development and growth (see chapter 5). The school then becomes the place where this growth is fostered, and not only a place where academic knowledge — important in its own accord and indeed not overlooked in the school — is shared. These are some of the reasons why the teachers strongly believe in building solid relationships with the pupils and they have made it clear that the growth of the pupils is not constricted within the achievement of good grades, but from a broader and more holistic perspective. Brian stated:

I was, always felt in a very humble position, because it's a complete privilege to watch children grow up. I mean, as a class teacher you're taking a child from age six to fourteen, their formative years, you know. And you're watching this

development and you're part of that, it's phenomenal, really. And so one thing is watching people grow, you know, I find that fascinating.

Here Brian makes explicit what was implicit in the focus group discussion with the teachers.

Teaching is not understood by the teachers to be just a job, but almost as mission. It is true that many teachers would consider their job as a vocation, but here there is a particularly strong emphasis on the vocational aspects of the job. It is apparent that the role of teachers is central to Steiner Education, however their role is not only that of a leader or guide who imparts their knowledge, but rather it is also imperative that they observe and facilitate the development and unfolding of the individual potential of each of their pupils. This emphasis stems from the philosophical background of Steiner Education, and from Steiner's strong belief that education is an art that requires each teacher's full dedication, which is why he put particular emphasis on the internal character of Steiner school teachers — who a teacher *is* and how he or she acts rather than simply what a teacher knows.

This sentiment of both respect and fascination for the development of the pupils is rooted in Steiner's words and it is a common feature in the Steiner school. This mindset has an impact on the nature of the relationships the teachers build with the pupils. Agnes, class teacher in class 1, said:

Most of the teachers here are striving in some way, they've got some spiritual path of their own - and they're not the same spiritual path necessarily — I mean my children have been taught by Buddhists, and Christians, and Muslims, and people with no defined spiritual path, quite a mixture. But the fact that they were striving seemed to affect them, and they recognised that and felt it was a good place. And there's a strength that comes from a teacher that goes into a classroom in that position. Sometimes they don't even realise that they're doing it, but the very fact that they're here means they are.

Agnes argues that the students perceive a huge difference in the quality of teaching due to the fact that 'most of the teachers' are working on themselves. Therefore, education is considered linked with self-education. In other words, one cannot be a teacher and teach effectively without being on a path towards self-improvement him or herself. From the quotation, it emerged that the teachers believe that being on some sort of journey is paramount, and — in the quotation above — Agnes adds that "sometimes they [the teachers] don't even realise that they're doing it, but the very fact that they're here means they are". This highlights the importance of trust as well as how self-education and striving comes directly from the ethos, underpinning the philosophy and pedagogy of the school, which is rooted in Steiner's theories on education. It is widely assumed that the school — the community of teachers forming the school — provides a set of values upon which the teachers of the school agree. Having common values and goals seems to help them to build the special sense of community that permeates at the school. These values, the very core of the ethos of the school, is clearly held in great regards. Agnes asserts that "you wouldn't come to this school - you don't come here for the money...". Therefore, what brings people together in the school is a shared goal and a common view of the world.

These elements — striving, facing new challenges, and sharing this experience with the rest of the colleagues — seems particularly important because from them emerge the way the teachers seem to regard the importance of the relational dimension with the students. The sentiment expressed in the quotations is shared also by many of the teachers who took part in the focus group. They remarked on the importance of creating a strong bond with the pupils and also the importance of respecting and nurturing the individuality of each pupil.

Chris, from class 8, said: “in other school as long as you don’t do anything bad, teachers don’t care about you”. Interestingly, when outlining the positive aspects of their experiences, those pupils that had attended a different school were prone to draw comparisons. There was some consensus over the idea of being “more valued as individuals” within the Steiner school. There are indeed many factors to consider in relation to such a claim, and some reasoning emerged during the focus group with Class 12 on this subject. Aaron reasoned:

[...] I mean, I’ve never been to one of those schools, so I can’t say “Well, there I’m just a number.” From what I can tell from just from seeing other people and hearing what they’ve said, outwith this focus group, yes, and it makes sense logically because you’re dealing with much larger groups of people and they’re the primary, I believe — correct me if I’m wrong — but the primary teachers, they just teach Primary 1 and then the next Primary 1 comes in. Whereas, here, our lower schoolteacher takes us from 1 to 8.

Some considerations emerge from class 12 regarding the possible reasons for these very close relationships between students and teachers. Some of the students note that it may be due to the size of the school and of the classes: being a small school enables the teachers to have a more personal role in the education of the pupils.

However, considering the structure of the curriculum and the ethos of the school, as outlined in Chapter 5, the role that the class teacher plays is pivotal in shaping the children's experiences. Indeed, the size of the school is important as well, but arguably, the relationship the pupils build with the teachers is strengthened by the fact that the main teacher follows the same group of children for 8 years. A student from class 12, Emily, who went in a Steiner school abroad, when considering the importance of the size of her class in relation to the teaching style and the attitude of the teacher, stated:

I was in a Steiner school in Germany for three months which was a class of thirty-five pupils and they still, like the teaching style was pretty similar to here. So...

So, the size may play an important role, but probably it is not the sole element of importance. As argued, due to the fact a class teacher follows the same class for 8 years, the bonds created might be stronger than if he or she had only been with the same class for one year and inevitably they will get to know each other much better during the comparatively lengthy period of time they are together in a Steiner school. The ramifications of such occurrences are multifaceted. Stronger bonds can lead to a better understanding of individual students' needs, but — as pointed out by class 12 — it can also represent a problem if a clash of personalities takes place between the student and the teacher early on in their time together. However, on this matter mainly

the positive outcomes of such close relationships are outlined. It is pointed out that the teachers get to know the students and they do try to see beyond their faults and poor behaviours.

Noticeable was Madam Vialle, who would check with her students every morning — especially when the exams were approaching — about their well-being. It has been stated at the beginning of the chapter that I am not claiming that this caring attitude is unique to Steiner teachers, but it does appear that within the school teachers and students seem particularly aware of this practice. This attitude is reflective of the ethos of care and concern adopted at the school: the teachers really do seem to live this in ways that perhaps teachers in other schools may not — it could be that this school feels less pressurised to work in, due to the freedom the teachers have in creating the curriculum. The size of the school is also important because it allows a closer relationship among those who work there. In joining the school, it is expected that a teacher undergoes a growing process, a personal evolution. Teachers in the school put a great amount of emphasis on leading by example, and not simply lecturing, but living their roles as teachers, by embracing self-discipline, respect and care.

7.5 Community and Individuality

Being part of a community can result in the adoption of a shared identity, common beliefs and values which shape the individuals of a community and can lead to the creation of important bonds and connections. Trust within a community can empower collective action. That is to say, it appears that an important source of success in a community stems from the acquisition of common thinking and the application of

common goals. It is possible to identify the shared rationale of those who work in a Steiner school from the data. However, clear repeated references were made, especially by the pupils which demonstrated the fact that they feel valued as individuals and that they have room to express and shape their own individualities. Sophie said:

I think they have, all teachers have their capacity to care about the pupils but here they do tend to, they focus on you as a person and you can really feel that.

The sentiment expressed in the quotation does not seem to be the result of a series of casual coincidences. What emerges from the interviews with the teachers is a conscious intention to nurture and respect the individuality of each pupil. What is understood to be the aim of education fashions the teaching approach and style in the classroom.

When directly asked what the purpose of education and schooling is, the teachers agreed that it is not to produce “cogs to fit in a wheel”. Agnes’ answer is particularly helpful in understanding this aspect.

That is the key question. Yeah. And it’s not about - it shouldn’t be about producing cogs to fit in a wheel, people to fulfil the functions of the economic sphere. There are a few that are going to make a huge amount of money, but lots of people doing the right jobs for them, or inventing the right things for them, or whatever. So, it should be about people that are helping young people develop into the sort of adult who can make moral and--

decisions about what they're doing, whatever it is. So, you're not churning out a product, you're letting something unfold, and you don't know what the future's going to bring but you're hoping that they'll be able to deal with whatever it is. Out of a good moral compass, a good feeling for society, and...

The importance of morality and freedom will be discussed in the next section, because they represent a theme on their own. What appears here is that on the one hand, the pupils - who claim that due to the teachers' attitudes and the curriculum applied - felt free to "become themselves", on the other hand the fact that the teachers operate so that the contents of their classes were not the only important matters they worked on delivering, initiating from the rationale that school is capable of teaching more than just academic knowledge.

The importance of socialisation is indeed an important factor also. In the next paragraph the important differences between the lower school and the upper school as they have been described by the research participants will be taken into consideration. Here, what arises from the participants' experiences is that within the school the teachers provide a support that goes beyond the students' academic needs, almost like parental care. It is common in the school to see the pupils performing tasks such as sweeping the floor, tidying the classroom and even cleaning the garden and playground. In class two, every morning one pupil reads from a list of 'jobs' (watering plants, tidying up after break, sweeping the classroom, setting-up for lunch, etc.). These tasks are given to a different pupil (or a couple of pupils) each week, and the children perform them autonomously when it is the appropriate time. There are different levels of purpose for this task: building a sense of community by taking care of the lived space, fostering responsibility and autonomy in the children, creating a

sense of respect for the other members of the group (e.g. not trashing the classroom floor because someone has to clean it). Ultimately, it can be argued that all these purposes together make the classroom not only a place where the students go for few hours every day to be taught something but a place where they can share experiences.

It is noteworthy that class 8, once a week, cooks the meal for all those students that decide not to bring their own packed lunch from home. Each week, a little group of pupils from class 8 dedicates one morning to help the cook in the kitchen by making the meals for the school. Again, besides the fact that in this way they are acquiring practical skills such as cooking, it is also a way to take care of their own community.

Meaningful is the language used by Agnes. The uses of ‘Steinerian’ jargon are numerous, the reference to the ‘economic sphere’ is directly borrowed from Steiner literature (Steiner, 1997d, 1999, 2003), while the imaginative and metaphorical language is a feature I have observed in every class I visited and that is shared by each class teacher in the school (see chapter 8).

Interestingly, during the interviews with the teachers, one idea was shared among all the participants. When talking about the needs of the pupils in relation to the aims of education it was stated that the school should care not only for the academic — as previously mentioned — but also for the physical and psychological needs of a pupil. All the teachers seemed in agreement that this was the basis of providing a duty of care which will in turn impact the lessons and the pupils’ levels of engagement in their respective educations.

Rachel: If a child comes in tired, or upset, or overly-excited, I need to help them come to a point that they can receive my information, because it can have an impact on the whole class, and I'm much smarter to address that need, and I notice it I shake their hand at the door as they come in, and I can quickly assess what needs to happen. Two weeks ago, we had a class that had arrived from a long walk, they were exhausted, I immediately got jugs of water out, we sat and had a drink, I had had a snack just because of the special lesson, we spent ten less minutes, the rest of my lesson they worked beautifully, they cleaned up beautifully, and I think we had a better lesson because I met their physical need - and their emotional need - to just 'Please see me as a person', instead of saying "Right, here's our lesson."

This particular care is even more noticeable in the lower school. During my observation in class 2, for instance, I noticed that every morning the teacher would prepare an herbal tea and the children could help themselves to one also. Time was given for everyone to get ready and change their outdoor shoes, to get warm on a cold day and in the unusual event that something challenged the emotional wellbeing of a pupil, that would be addressed in a one-to-one conversation with the pupil.

7.6 The Moral and Spiritual dimension

Morality represents a ubiquitous element in Steiner Education, strongly intertwined with the idea of Freedom and Spirituality. This element emerged powerfully when the teachers were talking about the aim of education and about how a teacher should conduct him or herself in front of the class. The moral element is palpable in every

aspect of school life, and there was a general consensus among the participants that morality is an important aspect of education. However, there was little agreement as to how such a component was to be conveyed to the pupils.

The teachers who took part in the focus group were particularly engaged with the matter. Noticeably, there was not a clear definition as to what morality means or is among the teachers, however some understanding of its meaning could only be reached indirectly through the teachers' and pupils' voices. Strong consensus was attained in pointing out that morality has nothing to do with religious education or religion. It was believed that morality cannot be taught but can only be shown through moral behaviour and actions. In order to convey morality, the teachers claim that one has to act morally. Brian, explained:

[...] You can't teach morals, I don't know [whether you can] really teach morals. [...] It's sort of a way of life, isn't it? They have to approach morals from all sorts of areas. And get the right foundations [...].

Sabine was alone in stating that she did not think that a moral environment was necessarily needed:

I don't think that a morality around you is necessary for you to develop a morality, so I think the question is very, very difficult. And I don't know how to answer it, actually. I think having a morality around you certainly helps to support that growth, but I think it can grow in the absence.

The majority of the teachers' perspectives on morality were described as coming from practical actions (such as tidying the classroom or waiting in silence for a class to start) but also suggested that morality is linked with a spiritual reverence that is instilled in the children. Morality seems to move alongside what has been discussed before in regard to the development of the pupils' individuality and self-awareness. Morality is considered a quality essential for any achievement in life. Agnes stated:

A sense of self. And there's--it's amazing how many of the children, through this education, choose quite unique paths for themselves. I remember one young man being railed at by a teacher about not working hard enough for his exams, and what's going to happen to you, you'll be on the streets, and he said "Well, as long as I'm not a junkie or a drug addict, or an alcoholic or something. There's worse things. So long as I'm happy." You know? It wasn't--the result was not to get the exams, and to get into a job, and get money, and get material things, it was to find himself and to find his purpose - and so many of them spend a lot of time just trying to find themselves.

In addition to pointing out once again the importance of life and achievements that are beyond exam results, the importance of self-awareness in an individual was acknowledged, something the school is clearly striving to achieve.

The teachers seem to describe morality also as the ability not only to look deep into oneself, but also to look at the world with understanding. 'Social morality' is a phrase regularly used by the teachers at the school. It seems here, that it used to describe one's ability to view the events and individuals encountered from a position of non-judgement. Agnes, on the matter, recalled an anecdote:

There was a girl - oh, it was a number of years ago - and she had a Saturday job in a dress store in George Street, and she was fired because the manager had taken another member of staff to task on the shop floor in front of customers, and this girl went to her afterwards and said “That was not right. That was a wrong thing to do. As a manager, you should have known”, so, of course, she was fired, but she said “But somebody had to tell her.” You know? “And it meant I lost my job, but it would have been wrong not to tell her that”. So... And I thought ‘What courage for, you know, a 17-year-old, to have gone and do that’, and that was directly a result of the moral feelings she had from school, that she’d developed.

The example given by Agnes supports the idea that a “strong moral compass” is essential for life and that such a moral character is a result of the education received in the school. Even though in relation to other elements, such as religion and faith, Agnes stated that the influence coming from the family is greater than the one originating from the school, on this matter she is prone to say that the way the girl in her story behaved was the result of the moral feelings which were derived from the school. This stance shows that some pride is taken for the way the young woman in the story behaved. I suggest that even though it is not made explicit some credit has to be shared with the pupils’ families. Of course, this young woman’s response may have had little to do with her education at a Steiner school, but what is interesting here is that the teacher gives this as an example, and states that the action was the direct result of the girl’s moral development, which was gained at school. This indicates that the teacher has a strong belief in the importance of the moral dimension of education and more importantly this is given as an example of what is believed to be gained from Steiner Education. The value of the family is not overlooked. In other words, here I

am not arguing that the education provided in this Steiner school produces morally superior young adults, but rather that this is the ideal and the goal that the teachers are striving for. Agnes' story exemplifies this. The ideal is to send into the world adults with a strong sense of self, able to make judgements on the basis of a strong moral feeling and capable of looking beyond superficial achievements. The teachers argue, therefore, that they instil morality in their pupils not by lecturing on the importance of being honest or on the importance of acting morally, but by acting soundly themselves — e.g. in their own conduct as people and educators. Once again, the centrality of the teachers and of their self-education emerges.

With regards to spirituality, this theme is clearly set apart from religion and religious feelings, while it is often linked with the idea of freedom and creativity. Teachers conveyed a sense of religion as a set of rules or otherwise as dogmas, while spirituality is described as an ineffable attitude towards the surrounding world and at the same time the ability to be in contact with our inner selves. Brian stated:

Whether you can, you can call that spiritual education, I'm not sure, 'cause I think it's, it's trying, I think it's trying to educate, or it's trying to create inside each one of us, a kind of devotional attitude, that we can have that quiet moment, that peaceful moment, where we are being reverential. And that's why it's so important, you know. It's funny, 'cause, a spiritual education. You know, we have religion lessons but it's not, it's not religious education, it's about how we can be people in the world that care, have responsibility, have reverence towards what they are doing, and I think, you know, that's why I'm sitting in this, in the younger ones we sit down in a circle round a big table, eating, having said a grace, and maybe having two or three minutes

silence just so you can actually take in food. I mean, it's such an important thing, isn't it?

The emphasis in the school is on creating an environment where moments of silence, reverence for one another and respect can occur. For example, an extract from my diary states:

Class 5, Morning verse

At 8.45 the second bell chimes in the distance — I notice now that the sound of the bell is barely audible from this class. Immediately the light of the classroom is turned off and one candle is lit. The desks are arranged in a circle, in the middle on another desk there is the Christmas wreath. The pupils stand behind their own desks. They are quiet, and after a moment of silence they start declaiming the Morning Verse. Being Christmas time, after the morning verse they sang some Christmas songs accompanied by Mr. Penman who plays the music on his lyre. Some of the pupils ask and remind Mr Penman of some specific Christmas Carol, and he readily finds the right tune on the lyre and they all sing together. This moment is not rushed, it goes quietly on.

What emerges here is the ritual quality of such activities. They are repeated on a daily basis, ideally at the same time every day. These activities carry symbolic connotations that help to define the community (Henry, 1992). It is noticeable that the pupils' time in the school follows a pattern that is marked by different moments, such as the Morning Verse, or else the poem recited before lunchtime. This ritualistic timetable is applied in every class from the lower school to the upper school.

It was argued by Isabella, class teacher of class 2, that creating repetition at school builds a sense of waiting, longing and expectation in the children, and this plays a pivotal role in what is defined as spirituality in the school. Not to mention the known psychological phenomena that children are able to relax when they know what to expect. Small children require routine to feel safe. In the ritualistic occurrence of such events lies their importance and their meaningfulness. Rachel said:

I think in addition to what you're saying there, there's a certain daily rhythm of having reverence for certain things. Like we have a small moment at... like a poem or something, or grace or something, before a meal. So, one thing you're sort of giving space or time in that way, to spirituality, you're just saying "We're thankful for this, this is something that is being given to us", and I think that's reverence, which is a good thing. So, that's, yeah, we do a lot of festivals, which I have never seen either in my own school career or where I volunteered, we do a lot of festivals that bring in light, that bringing in the light and the warmth is really important and is very special.

Christmas is not presented by Isabella as the day in which Jesus was born, marking again a separation from the practice in this Steiner school with the events that occur in religious education. The attention of the pupils is led by the changing of the seasons, marked by spiritual events such as Advent, Michaelmas, Martinmas, Easter: pupils are invited to reflect upon the connections between a particular season and the changes they may experience in their feelings, behaviours and environment. The school tries to plan the school programme and the activities so as to follow the natural calendar and in doing so, it draws a very direct connection with nature and the environment. Christmas comes to represent the path towards mid-winter. In the same way

Michaelmas is the milestone of autumn, and Saint John's Eve marks the start of the summer.

One quality associated with spirituality within the school can be observed: creating a moment in which the attention of the entire class is focused on one 'spiritual' activity, usually an activity that bears in itself an almost meditative feature, such as reciting a poem, or singing a song or else the performance of certain movements which occur in unison. In this sense, it can be argued that spirituality carries a practical aspect in the school's practices and is simultaneously both an individual and shared experience as was demonstrated by the participants during the interviews. One example of this is the use of the Morning Verse, which has two versions:

Morning verse class 1 to 5

The Sun with loving light
Makes bright for me each day,
The soul with spirit power
Gives strength unto my limbs,
In sunlight shining clear
I revere, Oh God,
The strength of humankind,
Which Thou so graciously
Has planted in my soul,
That I with all my might,
May love to work and learn.
From Thee stream light and strength
To Thee rise love and thanks.

Morning verse class 6 to 12

I look out into the world
Wherein there shines the Sun
Where glimmer all the stars,
Where lie the silent stones
The plants that live and grow
The beasts that feel and move
Where man in soul creates
A dwelling for the spirit.
I look inward to the soul
That lives within my being
The spirit of God is weaving
In sunlight and in soul-life
In heights of world without
In depths of soul within.
Spirit of God to thee
I turn myself in seeking
That strength and grace and skill
For learning and for work
May live and grow in me

Every morning, before starting the lesson, the pupils are asked for a moment of quiet and silence. The light of the room is dimmed, and a candle — which is placed on the teacher's desk — is lit, often by one of the pupils in turn. Indeed, from my observational diary, from the moment the flame burns the atmosphere in the classroom changes: I observed a calmer feeling. Not many words are said by the teacher, they proceed in their 'ritual' following a well-established habit.

These verses, written by Steiner, present God as a transcendent being. The poem is written in a mystical language that could easily be viewed as religious, but I argue that this impression derives from the fact that words such as 'soul', 'spirit', and 'God' are

nowadays more commonly found in religious literature rather than elsewhere. However, these terms have to be considered in relation to Steiner's use of language as well as in relation to the context in which they were written (see chapter 3). Focusing on the content of the verse, the centre of the text is the human being, and not God — which is mentioned almost as a marginal character. This derives from Steiner's philosophy, which saw the human being as the main agent in the world, a world that was not interpreted in a mechanistic way but rather transcendent, but nonetheless a physical world — although permeating within a spiritual one.

The two poems discussed above are presented as verse rather than prayers. The difference lies in the fact that the pupils are invited to join in and repeat the verses, but an exegesis of the text is not discussed, and these verses do not provide a direct source for moral conduct. Steiner himself did not intend for the Morning Verse to be a prayer. When presenting a typical school day in a Steiner school, Steiner (2003, p. 119) said: "this verse, which could also be sung, embraces both a general human and a religious element, and it unites the students in a mood of prayer. It may be followed by a genuine prayer. In our "free" Waldorf school, such details are left entirely up to each teacher". He indeed talks about 'a mood of prayer', but he also adds that this verse can be followed by a 'genuine' prayer setting in this way a distinction between the two ideas. During the time spent in the school, I did not hear any references to any of these verses nor to the enforcing of any moral actions. In fact, God is not mentioned in relation to any moral enforcement, that is to say that the nature of the idea of God within the school is that of a spiritual being permeating in the world, not the one of a moral judge or entity who requires us to behave accordingly and is pleased if we do. Morality stems, instead, from a sense of gratitude (Steiner, 2003).

Discussing the Morning Verse during the focus group with the teachers, Angus — the chemistry teacher in the upper school — said:

One interesting note about morality at the Steiner School — that there's quite a lot of emphasis on the joy of work and learning. Like the morning verse that we say, you know... [...] "The strength and grace and skill for learning and for work, in me may live and grow", you know? It's not directly about being nice to each other, it's about taking joy and doing something useful, and I think that's, I don't know, it's interesting, fairly unusual approach.

His comment reinforces the idea that this verse is not perceived as a prayer, and also that the moral sphere emanates not from direct instructions ("it is not about being nice to each other") but from certain values that he encompasses which create a particular worldview. In this case it is pointed out that the message the verse is conveying is about "taking joy and doing something useful". Therefore, more than moral teaching, these Morning Verses are indeed used to enable a moment of quiet and meditation at the beginning of the day, which serves the purpose of creating a juncture with the pupils' lives before they arrive at the school and the start of school day.

When asked about the Morning verse Ross, a student in class 8 responded:

I think to wake up. I don't think about it sometimes. And I cannot say it on my own. I don't think about it, it's a routine.

It can be argued that in this practice lies the possibility of subliminal indoctrination. These rituals can be considered quasi-religious activities. And indeed, by observing these practices, a link with religious cults may come easily to mind. But rather, I argue that this is an expression of the freedom exercised by the teachers — in the same way it was intended by Steiner — it is not explained but rather it just provides the basis upon which the school is run. The risk of subliminal indoctrinations is arguably present. However, the school is based on Steiner Pedagogy, as clearly stated, the pupils and parents who attend this school are aware of the philosophy underpinning the school ethos. This spiritual element is not hidden, nor does it creep into the classroom unwelcomed. This element is, on the contrary, a foundational one of this pedagogy.

The Morning Verse is not the only moment during the day when the pupils are asked to focus for a few moments inward. The quality of these quiet moments is almost that of meditation as it can be interpreted according to eastern traditions. They happen throughout the course of a school day. The aim seems to be to create a balance between the activities proposed: those that require some actions or movements — jumping while repeating some maths timetables, acting out a brief story, running in the garden, singing or else declaiming a poem — and moments when silence is required — the Morning Verse, the poem recited before a meal or just queuing before entering a class. Under those circumstances, the morning verse — as a moment — cannot be understood in isolation, or it would be misleading. The schedule of the day is not casual. Although flexible and prone to responding to the needs of the pupils, a regular school day follows a pattern that seeks to balance quiet, focused work, with moments of distention and movements.

Some teachers also expressed their views of the school as providing a spiritual journey: the majority of participants claimed that they are still striving “in some way, they’ve got some spiritual path of their own — and they’re not the same spiritual paths necessarily”. The teachers are evolving intellectually and creatively themselves and persistently trying to improve and venture forward, which is part of the same process that has been illustrated before when teachers have been described as ‘active agents’ and ‘active implementers’ of Steiner’s pedagogical ideas. This process is referred to by the teacher as a kind of spiritual work that they undertake voluntarily. This is done believing that the teachers’ own journey on this path, directly influences the ways that the pupils, in turn, develop their own inner voices and consequently their own paths. This demonstrates yet another process at Steiner schools that is led by example, and it is for this reason that the teachers are required to undertake work on their own individual creative lives. A quotation attributed to Steiner says: “You will not be good teachers if you focus only on what you do and not upon who you are”. It is a swift move from a focus on academic knowledge and teaching techniques, to one which fully considers interpersonal aspects. Arguably, this is important to many schools and in many teaching approaches, however it is particularly emphasised in Steiner Education, and it falls under the category of spiritual work.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented some of the data from the interviews. A definition emerged from the participants as to what Steiner’s philosophy of education concerns. Emphasis was given to how a teacher should conduct him or herself in front of the pupils. What appears from the interviews is that this demeanour has to be truthful and cannot be an

act — an empty gesture. For this reason, the importance of the work the teachers do on themselves is crucial to the ethos of Steiner Education. Describing the role of a teacher, Steiner said:

The boy or girl, seeing the teacher come into the classroom must not have the feeling “He is teaching according to some theoretical principles because he does not grasp the subconscious”. They want a human relation with the teacher. And that is almost always destroyed when education principles are introduced. Pedagogics is not enough if it makes the teacher or educator merely clever. (Steiner, 1967)

The focus has been in particular on the element of spirituality, although a picture of how the three notion of spirituality, freedom and creativity are interconnected started to emerge. Particularly, the spiritual element in the school is linked to that of morality. The elements which according to the teachers play a role in shaping the pupils’ morality are diverse and ubiquitous. What is emphasised is the importance of the practical aspects of the everyday life in school and how the teachers behave in front of the pupils. The school aims at creating an environment where the outcomes are not forced or imposed, but rather understood, so that the tasks undertaken are meaningful, and they are oriented towards an aim. In the next chapter the notion of freedom and creativity will be explored, and, and more practical examples of lessons and practices will be provided.

Chapter 8: Education towards freedom

8.1 Introduction

The discussion around the idea of freedom — across the data set — appeared to be linked with the notion of creativity. It will be shown in the following sections that the idea of freedom is central to the pedagogy and that it is experienced differently in different contexts. In chapter 3, the importance of the idea of freedom within Steiner's philosophy has been discussed at length, therefore it is not surprising that the participants referred to this element. There were two main perspectives arising from the data on the notion of freedom. Freedom in teaching and, as its counterpart, freedom in the learning experience. This idea of freedom in the teaching practice was argued to be the starting point to create a fertile environment for a creative experience for the students and for the teachers alike.

8.2 Freedom in teaching and learning— creativity

A broad consensus was reached by the teachers for what constitutes the link between creativity and freedom, but both terms were used without a precise definition, and during the course of the interviews slightly different notions surfaced. One element that all the teachers agreed on was the freedom they experience in teaching. This freedom is originated by the lack of external constraints with regard to fixed targets, which consequently leaves teachers free to plan their own classes. As long as the teachers have a plan and they are aware of where they are leading the pupils, they have the freedom to work towards that aim. Agnes described this element saying:

I think in the, particularly in the lower school, is that you know that there's things you want the children to be able to achieve. You know, skills. But you've got the freedom to look at the children and see them as individuals, and not think 'I've got to do this, this year, otherwise they've failed and I've failed', but you can leave them to be ready to unfold in their own time, and support that unfolding, so, you find what they need to help them to be ready to learn a thing, and work with that, rather than top-down. You know, you're sort of building them up and building up their confidence, building up their feeling of self and their awareness of the world, and then showing them whatever it is you want them to discover and they've got time to discover it and play with it a little bit. So, there's far more time to do that as a lower schoolteacher.

From a semantic perspective, the words used by Agnes suggest adherence to Steiner's philosophical assumptions. Steiner suggested that the curriculum was to be developed by the teachers, based on an Anthroposophical understanding of early childhood development (see chapter 5). In a way, the curriculum "was the children", to paraphrase Steiner (1996c). When Agnes says that the teachers "have the freedom to look at the children", and that they have the time to let them "unfold" she is in fact describing the essence of Steiner's pedagogy. Thus, on the one hand, she is describing the practices within a Steiner institution, on the other this is also indicative of the sort of freedom the practitioners within a Steiner school have.

The way Agnes is talking about learning is particularly relevant: the fact that teachers are supporting pupils to unfold in their own time is possibly a luxury that teachers in

state schools do not have. Agnus, a science teacher in the upper school made an excellent point, comparing his experience in the Steiner school and in a state school:

I'd say still relatively relaxed. Certainly, having been in state schools, everyone's very aware of targets and their performance constantly being assessed and this sort of thing. It's not necessarily all that much more rigid - I think that's partly a function of the size of the school. So, the fact that we're so small, you know, R. is the one who teaches GCSE Biology, and I'm the one who teaches GCSE Chemistry, we get to do that how we want to. But then also there's the whole main lesson thing where there's really a lot more flexibility that we have than the prescribed curriculum for exam subject.

This quotation and the previous one introduces also an important point about the difference between the lower and upper school. The freedom to teach is more evident in the lower school where national examinations are not the ultimate outcome and where there is greater scope for exploration in the curriculum. In the lower school, the teachers feel more free to promote a stimulating learning environment which is in part due to the possibility of taking time to explore and give the pupils time to learn at their own paces. In this way they are building up the pupils' confidence as capable learners. However, even in the upper school, the comparison with a state school, draws the idea that the greater freedom, the small size of the school and the more relaxed attitude towards reaching targets creates more space for a better teaching and learning experience.

To better understand what is implied by the notion of freedom, it is worth remarking that no participant provided a definition of this term. Brian was the only one to touch on elements that could be related to a definition of freedom. He said, “[w]hen I hear ‘freedom’, I have to put responsibility beside it”. Without explicit reference, the same notion emerged also from the other teachers and from the pupils as well. It is clear from the data collected, that freedom is not interpreted as the absence of rules and therefore the possibility of doing anything. Brian reasoned:

I think, if we look at teaching in a Steiner School, you have the freedom to deliver it, you have the freedom to deliver it in the way you feel best enabled to do so, but you still have that responsibility to ensure that curriculum is delivered.

An important link between freedom and responsibility was noted by Brian. What he is describing is again synonymous with the ‘Steiner curriculum’, where curriculum has to be understood according to what was discussed in chapter 5. So, the agents in a Steiner school have the freedom to act within a frame, building their own curriculum as deemed appropriate to fulfil the needs of a given class and set of pupils. Their actions must be scrutinised and more importantly nothing is done by chance.

The lack of targets, named as one of the reasons for which the teachers feel free to experiment and implement a lively curriculum, does not mean lack of scope. The teachers attending the focus group discussed this particular element at length. Rachel was articulate on this matter:

For me, like, one thing that always strikes me, that people have to understand about a Steiner School, is creativity exists best when you have a clear sort of set up and you have a direction or place you're going. It's not just 'Oh, go sit down, there's a piece of paper, go draw yourself something'. The teacher has a very clear picture of 'We have a project, this is what we're going to work towards', and there are certain guidelines and boundaries, it's not a free-for-all, it has been thought through, and then they're given a certain amount of creativity. Whether it's the materials they're using, whether it's the... It's very important to understand creativity has structure.

The teachers are naturally held responsible, within this school, for the delivery of their teaching and for the outcomes of it. The centrality of the role of the teacher in the classroom can be inferred from Rachel's words: the teacher is responsible for the choices he or she makes.

Rachel's response was further supported by Agnes, who fervently added:

And it's the same as a science experiment [...] there's no point in giving [the pupils] materials, or allowing chaos to reign, because then there's too much and they can't filter all that out. You've got to produce the filter—that's what it is, it's filters, you're producing filters around them.

So the teachers, especially in the lower school, have the task to filter the contents of their lessons, select the topics and guide the pupils in their discovery of the world, which does not happen in a chaotic way, but rather according to the teachers' choices and their specific sensibilities and their abilities to recognise which contents are

appropriate for the pupils. Creativity does not occur in a vacuum and in the absence of rules and guidelines. On the contrary, it happens with constraints. However, these constraints have to be appropriate and, as the teachers confer, can hardly be imposed by external practical demands. It falls upon the teacher to discern the right path to pursue for their students. This can explain why the lower school is considered a better place to implement the Steiner curriculum. The freedom provided in the lower school, where the exam system does not impose its external constraints, is linked to a very creative environment, as claimed by the participants. That is: those restrictions that do not emerge from the observation of the child's development and that do not resonate with the needs of a specific stage of maturation in accordance with Steiner Pedagogy are considered detrimental. The exams system with its strict requirement falls in this category of external constraints which obey the needs of society without taking into full account the needs of the pupils.

It is believed that freedom as a teacher maintains an enthusiasm for the role of teaching. Agnes discussed this point, which all of the teachers at the focus group unanimously agreed with, noting that:

It's true. It's the teacher's enthusiasm, and that comes from — I remember P. talking about how many different ways could you prove Pythagoras? And he was trying to explain this at a teachers' meeting, and he got so excited, by the end of that week, with his own class, the class were going 'Oh, no, not another way!' He was so excited about it, and I think that's it, when you've got a subject and you can get that excited about it even though you've taught it many times, and you certainly can. It

doesn't become boring - because you've got that freedom to alter it, and to come from different angles, and do different things.

The freedom of trying different ways and exploring different approaches to teaching a subject prevents the teachers from feeling that their job is repetitive and menial. It comes without saying that such an attitude requires the teachers to challenge themselves, a central component of the Steiner's pedagogy, which encourages teachers to continually learn and grow themselves. This is a crucial part of keeping the material in their lessons live both for themselves and their pupils' benefit.

An example of what can be considered a creative and alternative approach in delivering a lesson emerged in class 2. Every morning the pupils were asked to recall the story told the day before. That was a group activity, and Isabella always tried to involve every pupil in the discussion, without forcing them and moving on to a different one when someone could not remember a part of the story. One morning, a new method was implemented to recall the story, which was different than usual:

At 9.23 Isabella addressed the class, after the desks have been moved back to their normal disposition.

“Who can remember the story of Jerome?”

All together, with some help from Isabella, the children recall the story.

“Very well done” says Isabella “I need 5 of you, now...” some of the children rise their hands and Isabella takes her time to choose five children.

“You are gonna be Jerome, and you... you are the lion! You two are the monks and you are the donkey!”

The children are excited, not only the ones directly involved, even the ones still sitting behind their desks are all laughing and jumping on their chairs.

Isabella asks the five children to enact the short bit of the story they have just recalled. It is a deeply engaging moment. Both the children acting and those who are watching are lively involved in the activity. They move around the classroom, the lion roaring, and the acting is accompanied by laughter.

The result of such a different way of recalling the story was a deepened engagement from the pupils in the lesson. So, this demonstrates firstly how using acting as a means to deliver a lesson can be considered a creative approach as it is at some remove from a traditional approach to teaching a subject. But the rationale behind it can be found in Steiner's ideas for engaging children with the lessons not only appealing to the thinking and rational faculties; but also to engaging children's feelings and forces of will as well creating an aesthetic experience.

In this specific situation, one can see the thinking faculties being kindled in the task of recalling contents from a previous lesson. Their feelings are engaged by the acting process and acting a scene from the story out is in itself an action that requires the exertion of willpower. Therefore, this activity is not simply an expression of creative teaching, but it carries a rationale which makes it richer in its scope. Furthermore:

After this Isabella addresses the class again. In her voice, there is some excitement and with a merry tone that echoes the fun activity that has just come to an end she says:

“Now choose one image of the story. You can write down something about it, draw a picture or do some craft. Tell me what you want to do, and I’ll give you what you need”.

The children are so asked what they want to do. I would have expected very few of them to choose to write on their book, but I am surprised to see that on the contrary almost half of them decided to write a short sentence of their invention.

Some of them start drawing a picture and one using some wool and pipe cleaners shapes a lion with a thick mane.

This is another example of how the pupils are given the possibility of experimenting and making their own choices. They had the freedom to pick their favourite medium to perform a given task. So, it can be argued that they were in fact not left entirely free to decide what to do. However, such an objection would not take into account how freedom is understood by Steiner and in his pedagogy. Freedom does not equate to absence of rules, but rather to the possibility to explore and experiment within a particular framework of possibilities. This exercise in freedom becomes at the same time an exercise in creativity, provided — as it has been said — that creativity is not defined as erratic behaviour, unconstrained by rules, but rather as an attitude that requires knowledge and discipline.

In this way freedom is understood to be linked to creativity. This is expressed by Aaron, a pupil from class 12, who claims:

So, I can do it with a comparison between lower school and upper school, seeing that’s the subject we’re on. So, in the upper school it’d be like, “This is the answer to this question,” so even in Humanities and Social Sciences where it’s not black and white

like it would be in hard sciences, ‘This is the answer because this is what the examiners want.’ So, if the question is on something to do with just something that’s to do, that’s to do with something that’s not black and white, is a social attitude, you’re given the answer the examiner wants because that’s the correct answer. If you try and make up your own one or try and provide an alternative, it’s not of value, fair enough, it’s not of value because it’s not what the examiner wants, because you want the grades. So, all that’s fair enough. Whereas in the lower school, the question is for the sake of learning. The teacher’s job is to teach you and to make you knowledgeable and to make you creative and to make you think on your own. Not to teach you an exam, so, naturally, the questions they ask, the way the lesson’s structured, the way they induce stuff out of you, is to make you more knowledgeable, to make you more creative, to make you try and think on your own, try and think of alternatives.

This quote clearly exposes a different perception of the learning process and environment in the lower school as opposed to that within the upper school, and to the extent, it also shows a different perception of the role that the teachers have in teaching younger children. Class 12, during the focus group, reasoned that there is a connection between freedom and creativity: it was argued that a great degree of the freedom experienced has led them to engage in more opportunities to be creative. Freedom is understood as having the possibility to explore and make mistakes. This conclusion also tells us something about the learning process.

In practice, what is perceived as a greater degree of freedom in the learning experience has to do with the attitude towards the educational process. Aaron said “[...] in the lower school, the question is for the sake of learning” while in the upper school the focus shifts more to being exam-ready. The consequence of this, in Aaron’s opinion

— which is also shared by other students — is that there is less room for exploring the possibilities on a certain topic in the upper school, because what becomes more prominent in the learning process is the need to learn the correct answers and methods required to pass the exams. This shift of focus — from learning for the sake of learning to learning to perform well in exams — is perceived both as a lack of creativity and freedom by the students. This is relevant in what concerns the students' experiences: arguably the exams produce stress for most students, but here they also experience a contrast with the learning experience they had had earlier in the lower school.

It would seem that before the exams had begun to play a stronger role in their lives, the motivation for learning stemmed more from an inner desire to study and discover. The seed of self-motivation was planted in the students during their years in the lower school, and this exposes a shift from the way they experience learning in the higher school. This shift in the learning experience goes hand in hand with the perceived changes in the role of the teachers that many students seem to acknowledge occurs after matriculating from the lower school to the upper school. Aaron went on saying:

I felt that in the lower school, yeah, I was encouraged to be creative, I was encouraged to think on my own, I was encouraged, you know, my opinion mattered and all that, whereas in the upper school, for, of course, because they needed to get the higher grades, so it's not like they're doing it out of bad intentions, but, no, that's not important. What's important is you learn these phrases and remember them. It's all about memory and being able to write it down and stuff. [...].

However, that is not to suggest that in the upper school creativity was discarded completely. On the contrary, this perceived change in the teachers' attitudes and approaches to learning can in fact be due to the changing focus required. In chapter 5 it was argued that the focus in the lower school is to address the developing faculty of feeling, and that the teaching is presented in a colourful way, so as to nurture and relate to the "sphere of emotions". In the upper school, conversely, it is the faculty of thinking that is undergoing a metamorphosis and requires nurturing. It might be that this shift, from a more colourful language and environment, to one that is focussed more on rational and causal thinking might produce some discomfort from students.

It is worth noting that the teachers themselves were aware of this change also. During the focus group with the teachers, while discussing the idea of creativity, one of the teachers from the upper school — Angus, a science teacher in the upper school— was talking about ways to create an environment which could foster creative thinking, and he said:

[...] [S]o much of teaching is, in some sense, about getting them [the pupils] to think, and if they can think creatively then that's more engaging, it's more fun, and it's thinking on a deeper level, which I think cements the knowledge and the understanding that much more.

The quote is interesting because of the answer that it provoked in Rachel, a teacher from the lower school:

See, I think that reflects that you're [both] upper schoolteachers. You know, this thinking, which is so important, because I think in the lower school, we're always doing, and after you gain a lot of experience then you can think it through.

This leads us to assume that there is indeed a difference in the focus between the lower and upper schools. A difference that has not occurred by chance alone, but by design.

During my time in the upper school, it was remarkable the way that the teaching was organised so as to address the development of faculty of critical thinking. This was both explicit and implicit. In class 12, the students had a main lesson block, which was dedicated to the design of a building. In particular this was part of a broader project in which many schools could participate. The participants were to design a building for patients with a terminal illness, so many elements were to be taken into consideration. The Guardian of class 12 — Madam Vialle — dedicated much time towards guiding the students to reflect upon the essential characteristics that such a building must possess. Eventually, she divided the class into groups, and on that morning, she addressed them all by saying:

The aim of this main lesson is to enable you to express yourself within external constrictions. In life, you'll see, often you will need to work in teams. And when you do so, you'll see that everyone contributes according to his or her own strengths.

The aims of the project were made explicit here, and this is also instructive to further defining what is meant by creativity in this context. This exercise, which can be seen to have been intended to challenge the students' creative thinking, was not organised

without guidelines or constraints. So, the creative process, as can be seen, occurs within a specific set of boundaries.

Each student in the upper school mentioned that within specific classes and subjects, a certain degree of creativity could still be found. Interestingly, there was no clear consensus on which subjects were more likely to create a favourable environment for creativity. One of the first subjects mentioned as an example of a creative class was Mathematics and Science. In this situation creativity was understood to be the ability to reach the solution for a problem in more than one way. Other upper school students mentioned geography and referred to specific experiences with specific projects that they have been working on in this course as being open to different approaches.

When prompted to describe what creativity is, it is said that it is “to think of alternatives”. Jack, from class 12, said:

For, I mean for me personally, create, there's kind of two different creativities. One is you're trying to reach a goal and coming up with an original solution to the, kind of, an original path to reaching the goal. Or a kind of artistic creativity where you're just coming up with original ideas and producing something. And both of those rely on there being less restrictions on what you're able to try.

It is reasonable to believe that the pressure coming from the exams, the necessity to achieve certain grades and the feeling that the students' futures depend on these results would be a limiting factor when it comes to educational creativity. So, even if it is

possible to have classes where one's creativity and freedom of action is still allowed, the students in the upper school, in this case, perceived that the pressure coming from the exams restricted their possibilities to be as creative as they had been while in the lower classes because the focus was then on identifying methods to learn the correct answers to various questions as opposed to being on the art of learning in general. Some of them went so far as to express the feeling that the upper school "completely departs from Steiner Education".

Jack: But a key problem with this Steiner school and the Steiner schools in this kind of situation as well is that we still have to follow the exam system. So, most of the upper school education is based around educating us for exams so there's not really, there's nearly no — apart from the Main Lessons — there's nearly no implementation of it.

Aaron: Oh, absolutely, but we still, like, I know you did - I studied 8 years of Steiner so...

Jack: Yeah, in the lower school you really get it but in the upper school it basically completely changes into...

Emily: Except for the teachers generally have that mind-set and they're thinking about...

Jack: Yeah, they try and find a way.

Emily: ...that philosophy when they're teaching you even if they're not able to--

Through their voices, a picture of what Steiner Education means to them is exposed. The stress coming from the exam system and the focus on achieving high marks are not considered to be of key importance to the Steiner ethos.

On the other hand, even in the midst of this, so called, shift away from the Steinerian approach, that has brought students to say that: “there’s nearly no implementation of [the curriculum]” in the upper school, there is still something of Steiner’s influence that remains in the upper school. It is as though a “Steinerian” teaching approach goes beyond the physical context in which education occurs, and also beyond the way a subject is taught. Students seem to recognise something familiar in general with the way the teachers conduct themselves, “for the teachers generally have that mind-set”. Jack tried to explain this:

I mean it’s just, you do get teachers who are not following the Steiner philosophy that teach the higher courses in the, in a similarly effective way as to the teachers here. [...] I just don’t really see that the teachers here incorporating the Steiner philosophy into their teaching of the higher course. I think they’re just teaching the higher course in the way that they think is...

Adam: You could argue that it’s harder for them to do it with the higher course because there’s maybe so much more restriction on it...

This insight may suggest that what is perceived by the students as a Steinerian quality of education does not come solely from the academic curriculum. If indeed — as it is said — the high school somehow departs from a more traditional Steinerian approach to teaching, there was some agreement over the fact that the teachers preserve some qualities that are, from the students’ perspectives, still linked to Steiner’s philosophy on education. Tentatively, it can be suggested that Steiner’s philosophy does not therefore simply inform the academic curriculum, but as it has been argued, it provides the practitioners with a philosophy that informs more than the presentation of

academic content, it also provides a shared ethos within the school. I argue that this latter element is one which is maintained even as students progress from the lower school to the upper school.

8.3 Teaching in practice: examples from the classes

In order to better understand the way Steiner's ideas are put into practice, it is worth presenting some examples from the lessons. This will show how compromises are made and in what way the practitioners have interpreted the Steiner's philosophies on education in their practices. Some characteristics, it has been said, are common features of Steiner Education: the rhythm of the day, for instance, with the welcoming of the pupils, the morning verse, the presentation of new activities and then some artistic works. Some approaches from the different classes will be presented now.

8.3.1 Class 2: practising joint writing

Class 2 is the first class where I spent time. It has one peculiarity: in the class there were always two teachers present at all times: Isabelle — the class teacher — and Penny — a teacher's assistant. This is unusual, but it was due to the fact that one of the pupils requires particular medical assistance, and Penny was there for this reason. However, she was also involved in teaching the pupils. The two teachers seem to cooperate, and for the pupils, there is not a difference in the roles of the two teachers. During my time in the class I witnessed a continuous exchange of opinions and ideas between the two teachers, often happening in the morning before the day started.

Class 2 was at the stage where joint writing was being introduced. What follows is the activity the teacher, Isabelle, prepared for the class, it relates to a new way of writing and it occurred after the usual opening activities of the day had occurred (morning verse, telling of fun events, singing and poems).

At 9.25 new big notebooks with blank pages where Penny has drawn coloured lines are handed over to the children.



Figure 2, Example of a Notebook in Class 2

Today is the beginning of a new main lesson block. The pupils are going to resume the practice of joint writing (for more images see Appendix 1).

Isabella slowly writes on the black board, on which she has drawn the same lines that are on the children's books, a big "i". The whole class is looking at her. Then with a white chalk she draws the same letter on the class floor, just at the front of the classroom: between the first row of desks and the blackboard there is enough space for this.

"Please, gather here..." she said, and when all the children are around her, she walks on the letter "i".

"Now you can do the same" she said to the class.

In turn, every pupil walks on the big letter “i” on the floor, then they go back to their seats and start to write down a long series of “i”. Penny and Isabella walk around.

“That’s very beautiful” —

“Look, the letter stays between the red lines” —

“Come, walk on the big “i” with me” —

These sorts of activities were common in the lower school practice. Jumping around while repeating a new timetable during a mathematics class, or else reciting the alphabet on the note of a song. Those were not the sole means of teaching. Methods that can be described as more traditional were in place too. So, it was not uncommon to see the pupils doing maths on their notebooks or writing down short sentences in them.

What I noticed, however, was that when a new element was introduced to the children, for the first few days that topic would be tackled from different perspectives and by appealing to what — using Gardner’s definition (Gardner, 1993) — are different intelligences. Furthermore, the children were encouraged to use different ways to overcome their difficulties. In the Steiner school, the foundation of this approach lies in Steiner’s idea that education should happen in accord with the three faculties of thinking, feeling and willing described in chapter 4. So, by having the children moving around the classroom — or else in the courtyard — is the power of will that is exercised. By drawing pictures next to a maths exercise a sense of beauty is cultivated, which is linked to feelings and emotions. Memory is strengthened collectively by recalling daily the contents of the previous days, or else by reciting the same poem every day.

8.3.2 Class 7: science class – chemistry

In this lesson there are some elements specific to Steiner's pedagogy. These notes were recollected from my first day in this class on June 19th. The chemistry lesson went on for another 2 weeks at the time.

The classroom is a bright and spacious room. The walls are of a warm shade of orange, a big and beautiful reproduction of Venus by Botticelli decorate one wall. Desks and chairs are all wooden, so is the floor. Charlie is class 7's teacher. He has a very calm and warm way of speaking. He moves calmly as well, but it is always apparent that there is a purpose in what he is doing. However, he never rushes anything, and his demeanour influences also the pupils.

I have joined class 7 for they are in the middle of a science block, and I am interested in seeing how they study this subject. The morning activities are not dissimilar to those I have observed in other classes. After the opening activities, the class move to the science lab, which is in a different building, just across the playground.

“When we go to the lab” said Charlie “you may see lots of interesting things. You may look with your eyes, not with your fingers”.

Once in the lab everyone finds a place in front of the main table. Charlie makes sure that everyone can see what he is about to do. There is a little bit of chaos and noise while they are settling down.

“Now, if you are that person who really struggles to concentrate, how much patience should I have with you? Ask yourself: what can I do to help myself? Sit next to someone you know is gonna help you to concentrate.” Charlie talks to the whole class who slowly becomes quiet.

“What I want from you now is some observation. Use your senses: look, smell...”

The approach to science is based on some ideas that Steiner drew from the study of Goethe's scientific works (see chapter 3). The class teacher is still the centre of the lesson, but in a different way. He was leading the lesson and guiding the focus of the pupils, drawing their attention to what he wanted to be explored. This is a characteristic common throughout the educational path in Steiner schools. However, the pupils reinforce this method, by becoming active agents in their own education, even though they did not perform any experiment on this occasion personally.

It has been said that the lessons and the subjects studied in school are carefully planned in accordance with the stage of development the students are at, which originate from Steiner's child development theories, which introduce certain subjects and approaches to students at different moments in their developments (see chapter 5). In class 7 the students are aged 12-13. From class 6, the students are led to explore and discover the causal links between events and phenomena. This is not done through the study of scientific laws, but rather starts — when possible — from direct observations.

Charlie burns some different natural materials over the flame of a candle. There are some dry leaves, a piece of wood, cotton, hay, a piece of string and so on. The class is just observing and making brief comments. Charlie is not giving any explanation of what is happening. He merely says what he is burning, or else let the class guessing. Eventually, Charlie places a glass bowl over the candle, which slowly turns off. "Can you tell me why that happened?". The pupils murmur their theories.

"We'll explain that tomorrow".

After that, they all go back to the classroom where Charlie starts to talk about combustion.

The pupils were required to observe and to use their senses. The day after this experiment, the class was asked to collectively formulate a theory about what they had observed the previous day. With the help of the teacher they reached the formulation of the law underpinning the phenomenon, or else the precise description of the events.

The stress on qualitative observation was particularly important. The pupils were asked to write down what they had observed. The task was to describe the events, as precisely as possible, without inferring anything. The formulation of hypotheses was a task introduced the day after the experiment was performed, so that the two stages of observing and reaching a conclusion were separated.

“In chemistry we use the word combustion for the burning of things. Humans have a connection to the fire stretching back deep into our past. Ancient culture may have watched the smoke and heat rising, leaving behind the ash, and made a connection with the gods. A separation of spiritual and earthly substances. This can be seen in the burning of offering, the cremation of dead, the Shamans throwing herbs into the fire in search of visions.

In combustion, a substance ‘burns’ but what is burning?

In burning the substance combines with oxygen, with the release of heat. The heat energy released shows the relation between the substance and the air”.

Then he draws on the black board the fire triangle

By this time the main lesson is finished, and it is time for the break.

The language used by Charlie to describe ‘combustion’ can be considered unusual, as well. It was scientifically accurate in its essence, but it was not presented as a strictly scientific chemistry description. A link with humankind was made. Fire was not only described as resulting from combustion, but it was connected with its importance for humanity through the sketch of some images. The language was almost poetic. The centrality of humankind, even in connection to phenomena that we — as human beings — cannot control, was a common feature drawn out of this task.

I argue that Steiner Education presents imaginative approaches even to the sciences. At the end of my time with class 7, during a brief informal interview, Charlie illustrated some of the characteristics and reasons for teaching science in this way. It is useful to start from these observations. The experiment is presented in such a way as to guide the pupils towards an inward experience — observation. From this position the students’ experience moves from one of inner individuality to an expression and description of the experiment — to the stage where, on the second day the observations are recalled. In the end they draw the conclusion — making a synthesis of the experience. Charlie explained to me that the idea is to start from an external phenomenon, which is observed closely, and from it gradually move to the creation of concepts. He talked of “living concepts”, concepts that are not presented as fixed laws, but that are illustrated by analogies, in order to create a sense of elegance. He said: “You can’t really feel a Newtonian equation”, the task of the teacher is to create a connection to these formal concepts.

In Steiner schools the teaching intention is to not only focus on intellectual — academic thinking — but also to the feelings and experiences of the students. The fact that the theoretical concepts are not presented directly as self-evident ideas, but rather that the students are led to questions the reasons underpinning a given phenomenon is done with the intention of engaging the feelings and will of the students. By allowing them to slowly reach a hypothesis and then the law, their critical and abstract thinking is fostered. Furthermore, this process of approaching the sciences emerged as one of those more associated with creative thinking, imagination and freedom during the focus group with class 12.

8.4 Contraction and Distention: the rhythm of the day

In all our breathing are two kinds of blessing:
Inhaling air and thereafter expressing,
That will oppress, this one will refresh:
Life's such a process in marvellous mesh.
Thank thou the Lord, hard though he be,
Thank him as well when he's setting you free.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Freedom, creativity and spirituality are greatly intertwined, and it is hard to set them apart when looking at the school and its practices. This is because these principles do not work on separate domains. For instance, the freedom the teachers have to set and organise the curriculum appears to be a prominent element, which secures the implementation of creativity in teaching and the spiritual aspect of the school because it allows the teacher to experiment and work in an environment where they are able to express their ideas. It is due to this freedom that the teachers can choose to operate in different ways, as is demonstrated through their interview responses.

However, it is worth repeating, that freedom in teaching does not mean a lack of scope or goals. On the contrary, the outcomes of what the school wants to achieve has been summarised appropriately in its motto “Education towards freedom”, which ultimately has come to mean providing an education that allows the students to build their own confidence and supports them to follow their own interests and passions. The teachers’ pedagogical approaches are on the one hand some well-established practices within the Steiner moment which come from suggestions provided by Steiner himself, and on the other these practices are derived from the experience of Steiner teachers from all around the world. Finally, each teacher has the possibility to personalise the contents and the ways these contents are delivered based on his or her inclination and based on the needs of the pupils he or she is teaching.

One characteristic of the teaching approach — besides the freedom in personalising the curriculum — is also linked with the sort of activities and exercises presented to the pupils, and even more with the way these activities are scheduled. From my observations of the lessons in various classes, a pattern emerged in the activities performed.

The importance of the rhythm of a school day seemed something particularly relevant within the school. Although the school was prone to adapt the schedule of the day and the activities to meet certain unexpected needs or events, the class teachers would follow a rhythmic schedule that stemmed from a long-established practice taken from Steiner’s suggestions. An example of a typical main lesson is presented here in its essence. This sketch is the result of the observations made while at the lower school

over a long period of time. The events and activities described did not necessarily happen on the same day. I merged together those events that were essential and that I noted as more relevant. Each class in the school had its own character, and the class teacher would personalise the way he or she would organise the activities. However, the purpose here is to provide a description of the “archetype” of a main lesson, based on the data I have collected. This will serve the purpose of highlighting some features in the rhythm of the day and discussing their function. In other words, the focus here is not on the content of a lesson, nor the way the content is presented, but rather the rhythm of the lesson, which carries a certain ritualistic pattern.

8.5 A typical main lesson in the lower school

The arrival of the children: a moment of transition

Some children start to arrive as early as 8.20. They get ready for the day by taking off their shoes and hanging their coats in the cloakroom. P, the first girl to arrive, had discovered that her desk is dusty, so immediately she starts to clean it and after her own one, she proceeds to wipe all the others. While doing so, she exchanges few words with Isabelle. On my diary, I noted how the atmosphere is relaxed, it seems that all these activities are part of a well-established routine, and the children do not need to be told what to do: they simply know it.

While P. is cleaning the desks, more pupils arrive, and Isabelle offers everyone some tea: they help themselves in a sort of calm routine. The atmosphere feels very familiar.

While they are getting ready, Isabelle goes around the class talking to them while they are working on their own: some are reading, some others drawing or chatting.

The arrival of the pupils takes the form of a period of transition. The lessons are scheduled to start at 8.45 and the school opens to the pupils at 8.15. This allows a long period for the children to settle. It must be considered that many of them travel from far away, either by car, bus or train, to reach the school. During my observation in class 2, every morning upon my arrival at school at 8, I could find Isabelle already in the classroom, tidying up or else busying herself with some preparation for the day. In a corner of the class, over a set of drawers, there was a kettle which would be boiling every morning ready to make tea. Isabelle explained: “I need a cup of tea every morning to start the day, and we also prepare some tea for the children. Some of them come from far away, some are sleepy when they arrive and some others are simply in need of a warming up of sorts to get them ready for the day. We have some tea every morning”.

This time before the beginning of the lesson is common in every class at this level. Every morning the pupils arrive, and some time is allowed so that they can get ready for the day at school: changing shoes, washing hands, cleaning tables and chatting. The younger the pupils are, the more time seemed to be allowed for them to settle down. After this first moment, the class is led slowly into the first lesson.

The start of the day: leading to concentration

At 8.40 the first bell rings and the morning activities begins. All the children stand up behind their desks and a rhythmic game takes place. They clap their hands singing a song: it is a game to improve their coordination and also a way to “wake them up” and preparing them for a day of study, so Isabelle has explained

to me after the class. At the sound of the second bell, at 8.45, Isabelle rings a singing bell placed on her desk and she starts counting.

“One, two, three, four, five, six... Books away, sit down... seven, eight, nine, ten and eleven. Good morning class”. While she is counting all the children get ready and sit down looking at her. She sits next to her desk and looking at the class, with a warm voice she addresses the children providing a brief overview of the day. It’s an honest chat, and she presents the activities and the reasons for which certain changes had taken place.

“Last time we had Mr T teaching Eurythmy, we thought he could be our new teacher, but things did not work out. So, today Miss K will lead the lesson again.

Now, today is M’s birthday...”

M seems excited, Isabelle is looking at him and he is invited to open his desk. Under it there is a card. With the card in his hands, he goes next to Isabelle at the front of the classroom. On the card is written a short poem. All the children have their own verses, that they declaim on the day of their birthday⁹. Isabelle reads the verse to M who repeats the words after her. He will soon learn the verse by heart, and he will no longer need either Isabelle’s help or to read from the card. During this moment, all the children are quiet and actively listening to M declaiming his new poems.

On one of the class walls there is a colourful list of the jobs and tasks that have to be taken care of. Next to every task there is the name of one child. One of the children offers to read the list aloud. The tasks are: compost, wiping desks, moving desks, washing up, sweeping, dustpan and brush, plants, books, cloakroom, and paper basket. Reading the jobs out loud is one of the morning routines. But the children are all waiting for something else, they are all moving on their chairs and when

⁹ i.e. if a child was born on a Tuesday, every Tuesday he or she will declaim the verse.

Isabelle asks, “Who has any news today?” many hands rise. Every morning a moment is devoted to allowing the children to tell their classmates about something that happened the day before. It is an engaging moment: they listen to their friends and ask for clarifications. Laughter and chatting accompany the news telling. They all seem very willing to join in and tell some news. Given that many of them are willing to share some personal events and if there is little time, a list is made: more news will be delivered during the snack break and lunch time.

The activities flow one into another, without sudden changes. The younger the pupils are, the more attention seemed to be made on creating a smooth and gentle transition from one activity to another. So, before sitting down, a movement exercise is performed while standing behind their desks. I observed these exercises taking place until class 8. They get more and more complex in their nature. From hands clapping out a simple rhythm, to more complex rhythmic clapping exercises, stamping feet and reciting tongue twisters at great speeds. It was a common belief of the teachers that these movement exercises helped the students to “wake up”. On a practical level, moving exercises prevent the pupils from being asked to be seated and still for an extensive period as well — in fact these exercises are repeated often when a change of activity occurred. During the morning focused-activities — such as doing some maths, writing exercises, drawing a picture or reciting a poem — would be alternated with clapping exercises, and activities where movements were required.

On the other hand, the time the students spent sharing their stories builds a sense of belonging and it can be argued that it is one of the elements that led the students to state during the interviews that the relationships with their classmates are quite strong. By sharing experiences, the pupils have learned to speak to their peers in a clear way

and to develop social skills. Furthermore, the class teacher gets to know his or her class quite closely: this close relationship is at the core of the pedagogical choices she or he will make when building the specific programme of lessons for the pupils. Borrowing from Steiner's ideas, the curriculum is then built around the needs of a specific class.

The Morning Verse: concentration

It is now almost 9 o'clock and the daily activities are due to start soon. But before they start working there is a moment of concentration. On Isabelle's desk there is a candle and called by Isabelle a child stands up and lights it. The class goes quiet, all children are standing up behind their desks. There is a moment of concentration, and then they all declaim the Morning Verse followed by other poems that seem to be chosen for their relevance with the season: one is about November and the approaching of the autumn season. They also sing a song, it is a song about the King of Ireland's Son, a story Isabelle is reading to the class. All these poems and songs (with the exception of the Morning Verse) are accompanied by hand movements, so that the children alternate staying still and focused with hands clapping and slow arm gestures.

By 9.10 this activity has come to an end. Isabelle spends a few words to compliment the class on how well they performed the songs and the verses.

The morning verse truly marks the beginning of a new school day. The morning verse has already been discussed as well as its role and purpose. In the preparation for the Morning Verse there is also a certain ritual. However, observing the opening of the day in many classes, this ritual does not look devoid of a purpose nor of meaning. It does not appear that the teachers and the pupils are performing something out of tradition or habit. Even though the quality of this moment changes from the lower

classes to the upper ones, it maintains an important role in the rhythm of the day. In the lower school there is more concentration and a more meditative atmosphere. Older students are less prone to maintain a focused demeanour, especially in those years where they are approaching puberty. Be that as it may, the declamation of this verse marks the transition from the life outside the school — with the distractions of everyday life — and the life within the school. The activities demonstrated so far have been implemented as gentle preparation for the start of the lessons. With the morning verse the students are led to a kind of symbolic threshold: what comes before is put behind, and thoughts, feelings and will are now directed towards learning. It was always remarkable to note how something would change in the attitude and behaviour of the students after the morning verse: they would be more prone to concentration and seemed to work with better focus on the tasks proposed.

Lesson activities: expansion and concentration

At Isabelle's signal the desks are moved at the back of the classroom, so that a big space is created at the front, just in front of the blackboard. There, the class create a circle and they start practicing the 6xtable up to 12 times⁶. This is done in many ways: counting while clapping hands, walking in circle and by singing a song. After that, they start to learn the 6xtable using similar movements and clapping patterns.

At 9.30 they all sit down again. The class resumes by recalling the bit of story told the day before. Isabelle is reading to the class the King of Ireland's Son story. All the children, collectively, one bit at time, recall the story. Everyone joins in, and Isabelle seems to take care that everyone has a little saying. After this, the Maths Books are handed out: they are big notebooks, with blank pages. On this book, they exercise the elementary arithmetic. They have the task to write down the timetable and then complete some mathematical calculations. All the children

are focused now. They are working very hard to complete the exercise. Some of them stand up and they use the hands-clapping pattern to work out the appropriate timetable. Some others count on their fingers, someone else asks Isabelle for some “gems”: round coloured pieces of glass used as an aid to do the maths.

I quietly observe how the children are working and what Isabelle is doing. It appears to me that the focus is on the process, rather than on the answer itself. There is no rush, no pressure on obtaining the right answer. When the result is not right, Isabelle encourages the child to try again and often suggests a different approach: so, if the hand-clapping pattern was used, she may hand out some gems, or vice versa. Some of them seem confused.

“It’s ok! It’s our first day with the 6xtable! Let’s use the pattern we have just learnt. Stand up, we can do it together...” says Isabelle

Isabella walks around the class helping those who are in need. The hand-clapping pattern is used as an aid and calmly all the children write down the new table.

After the pupils have done some mathematics exercises on their Math Books, they are asked to recall a moment from the story that had been told the previous day. Isabelle is reading to the class the King of Ireland’s Son story.

They choose their favourite moment of it and draw a picture on their book, next to the mathematics they have just practiced

Even intellectual activities, such as mathematics, are proposed to the pupils in a way that aims at stimulating not only their intellectual faculties, but also their will and feelings. Learning a new time table can be a hard process for some pupils (as was the case in the class I observed, where one girl struggled with her exercises), but the stress was never on getting the right answer before the other classmates nor on finishing the exercises in as little time as possible. The pupils were led into the intellectual work by

doing mathematics through movements. The pupils were fully engaged in their activities, and what I could notice was that when finding some difficulties in completing their exercises, they would autonomously resolve to use any of the clapping patterns, songs or other aid so as to help them complete their task.

Morning break

Without even noticing, I realise it's already 10.30. Isabella starts to count up to ten. This is the signal "It is time to finish your work. Don't rush it, you're going to have time to finish it later" she said while standing at the front of the class. "4, 5, 6... — all the book away, if you finished help a friend! — 7, 8, 9, 10". She then invites the class to stand up and some movement exercises are performed. Everyone stands up behind their desks and some verses are declaimed while some movement exercises are performed as well: they sing, clap their hands and jump. This activity takes just few minutes, but I have seen these verses, clapping and movements to be used every time an activity has come to an end and a new one is about to start. When everyone is sitting down, Isabelle sits on her chair and reads a bit of the story from the book. She will later tell me that usually the story is told and not read, but due to the quality of the language of this book, she is reading it instead of narrating it.

The pupils in charge of moving desks arrange them in a circle. My chair was always included in this circle and some snacks are distributed (carrot sticks and tangerines) with some water and newly brewed tea. The children themselves take care of these tasks: some distribute the snack, some other tea. Nothing is rushed, while this preparation takes place, they chat quietly, and everyone is relaxing. No one starts to eat or drink, everyone is waiting for everything to be set. Before everyone starts to eat, some verses are declaimed while holding hands in circle.

Blessings on the blossom,

Blessings on the fruit,
Blessings on the leaf and stem and
Blessings on the root

The snack is then eaten while more children share news. After the snack that I am offered, they all run outside for some playtime, who has the task to wash up and clean the room stays behind. At 10.45 they all go out for some playtime. The lesson resumes at 11.00.

Many elements are intertwined in the main lesson. Noticeable is the fact that the class seems to operate so as to alternate activities that require focus with those where the pupils can relax and move. In this alternation it is possible to see a breathing like experience, where contraction (focus and meditation activities) and distention (movement, exchange of words, signing and other such activities) repeat themselves in sequence. This structure of the lesson not only aims at providing the children with activities that do not over-exert them, so that they can work without stress and pressure, but it also addresses the three faculties — thinking, feeling and will — which are at the core of this pedagogy. What the teachers try to do is to harmonise these faculties, and it is believed that by doing so the will-power is strengthened and a moral sense is built in the individual. Moral education here comes to mean education led by both feeling and will through a conscious use of images, rhythms and rituals.

Furthermore, the pupils were required to work both individually and in groups. The class was addressed as a whole. The talents and strengths of each pupil are cherished by the whole group. As a consequence, the students are encouraged to express their abilities and they take personal satisfaction in this, and at the same time they develop an interest in the abilities of their classmates. Through the cooperation of the group

harmony is fostered. It was apparent from the observations that competitiveness is not promoted. Grades or schematic judgments are avoided, especially in the early classes in the lower school. However, feedback is provided using poetic language that encourages the students to overcome difficulties while highlighting both the talents and weaknesses of the students. This approach to the structure of the lessons enables the emphasis on freedom and creativity by the teachers, which is evident in observations. Things are not done casually or abruptly, but rather the motifs behind the pedagogical choices used are informed by the theoretical framework underpinning Steiner Education: so, the freedom of each teacher is expressed organically within the school environment. It is a creative approach that stems from scholarship on the stages of the development of a child and at the same time it is not a fixed curriculum as such because it was part of Steiner's beliefs that the nature of a child differs from age to age and culture to culture. It falls upon the teacher to identify these variations, which have been informed by this body of scholarship on Steiner's approaches, and the teachers' discretion must be applied as much as his or her pedagogical insights allow.

8.6 The importance of language

From the interviews and from observations a rich and powerful use of language has emerged, both from teachers and students. Indeed, Steiner was particularly interested in the use and formation of the language, and he lectured about them on many occasions. Particularly, he explored the sort of feelings and impulses of language, and how these impulses affect the three bodies of the human being (physical body, soul and spirit) (Steiner, 1984, 1995a, 1996c, 2007).

Within the school, Steiner gave the first teachers some impulses on how to speak with the pupils. These impulses were founded on the understanding of the child development illustrated in chapter 5. As exposed there, to each stage of seven years corresponds the maturation of one of the three human faculties of willing, feeling and thinking. In order to nurture the unfolding of these faculties, Steiner recommended a particular way of teaching, and being the main medium of teaching the voice and words of the teacher, therefore care was given to what constitutes an appropriate way of addressing the pupils (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b).

Steiner draws attention to the fact that the teaching, especially during the period at the lower school, should avoid a high level of abstraction, but rather teachers should resort to using an imaginative language and what he calls “living concepts” (Steiner, 1996c). (This so to engage not only the rational faculties of the pupils, but also to engage their feelings and create a personal connection with the content in the lesson). In the lower school, a certain amount of time is dedicated to the narration of stories. Steiner places great importance on the narration of fairy tales for the imaginative language that imbues these sorts of tales. Equally important is the content of the stories in Steiner’s view. The idea is that the appropriate story at the right age, through its imaginative and metaphorical language, can place seeds for the understanding of more complex ideas in later years (Steiner, 1908a, 1995d). The teaching of every subject in a main lesson relies on oral transmission — the lack of textbooks calls for a different form of teaching. Given these premises, noticeable is the vivid and metaphorical language used by the teachers, an aspect that goes beyond the lessons, but that is present in everyday life.

The use of images and similes seems part of the jargon of the teachers. While interviewing Brian, more than once he applied this sort of language:

If you're talking about delivering this curriculum out of anthroposophy, that any teaching individual has the understanding that that, the anthroposophy that they're holding, they're working with, is them, is part of them. And it does come out. What's Leonard Cohen's saying? **The light comes between the cracks or something, isn't it? [...] And so the light, the light of, any kind of spiritual base can come out through the cracks but it's not a huge chunk at a one time.**

And if we all want to be part of running the school, you know, how can we keep that balance in terms of the school being seen as a business or an organism that is, you have to fine tune. [...]. **There's a rainbow. And in order for it to be called a rainbow it needs all the colours, so we're all equally the seven colours. You can't have, if you have too much of one colour it obliterates the other ones, so we all have to live in har-, you know, we don't have to work in harmony but it's finding that balance and I find that, the challenging part, is to say, is to keep that, keep that balancing act working.**

The use of this language is recognised to be part of the necessary skills that a Steiner teacher should develop, and it is linked with Steiner's idea of the practice of education as an art form. In his conferences on education he constantly referred to pedagogy as "the art of education" (Steiner, 1985, 1995c, 1996b, 1996c, 1996e, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b, 2004b, 2004c). The rationale behind such an approach was to present — especially in the lower school — concepts in an imaginative way. This is done in order to respond appropriately to the respective developmental stages of the children (see

chapter 5). During age 7 to age 14, which approximately matches with the lower school years, the teaching is believed to be more effective if delivered with particular care to the sphere of feelings and emotions of the children. For this reason, stories, tales and poems play a pivotal role in the students' experiences. The language used in the classroom is therefore a significant element in creating an aesthetic experience. As stated, the lessons are structured around the teacher presenting a new topic every morning, followed by different activities. Tales are told and very rarely read, so as to preserve a more intimate and direct connection between the teacher and the pupils, which would be diminished to an extent if the teacher were to read from a book.

8.7 Conclusion

A variety of different elements constitute the structure of a lesson. Characteristic is the organic and holistic nature of the rhythm of the day (and of the year) which is expressed in the learning environment. Especially in the lower school, a balance is sought so as to provide the children with activities that are not only directed towards abstract thinking, but which are focussed on creating an aesthetic experience, engaging in this way the feelings and willing of the pupils. The ideal in Steiner Education is to be able to teach so as to harmoniously develop the feelings and will of the pupils, as well as the thinking. Learning seems to rely on genuine experiences and moves slowly towards abstract and theoretical knowledge. The teacher is at the centre of the learning experience. She or he is the pulsing heart of Steiner Pedagogy. For this reason, teaching become self-education as well. The work a teacher is required to do in order to prepare for a class goes beyond creating the contents of the lesson itself.

The teaching practices implemented aimed at being appropriate to the developmental stage of the children, so to nurture those faculties of the children that according to Steiner's interpretation need to be addressed. In the lower school the aesthetic disposition and presentation of contents is particularly emphasised, while it is noticeable the progressive focus on abstract thinking that emerges in later easier. The examples of a lesson in class 2 and in class 7 helped to shed light on these elements. Furthermore, learning based on experimenting and experiences is stressed. The pupils are guided towards a goal without rushing them. The experience gained in the learning process is valued as equally important as the knowledge that is acquired at the end.

Chapter 9: Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The research questions underpinning this study were as follows:

- What is the role of creativity, freedom and spirituality in Steiner's educational philosophy?
- To what extent does the practice in Steiner schooling support the development of creativity, freedom and spirituality?
- How do teachers interpret and implement Steiner's pedagogy?
- What are pupils' perceptions of Steiner schooling?

In this chapter, I will draw from the data to discuss the crucial characteristics of the Steiner approach as practised in the case study school, linking the data with the relevant literature. This chapter will be organised in such a way as to approach the research questions while linking the findings to the literature. Each question will be examined separately, and the findings of this research will be compared and contrasted with those of previous studies.

At this stage it is important to bear in mind the nature of the present research and its scope. As it has been discussed previously (see chapter 6), the aim of this research is not to prove or disprove the validity or outcomes of Steiner's pedagogy, but rather to provide a comprehensive picture of the life within a Steiner school, from the perspective of those who live it. The very nature of this study makes the generalisation of the data and findings impossible, however that does not make the findings less relevant. Flyvbjerg (2010) persuasively argues that the case study as a method of

research, and qualitative research more broadly, suffers from a misunderstanding. He points out some of the strengths and values that such research enables. The goal of this research was to understand Steiner's philosophy and its practice. Therefore,

If one [...] assumes that the goal of the researcher's work is to understand and learn about the phenomena being studied, then research is simply a form of learning. If one assumes that research, like other learning processes, can be described by the phenomenology for human learning, it then becomes clear that the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2010, p. 236).

This chapter will be organised so as to shed light on the proposed research questions, discussing some of the elements that have emerged from the study.

9.2 What is the role of creativity, freedom, and spirituality in Steiner's educational philosophy?

In Chapter Three, an account of Steiner's interpretation of freedom is outlined. In this chapter I explained that freedom does not refer to freedom of choice, but rather, as Steiner refers, to freedom of spirit. Steiner introduces the concept of thinking as the necessary prerequisite to understanding human freedom (Oberski, 2006). Thinking and his idea of freedom are inextricably linked, because without thinking there would be no freedom for the human being (Steiner, 1995b). This emphasis on the faculty of thinking that Steiner proposes influences his pedagogy in a rather crucial way.

Thinking, from Steiner's perspective, is not immediately connected to or associated with cognitive functioning. As argued by Oberski (2006, p. 339) "thinking as Steiner describes it is an experience, not merely a cognitive activity, but an experience that we can direct". This interpretation of thinking as a faculty, which, as discussed previously, is the precursor to freedom in Steinerian philosophy, has its practical manifestation in the classroom. This is demonstrated very directly through the data presented in this thesis.

With regards to creativity, it is interesting to notice that Steiner did not single out this notion. An examination of Steiner's work makes it clear that Steiner never addressed creativity specifically as a separate skill to be nurtured. Instead, creativity emerges in Steiner's work as the idea of creative teaching and creative learning that stems from his general understanding of what being a teacher requires, as well as from his view of the early childhood development (Steiner, 1985, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d, 1997c, 2000b, 2004b, 2004c). Particular emphasis was placed by Steiner on the idea of teaching "living concepts". He said:

You must teach the children concepts that can evolve throughout their lives. The teacher must be mindful to give children the kinds of concepts that can evolve in life. When the children are older, those concepts will not be the same as when they were [sic] received them. When you do this, you inoculate children with living concepts (Steiner, 1996c, p. 154).

It is from this theoretical position that a creative attitude becomes a hallmark of the Steiner school classroom. In the lower school in particular, teaching is based on

providing pupils with living images, rather than fixed frameworks. Explaining what it meant to teach living concepts, Steiner said that “in teaching, we should not define, we should attempt to characterize. We characterize when we look at things from as many points of view as possible” (Steiner, 1996c, p. 155). It is from this attitude that creative elements stream into the life of the pupils. This was confirmed not only in the interviews with the teachers, but also from my observations in the school (see chapters 7 and 8).

Spirituality, in Steiner’s literature, is a concept that seems to be quite separate from religion. In a Steinerian context, which is constructed primarily from Steiner’s conferences and publications (Steiner, 1977, 1995b, 1997b, 1997g, 1999, 2004d, 2010a, 2011b), spirituality is linked with the tension that exists in relation to the transcendent. Steiner claimed that the world is permeated by spiritual forces, a belief that very directly underpins his research into the Spiritual World. A discussion of the veracity of his claims is beyond the scope of this research, however what is seen to be ‘spiritual’ from Steiner’s perspective is a belief which is at a significant remove from popular formal dogmas that can be ascribed to a denominational faith. Spirituality, therefore, does not represent in Steiner schools a fixed set of beliefs. Rather, spirituality, according to Steiner, stems from observations of the surrounding reality; observations that, for him, have to be carried out in a scientific fashion for what concerns their rigour (Steiner, 2005). This attitude towards spirituality is mirrored in the school practices and approaches taken to teaching, where spiritual elements regularly permeate the daily activities, but they do not stand on their own as a distinct set of spiritual teachings. What Steiner seemed to aim at was to create a sense of wonder towards the unknown and the transcendent (Steiner, 2004d). Pearce (2015) argues that spiritual education should be an important element in education. She argues

that “the aims of spiritual education in common schools are to educate pupils about spirituality, and to prepare pupils for (as distinct from initiating them into) spirituality” (Pearce, 2015, p. 23). The distinction between “preparing for” and “initiating into” seems important. I argue that Steiner was led by similar beliefs. As much as Steiner believed in the spiritual reality, his goal was not to initiate the pupils into Anthroposophy. It has been shown that Anthroposophy is not a subject taught in Steiner schools (see chapter 7). What Anthroposophy provides is a philosophical background which informs the educational approach and serves the purpose of preparing the pupils to embrace their own spirituality, without initiating them into a specific denomination. This theoretical background can be seen in the observations I have made and is further supported by the data from the interviews. It seemed that the participants agreed on the fact that spirituality is a ubiquitous element in Steiner Education, which is not conveyed through activities that are related to religion (for instance, prayers). The absence of religion that accompanies spirituality permeates nearly all aspects of school life, for this notion is interpreted — according to Steiner — not as being linked with a faith, but rather from the understanding that the world is intrinsically spiritual in its nature, as much as human beings are. Therefore, in Steiner schools, it can be argued that spirituality should be approached in the same ways as mathematics or science. This means that spirituality is presented as a feeling of connection with the transcendent, without aiming to convince or initiate anyone into a prescribed set of beliefs.

What can be concluded from the synthesis of this scholarship and the data taken from this research is that these three notions (freedom, creativity, spirituality) are treated organically. They do not have clear boundaries, but rather they are fluid. Consequently, it is for the teachers to interpret individually what Steiner intended, and

to put this into practice. In other words, it is their task to unravel the theoretical framework given by Steiner and apply it in the specific context of each school and class they teach. The intrinsically complex nature of this information is compounded by Steiner's prose, which often leaves room for interpretation and discussion. This may contribute to the difficulty in explaining and clarifying these notions, difficulty that was regularly expressed by the participants in this case study.

9.3 To what extent does the practice in Steiner schooling support the development of creativity, freedom and spirituality?

The ways in which these notions are supported in the school are arguably diverse and at the same time hard to define, not for a lack of clarity but due to the very nature in which these concepts are presented by Steiner and then subsequently interpreted by the practitioners. The practices do seem to support the development of creativity, freedom and spirituality, but in a more intertwined way than I might have anticipated when I began the study. The argument supported by the data is that it is this holistic approach that creates the fertile environment found in the school. None of the participants pointed out a specific activity as the source of the subsequent outcomes. Certainly, some activities, such as the Morning Verse, were linked more strongly with one of these notions. However, the impression is that the importance of these pedagogical aspects is the result of the holistic approach. Trying to describe certain activities as specifically designed to address either freedom, spirituality or else creativity as separate domains would therefore be misleading, and it would compromise an understanding of this pedagogy. In his conferences and lectures on educational topics, Steiner often provided examples of activities used for delivering a

certain topic holistically, pointing out that by following his suggestions multiple goals could be reached at the same time (Steiner, 1995c, 1997c, 2000b). This seems to be the path followed by the teachers in the school. They believed that the organisation of the school day, the ethos of the school and the subjects taught, come together to create a fertile environment for the blossoming of the children in their care and in turn are all part of the development of freedom, creativity and spirituality. There was strong agreement across the interviewees that the school provides room for the growth of the individuality of the pupils and that this feature is significant: it is from this focus on the selfhood of a child that all the pedagogical intentions originate.

This argument is supported by others, such as Oberski (2006) who conducted a survey among Steiner teachers in Scotland. The study is particularly concerned with the development of thinking as a skill in Steiner schools. It was found that the practitioners of Steiner schools tend to work on long term aims in their educational pursuits. What this study suggests is that “the development of will and feeling are seen to lead progressively to the development of thought” (Oberski, 2006, p. 345). I would tentatively draw a parallel with the three notions of freedom, spirituality and creativity and on how they are implemented. I am suggesting that what is argued by Oberski (2006), namely that thinking is seen as the result of a slow progressive development of will and feeling, can also be applied to the way these three notions are fostered and nurtured as a unit. It is confirmed by the data that these notions are not considered as qualities on separate tracks but rather as qualities which are flowing one into one another. So, those activities — such as singing or drawing — that at a first level are more directed towards the nurturing of creative qualities, also work at the same time in the direction of creating a sense of morality, for instance.

The relational aspect is also important as a context for developing freedom, spirituality and creativity. The students perceived that they are treated with respect by the teachers who can “see them” for what they truly are and are keen to help and listen. The pupils stated that they are given time to progress, rather than being rushed into achieving certain goals. This approach creates a stress-free learning environment. Furthermore, the students expressed satisfaction in relation to their school experiences which was motivated by the freedom they had in the learning process. Dahlin (2017a) reports several studies conducted in Germany and in Norway which are in line with the results of the present study, particularly when it comes to the great satisfaction in the relationships between students and teachers. Dahlin (2017a) reported the results of the study by Barz and Liebenwein (2012) which were based on 800 Steiner students and compared their results with those of similar studies conducted in mainstream education. Dahlin (2017a, p. 130) states that “Waldorf [Steiner] students more often experienced good relations with their teachers, and their school environment as more pleasant and supportive”.

In the case of the school where this research was conducted, the teachers believe that a sense of freedom can be nurtured by placing emphasis on the development of a sense of the *self*. The notion of selfhood is held in high regard. It seemed that the intention is to allow room for the pupils to build their own individuality. Steiner’s critical interpretation of the pedagogical methods of his time led him to develop a pedagogy where room for the children’s inner development was created. Steiner (1997d) rejected a top-down approach, in which notions are delivered purely so that they may be reproducible for the purpose of examinations. The stress is on developing independent critical thinking, but this is done not by only addressing the thinking faculties of the children but also by considering their emotional and physical needs. This is

exemplified by some of the practices in the school. For instance, one peculiar aspect is the rhythm of the school day. During the observation, it appeared that activities in the classroom were presented so as to follow a certain pattern: care was given so that strongly intellectual activities (such as maths exercises, or else writing and practising cursive) were balanced by exercises of movement, or else singing, or drawing. These practices, stemming from Steiner's literature, are seen by the teachers as a way to provide a well-balanced education, not only towards academic thinking, but also towards the strengthening of other faculties, such as the emotional sphere of the pupils as well as their will.

It can be argued that similar approaches in teaching are nowadays quite common in non-Steiner schools. The difference, I suggest, lies in the distinctive aims that such practices have in Steiner schools, as opposed to non-Steiner Schools. The fact that art is an ubiquitous element in Steiner Education originates from Steiner's rationale that artistic activities can help the learning process of the pupils. Artistic activities, such as drawing, painting or clay-modelling, are used to foster creativity in the pupils. Art or artistic in this case does not refer to the fact that the teachers resort to the use of visual resources as stimuli. It means that an aesthetic appreciation is a part of the lessons. Drawing a picture on the page next to where a pupil has just completed some mathematics exercise is not just done for the sake of the drawing. Steiner believed that through these aesthetic dispositions the pupils would be helped to memorise the lessons, because not only their thinking would be stimulated but their feelings as well (Steiner, 1997c, 2000b). This is done in accordance to Steiner's description of the child's development (see Chapter 5), and in response to his belief that during lower school the children are more responsive to a teaching based on an aesthetic disposition.

It has been pointed out that textbooks are seldom used in the school. The pupils create their own textbooks by writing the contents of the lessons in a notebook with increasing autonomy (for some examples see Appendix 1). Such an approach relies greatly on the interaction between pupils and the teachers, and on the oral and sensory transmission of the contents of a lesson. Through explanations, stories and experiments the students themselves become active agents in their own learning process. Steiner also suggested that the pace of teaching should allow for a time of reflection during which the information delivered during the lesson would be left to rest (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b) so that pupils can form a personal attachment to the contents that are being recalled. In addition, what fosters an individual's thinking and creativity in the case study school is the way the students are allowed to make their own experience, especially in the lower school. The absence of the fear that accompanies standardised tests and the stress of achieving good marks creates a space for a sensory-based learning experience, the result of which is that pupils learn for the sake of learning. Robinson (2011) supports the rationale than standardised tests may serve the purpose of evaluate students' preparation, but they can hardly provide the students with an environment that fosters self-motivation. In fact, he supports the idea that education —especially in the early years — should provide the new generation with the ability to learn and adapt, and he recognised in the practice of testing, grading and measuring an obstacle for such goals (Robinson, 2011). I argue that the practices in the case study school move in the direction of focusing on the learning process itself, rather than on the achievement of a good grade. That it is not to say that good academic achievements are disregarded, on the contrary they are nurtured by helping the students to focus on the pleasure of learning.

It seems that creativity is conveyed not through specific tasks, but rather by the means of how the teaching is implemented. It is about the form of representation used in the classroom (Eisner, 1997). Contents, in a Steiner classroom, are represented in a variety of ways as shown by the data collected: singing, dramatization, drawing, creative writing, storytelling. The findings of this research, in this sense, echo that of other scholars, for instance Nicholson (2000) and Kirkham and Kidd (2017). Nicholson (2000, p. 577) recognised that “the selection of a particular form of representation shapes content and influences perception and meaning-making”. Furthermore, he points out that “providing content in a variety of forms of representation offers students practice in thinking and communicating in various modes of expression and understanding, using many different symbol systems” (2000, p. 577). By providing a great variety of forms of representation, Nicholson (2000, p. 585) argues that:

The layers of experience provided equal emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, the practice of skills, the fostering of creative ability, the stimulation of the imagination, the nurturing of feelings of empathy and understanding, the importance of social responsibility, and the value of moral principles.

Kirkham and Kidd (2017, p. 22) recognised that “Steiner schools [...] adopt a multiple symbols approach in which content is presented in a number of forms such as pictures, music, plays, stories, and dance, with verbal expression and visual imagery as widely valued as numeracy and literacy”. Both of these articles, although not sharing the same scope or means, recognise the form of representation as the cardinal element, which — as Kirkham and Kidd (2017) argue — leads to a more creative attitude in Steiner students than that displayed by pupils of mainstream schools or Montessori schools.

Creativity is often expressed through an imaginative approach to learning and the use of different forms of representation of a lesson's content. The role of creativity seems to be that of a catalyst for learning. I suggest, that the expression of this notion can be found in the imaginative approaches adopted in the school. This notion has been corroborated by other studies, such as that of Nielsen (2004) — which focused on the notion of imaginative education and the way imaginative teaching can be considered a way to educate holistically — and also that of Shank (2016) who argues from the position that the use of imagination as a stimulus is one of the most powerful tools available to educators and he explores the possibility of integrating an imaginative approach into mainstream schools. Shank (2016, p. 2) argues that “[..] resisting singular, definitive interpretations of truth, imagination breeds creativity and engagement with diverse possibilities. Freedom of imagination is required to envision alternative realities and potential futures, and courses of action that could produce these futures”. It seems that this is the same perspective that the teachers in this Steiner school were operating from.

Another characteristic of the Steiner classroom is an experience-based teaching approach. The pupils are challenged, when possible, to figure out the rules and laws of specific experiences on their own. In science lessons this seemed the fundamental approach, which was rooted in a phenomenological perspective and was underpinned by Goethean theories (see chapter 3). It was also noted that the kind of language applied plays a pivotal role in learning. The way the teachers speak and the way they present their content is not casual. The language used by teachers appears to be rich in metaphors. Especially in the lower school classroom where teachers avoid presenting abstract concepts to the pupils and resort to instead try present abstract ideas through

images and metaphors. Steiner warned against the use of a high level of abstraction (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Nielsen (2004) calls this practice “pedagogy of imagination”, and his study supports this finding. It has been claimed by the teachers that imaginative language helps the pupils to create living ideas and concepts.

For what concerns spirituality, some other elements should be considered. Spirituality has not been clearly defined by the teachers. It would seem that often the notion of spirituality overlaps greatly with ideas of freedom and to an extent morality. Spirituality did not appear to be treated as a competence nor was it addressed directly. The idea of spirituality is a direct product of Steiner philosophy and his worldview which has been said to be spiritual in nature (see chapter 3). What seemed to be conveyed is a sense of awe and respect for the world and the people around us. The morning verse and the rituals carried out daily and more broadly through the year are considered spiritual moments as in a sense their purpose is to reconnect students with themselves and with the environment of the school. The spirituality of the school emerges from activities more than from abstract teaching. The teachers stressed the importance of creating moments for self-reflection, in alternating activities where one has to be active and talk, with activities where students are required to be silent and focused.

Spirituality, in the school, is expressed in an organic and holistic way. It suggests that Steiner’s philosophy of freedom can provide a basis for spiritual education. Oberski (2011) recognised that the elements which might play a role in fostering a spiritual dimension are various. Here Oberski (2011, p. 14) says:

The emphasis in SW [Steiner-Waldorf] schools on creative activities, such as rhythmic games, drawing, painting, music and movement, may give the impression that these schools foster innovation and originality, but while they may indeed do this, in actual fact the purpose of these activities lies much more in the development in pupils of willing, feeling and eventually intuitive thinking through the imaginative faculty, which may later foster moral imagination.

Here Oberski (2011) is referring to moral imagination. He argues, according to Steiner's literature, that many activities in a Steiner school are delivered with the intent of strengthening the will, feelings and thinking of the pupils but that such activities may also have a role in fostering other qualities — such as moral imagination. I suggest that a similar occurrence is observable in relation to spirituality. Spirituality is not addressed directly, by way of implementing special activities devoted to the growth of spiritual sphere of an individual, but rather by the fact that the world itself is understood as permeated by spirituality and a sense of awe is nurtured in the pupils. Although some activities were described by the participants as being more directed towards a spiritual purpose, this dimension was not intended to be an isolated action. The role of spirituality goes back once again to the child's focus on the self and to the strengthening of their independent thinking. Spirituality is a notion directly informed by Steiner's specific conception of the spiritual. From Steiner's perspective, people are essentially spiritual beings. G. Woods et al. (1997) report in their research that Steiner teachers directly linked spirituality with thinking. The teachers in their study argued that as a teacher "you are educating spiritual beings" and the reason why a subject is taught is "to help develop the pupils' thinking, to develop clear independent objective thinking, and that is a spiritual quality" (G. Woods et al., 1997).

What emerges from the observations and the interviews, however, is that freedom, spirituality and creativity are not achieved nor nurtured through a single specific activity. It is the whole organisation of the school day, the series of different activities introduced, the teachers' attitudes and the shared ethos present at the school that creates occasions for such ideas to be implemented. It would be difficult to transplant a single activity (e.g. storytelling) and consider it on its own as something which helps creativity or builds a spiritual feeling. It emerged from the observations and from what the participants stated, that any activity applied was intended to constitute a creative pedagogic approach that is aimed to foster creativity in the students, but that activity would not have the same ramifications if divorced from the broader context and applied without the surrounding ethos.

9.4 How do teachers interpret and implement Steiner's pedagogy?

The teachers interpret Steiner's pedagogy in individualistic ways: each forming their own relationship with and understanding of Steiner's work, and in response to the needs of their particular pupils. However, all the teachers interviewed also shared a common understanding of the pedagogical theories underpinning the Steiner approach, but clearly, they do not share the same opinions on Steiner himself. It emerged that agreeing with Steiner's pedagogical insights, and believing them to be relevant and solid, does not necessarily mean sharing an uncritical and reverential attitude towards his pedagogical theories. In their varied interpretations of Steiner's pedagogy, the teachers showed a diversity of perspectives which resulted in a plurality of voices, which seemed to be cherished by all within the school and which did not seem to have a negative impact on the shared ethos in the school either. This was apparent among

the teachers, pupils and parents. The community — teachers, students and parents — has a strong perception of being part of a “special/different” group because of the ethos and approach to teaching and learning in the school. The school (as the college of teachers) is the guarantor of the Steiner philosophy that underpins it, but each teacher interprets it differently and implements Steiner’s ideas in different ways. There are some more “orthodox” teachers, while others reinterpret some of Steiner’s directions to accommodate new situations. Here, I argue that one can see freedom and creativity in the potential that the staff has to make their own choices about freedom, spirituality and creativity as well as other more practical choices that accompany learning.

The findings of this research on this specific matter are hard to compare with those presented by other researchers. An exploration of Steiner teachers’ interpretation of Steiner’s pedagogy is lacking. However, some observations can still be drawn indirectly. Indeed, I suggest that a great degree of personal autonomy is required of a Steiner teacher. Reasons for such a necessity can be found in the fact that Steiner’s pedagogy is not constructed on the basis of a fixed set of prescribed behaviours or approaches (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Steiner himself instructed the first teachers of the first Waldorf School to be active agents. Although at the time he was part of the college of teachers, and he would provide certain indications and suggestions, he often chose not to provide specific examples and instead to allow the teachers the freedom to elaborate on their own while considering his suggestions (Steiner, 1998). Being a teacher in the school was interpreted by the participants in a very specific way. Many references were made to the fact that in order to fully become a teacher, continuous self-education was necessary. Steiner was particularly outspoken on the matter that teachers should be particularly careful in what they do and say in front of the children (Steiner, 1996c, 1997c, 2000b). Teaching should be perceived by teachers as more

than a job. This element can be found in teachers' recollections such as Finser (1994) and Petrash (2002). Both authors share the same sentiment in saying that teaching was a path towards personal development. The necessity of continuous self-evaluation is a crucial part of the job. I argue that the reasons behind this lie in Steiner's pedagogical literature, which is required reading for new teachers: they are then left to interpret his work and to internalise it so as to include it in their approaches to teaching, be it in a personalised way. The relationship teachers have with Steiner Pedagogy is therefore not formal or systematic, but adaptive and subjective. Ashley (2009) explains that Steiner teachers

receive in-depth education about child development and, importantly, continue the development of this understanding throughout their careers through the ongoing child study that takes place in the schools. Steiner/Waldorf teachers are expected to engage in "inner work". The nearest equivalent in state schooling might be 'reflective teaching', but "inner work" requires daily meditative practice, often focused upon a particular child, or on a class's needs" (pp. 210-211).

In this sense, the teachers are required to be in dialogue with the literature, to draw conclusions based on their pedagogical insights, and to adjust and reflect upon their practices as appropriate. Within the school there is a particularly strong emphasis on the role of the teacher as a mission or life-long task. In the view of Steiner, the mission is to help the new generations to fully develop their potential, a task that was to be taken seriously by the teachers. This aspect has a close link with the philosophy underpinning Steiner Education, namely Steiner's view of what constitutes a human being (see chapter 5). In this regard, Steiner (1998) made clear that some aspects of education cannot be transferred through lecturing, punishments or similar means, but

only through practice, good examples and more generally through a teacher living good and ethical behaviour rather than through words or instruction alone. Many of the teachers in the school referred to their jobs as embarking or “being on a journey”, one of self-discovery and self-education. This perspective is supported by similar examples in other studies conducted on Steiner schools (Clouder, 1998b, 2016).

It becomes clear that the relationship that teachers have with the pedagogical literature is on the one hand a personal one, and on the other a shared experience. During the teachers’ meetings, which take place once a week, pedagogical discussions are a common feature. This practice appears to be particularly relevant, as underscored by P. Woods et al. (2005) in their research where they found that teachers regularly suggested distinctive pedagogical features such as “the importance of the ‘inner work’ of the teachers” and “teachers working together to study children. This sort of collective and mutually supportive approach to considering and understanding the children in the school is known as child study within Steiner education” (P. Woods et al., 2005, p. 67). This aspect of self-development was prominent in the case study school as well. It appeared that the inner work of a teacher is a pivotal part of being a Steiner teacher. P. Woods and Woods (2006) argue that:

What is involved in such inner development is more than advancing and improving one’s pedagogy and abilities as a teacher. It involves collegial study of the philosophical works of Steiner, and so involves the teacher in those broader and deeper philosophical and ethical questions that underpin the everyday education of students. It also involves development of capacities for self-discipline and spiritual awareness [...] which are valued not solely for their personal benefit to the teacher, but for their

positive impact on pedagogical practice and the relationship with students (p. 322).

This research points to similar conclusions. The continuous pedagogical work, which is necessary due to the fluidity of the Steiner curriculum, presents a basis for the dialogic relationship the teachers have with Steiner Pedagogy.

It is clear from the current study that the teachers do not consider creativity, freedom and spirituality as skills, or rather features which should be developed as a result of specific exercises. Nor are they considered as separate competences, in the same way that we can consider literacy or numeracy. Therefore, the emphasis is not on having specific provisions in place in order to foster these values (of creativity, freedom and spirituality), instead it emerged, from the way teachers addressed this topic, that Steiner's literature is reflected organically and in an individual way by each teacher. While there are certain rhythms to the way material is introduced, which is a recurring aspect part of the Steiner approach and this rhythm lends itself to an emphasis on the development of self for each pupil and indirectly to developing creativity, freedom and spirituality, this is not sought formally in a prescribed way. The rhythms and rituals are a feature of Steiner Education. It has been said before that these rituals have a quasi-religious undertone, however I argue that in fact they serve a different purpose and their aim is not that of a religious ritual of worshipping or commemorating. The rituals in the school help the school community to create a shared understanding of the world and of its meaning. Henry (1992) points out that the rituals in a Steiner school affirm "the idea of humankind as located in nature. The school-community is seeking to be in tune with its natural surroundings" (Henry, 1992, p. 299). This is supported also by the physical setting of the school, by the prevalence of natural materials in the

classroom. The aim is to connect or else to reconnect the humankind with their surroundings. Spirituality is expressed in this holistic understanding of the world and it can be traced back to Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* and his desire to bridge the gap between the material — and materialistic — world and the spiritual one (Steiner, 1995b). Thus, it can be concluded that the environment in the school, which is constituted by the teachers and staff who work there, further supports this emphasis on addressing the individual as a whole, considering both physical and spiritual needs. This is achieved by the pace and harmony of the activities and practices in the school. Such rituals, in turn, also foster the three principles central to Steiner Education, which are the objective of this research.

Overall, what appears from the practitioners is a shared understanding of and unanimous subscription to Steiner's pedagogical insights, however to different degrees of acceptance and implementation. This pedagogy has been implemented in many different countries for the last 100 years. I argue that in the freedom the teachers have in implementing it one can find one of the reasons for its long-lasting presence as an educational approach which has the ability to be adapted and readapted to different contexts and cultures. I argue that because the teachers are called upon to become active agents in its implementation, they are required to interpret Steiner's insights to different times, situations, and necessities and adapt their practices. This flexible attitude transpires from what the teachers at the case study school said when discussing Steiner, especially the teacher Brian, who emphasised this matter. He discussed the fact that the school was seeking a new structure, and that some compromises were necessary, for instance when it comes to the exam system and in general the running of the school. He said that looking for new or alternative solutions to problems is part of Steiner's philosophy and crucial to the continuation of this approach to education.

It requires a degree of creativity and freedom on the part of the practitioner. Such claims appear again in the study conducted by Ashley (2009), who noted that

Teachers face growing tensions between hard-line conservatism and the need to compromise with regard to seemingly unstoppable developments in mainstream education, such as the proliferation of new technologies or innovation in accountability and assessment practices (Ashley, 2009, p. 212).

Similar opinions emerged from the teachers of my study, and it appeared that they were seeking for a balance between Steiner's theories and the contemporary society.

What emerges from this study is a complex array of opinions. Teachers seem to be in a dynamic relationship with the pedagogical foundations of Steiner Education. I argue that much is left to the individual teacher, who is in charge of interpreting and putting into practice Steiner's insights. So, it emerges that Steiner Education allows a great degree of freedom to the teachers. However, the core nature of Steiner Pedagogy remains clearly visible in such interpretations. How does the school achieve these results? On the one hand, I argue that the continuous work carried by the teachers on a personal level ensures that the pedagogical practices have the possibility to be personalised by the teachers, tailored to the needs of different classes and different pupils, as well as preventing such practices to become stagnant. On the other hand, such freedom in the relationship and interpretation that the teachers have with Steiner's philosophy runs the risk of departing from Steiner's original ideas and pedagogy. The question, however, is if this outcome is necessarily a negative one. It seemed that Steiner wanted the teachers in a Steiner school to engage and elaborate on his theories,

transforming them by tailoring the pedagogy to the students. In this way the interests and enthusiasm of the teachers would be preserved as well by preventing them from becoming passive agent in delivering a set of well-established practices, and education would truly become an art.

Furthermore, I believe that many factors will prevent Steiner Education from going astray in the gap that is present when a theory is put into practice. The constant teamwork and the weekly meetings of the teachers, the shared responsibility in running the school and delivering the curriculum represent the foundational elements of Steiner's pedagogical practices and maintain the connection between this particular pedagogy and the ideas of its founder. Freedom and responsibility go together, even when it comes to understanding, interpreting, and transforming Steiner's pedagogical ideas.

9.5 What are pupils' perceptions of Steiner schooling?

Overall, students' perceptions of their experience in the school were positive. No serious concerns arose from the participants, rather it seemed that they were, in general, satisfied with their school experience. The element that was approached with some caution was the connection and relationship between Steiner's philosophy and the practice in the school. Some students questioned whether certain attitudes from the teachers could be conducive of a "cult-y" approach to education. These concerns were not related to any particular activity in the school, but to the reluctance of teachers to openly discuss Steiner and his theories. It has been previously discussed that Steiner schools have been accused of being sectarian (see chapter 2). It did not appear that this

was the case in this school, and this concern did not seem to be experienced by the students as such.

What also emerged from this study is that Steiner students were enthusiastic about learning. The students who took part in this research expressed satisfaction with the school experience, which was motivated by the freedom they felt that they had in the learning process. The students in this study asserted that they were allowed to create their own experiences. The absence of compulsory tests, the stress that accompanies the need to achieve high marks and the lack of general pressure create the space for a sensory experience-based learning approach, which resulted in the students claiming that they learn for the sake of learning. A strong sense of self-motivation can be recognised in the students as well. Robinson (2011) argues that the exam system should be considered outdated and ineffective. He explains how exam conditions are counterproductive when it comes to care for students' creativity and motivation and that a stressful learning environment — as a result of the pressure on achievements, grades and performance — does not promote engagement in course material or more broadly in the subjects introduced at school. The attitude towards learning in the case study school is also reflected in the findings of Mitchell and Gerwin (2007), who conducted a survey with Steiner school graduates, who attended Steiner schools during the period of 1945 to 2004 in the USA. The study sample presented in Mitchell and Gerwin's work was based on 550 students from 26 Waldorf High Schools. Their results showed that upon leaving Steiner Education, former pupils showed a high level of satisfaction in their current occupations and a general enjoyment in lifelong learning, demonstrating a link with positive life outcomes and participation in Steiner schools.

Particularly, the study by Mitchell and Gerwin (2007) reports some characteristics of Steiner graduates that can be useful to the present study. Mitchell and Gerwin (2007) said that one such characteristic of former Steiner pupils was a holistic and integrative quality in their thinking. Repeatedly cited as a second characteristic was “their creative and imaginative capacities, not only in the practice of the arts but also in the study of science” (Mitchell & Gerwin, 2007, p. 30). Finally, the students also showed high ethical and moral reasoning, which was another characteristic that emerged from Mitchell and Gerwin’s study. These characteristics appear to emerge from this study as well.

Some of the less positive remarks emerging from my study can be put into a broader context if compared to the findings of Mitchell and Gerwin (2008). In a survey in the same study, Steiner graduates were asked to list those aspects of their school experience which they had rejected at the time, but later came to consider differently after some time had passed. In this list we can find the spiritual foundation of Steiner Education. I argue, that a parallel can be drawn with their findings and the frustration of the students in this study for what concerns the lack of explanation offered to the students on the subject of Steiner’s philosophy. From my research it emerged that some of the practices in the school were perceived as strange by the students. Often such practices were those associated with either a spiritual element, such as the Morning Verse, or were related to aspects such as Steiner’s use of Eurythmy. However, Mitchell and Gerwin (2008) reported that from their survey of former Steiner students that their experiences showed that “far from inculcating belief and doctrine in the students, actually [the spiritual foundation of the education] helps them find their own heartfelt concerns and convictions, based on their own thinking and striving, not upon what they were told in school” (Mitchell & Gerwin, 2008, p. 20).

So, there might be a case for considering that in retrospect some activities might be seen differently by the Steiner students. Another element that can be drawn by Mitchell and Gerwin (2007, 2008) is that perhaps those features of Steiner Education that seem to be more prone to criticism, such as the spiritual foundations of the pedagogy and the Anthroposophical basis, are far less likely to be considered an issue by former students, substantiating the hypothesis that Anthroposophy is the basis of Steiner Pedagogy, but not part of the contents of the curriculum. Mitchell and Gerwin (2007) reports that a quarter of the 65 respondents to the open-ended “Other” category of their questioner said that “they did not know what anthroposophy was since they had never been taught it in a Waldorf school” (p. 63). Overall, they conclude that “there is no statistically significant difference in responses of graduates having positive, neutral or negative relationships to anthroposophy” (Mitchell & Gerwin, 2007, p. 64). My research does not provide enough data to definitely support any position on the matter. The focus of the research question was not to explore students’ perspective on Anthroposophy, nor to evaluate the role anthroposophy plays in Steiner Education. What emerges, however, contrasted to the results of the study of Mitchell and Gerwin (2007) may suggest that Anthroposophy does not seem to represent a reason for concern among the students. The word itself — Anthroposophy — occurred only once in the interviews with the students.

More relevant were the experiences presented by the students in regard to their learning process. For instance, the overall positive attitude towards learning by the participants to this study presented one problem that was linked with the experience of the exam’s preparation, which was believed to have a disruptive repercussion on the school experience. Although it was said that the negative effects of the exam

preparation were mitigated because of the teachers would still maintain the same set of minds. Similar positive remarks were made by the parents during the interviews for this research. One parent claimed that for her daughter the school experience helped her child to open up to share her desires and emotions. This was due to the teaching style and the approach to teaching adopted by the Class teacher. She said her child was given the possibility to talk and express her feelings in the classroom — and this supported her to build a sense of self and self-awareness. It was common that every morning there was time dedicated specifically to sharing news with one's other classmates and with the teachers. This can be seen as an exercise in listening and sharing, as well as a moment where a sense of belonging is nurtured.

What can be argued from this analysis is that the students who took part in my research recognised that when the exam's preparation took place something shifted in their learning experience. Being able to recognise which elements play a role in changing their learning experience can provide an understanding of what the students recognised as positive elements of Steiner Education. The students did not express any concerns with regards to their preparation or the difficulty of the material and of the exams. The stress they experienced was not linked to academic difficulties. What they described was a different quality of their experience. Lawton (2016) conducted a research exploring the experience of transition of Steiner students into mainstream education at high school level. Although the students of my research did not experience a transition into a mainstream institution, I argue that the exam system represented for them a small transition into an unfamiliar and more institutionalised system. It is interesting to note some similarities between those elements listed by Lawton (2016) as those that represented a difficulty in the transition and the elements mentioned by the participants to my research in the same context. Particularly, Lawton (2016, p. 48) noted “less

holistic aspects of learning in high school included the engagement of fewer senses, a focus on discreet facts, a future-oriented approach, rote memorization, passive modes of learning, and a significant decline in opportunities for creative and experiential learning". These elements resonate with my study, and I argue that they are the mark of a more standardised educational system. Continuing the comparison with the findings of Lawton (2016), his participants lamented a decline of personal connection with the teachers and a decline of a sense of class community. These last remarks are missing from my study, where on the contrary the participants expressed satisfaction with the teachers' mindset and the sense of feeling part of a community. These findings seem to suggest that the ethos of the school, the community and the teaching style represent elements which are recognised by Steiner students as significant and characteristic of the Steiner teaching approach.

These reflections bring us to consider the importance of the ethos of the school. It seemed that the participants showed a strong feeling of being part of a community. What appears from this research is that this sense of community is actively embedded. It can be pointed out that the parents who sent their children to the school had some understanding of and to a degree accepted Steiner's philosophy. Therefore, it can be assumed that the students experienced similar values both at home and in the school. However, the activities carried out by the teachers seemed to aim at reinforcing this as well in the activities and time set aside for communicating and sharing thoughts and experiences with each other as a group. In this sense, the activities performed in the school can be seen as a way of actively engaging in an effort to build a community. Similar conclusions have been discussed by Henry (1992, p. 306)

Waldorf School demonstrates a way of engendering a different relationship with the world and nature, one which views humans and other species in balance. Another dimension of the Waldorf worldview, evidenced in its rituals, is the emphasis on unity in all things. Whereas traditional science has tended to fragment (control all variables, alter one, and see the effect), the “science” that Steiner proposed revered the whole and saw it as much more than the sum of its parts. [...] Steiner proposed the essential nature of unity in all things and viewed the world as a web of interconnectedness.

This element of unity and interconnectedness was further supported by the statements of the students. The relational dimension represents an important factor in the school experience: the relationships between teachers and pupils is an important element in the learning experience. The students who took part in this research were vocal in claiming that the teachers maintained a positive, supportive and respectful attitude and that they did so consistently throughout the years they spent with that teacher. Similar findings are discussed by Dahlin (2007) in a report, where he summarizes the findings of an evaluation project concerning Waldorf schools and Waldorf education in Sweden. The study was carried out between 2002 and 2005 in Sweden and it aimed at comparing Steiner schools and municipal schools with a focus on three areas: the knowledge attained by pupils; their relationship to society, and the experience of Steiner teacher training. This report reflected how Steiner teachers were seen to attach greater importance to human dignity and were perceived to be supportive of the students and to provide help much more promptly and when appropriate than the public schools they were compared to there.

9.6 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, creativity, freedom and spirituality play fundamental roles in Steiner's philosophy. This is observable in the teaching practices in the school in question, which, through the use of diverse teaching approaches, give room for the students to experiment and learn through experiences. I observed that the teachers at the school felt they had a great deal of freedom with regards to how they chose to interpret Steiner's pedagogical insights, even though this was somewhat hindered by the complexity of Steiner's work. As a result, it can be seen that the students are generally satisfied with their experience at school. While they are aware that teachers implement Steinerian practices in different ways, this does not create confusion, but rather allows for a dynamic and stimulating atmosphere in which they feel more attended to.

The panorama that unfolds from some findings of this study is in tune with previous research. However, the problematic aspects of Steiner Education, such as the risk of Anthroposophical indoctrination, do not seem to be reflected in this school. Nonetheless, the results of this study can only be considered to be preliminary findings. The notions of freedom, creativity and spirituality are deeply intertwined, in ways that were not fully anticipated when the research was initiated. This intertwining can be traced back to Steiner's holistic understanding of the human being, in which spiritual, as well as physical and emotional faculties come together to form a whole. For Steiner, addressing merely one aspect of the human constitution would result in an imbalance. Correlations between the practice and the pedagogical outcomes have been drawn in full awareness that many questions may arise. I have attempted to show the positive aspects of this holistic approach, particularly with regards to the freedom in teaching

and learning. Further reflections on the school practices will be discussed in the next and final chapter of this research.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This study explored the Steiner teaching approach from the perspective of those who live it, with the objective of providing insights into the practice of teaching, with a focus on notions of freedom, spirituality and creativity. Chapter 2 outlined the main views of Steiner's pedagogy; Chapters 3-5 gave an account of Steiner's philosophical views and his pedagogical ideas. Chapter 6 dealt with the methodology of this research, explaining the philosophy underpinning it and outlining the limitations of this research. Chapters 7-8 accounted for the empirical data collected which was first presented and then put into conversation with the relevant literature in Chapter 9, helping in this way to produce a critical presentation of the foundations of this research. In this chapter, I will look at the analysis of the data in order to draw some conclusions from it and I will reflect on opportunities for future research.

10.2 Importance of this research

Some characteristics of this research make it unique in its outcomes. First of all, the extensive period of time spent in the field and the data collected through this process represent a rich source of information for educational scholars, academics, teachers and pupils who are interested in the Steiner model of education or in alternative models of education in general. In doing so, not only did it provide a holistic picture of what happens a Steiner school and how the notions of spirituality, creativity and freedom are nurtured within this context, but this study also represents a contemporary investigation of the Steiner teaching approaches. Furthermore, the intent is also to

move forward the dialogue on mainstream pedagogical approaches and to isolate particular weaknesses and strengths in contrasting pedagogies used in early childhood education. This research exemplified the fact that Steiner Education, like other models of education, has evolved since the time of its conception as an approach, and has been adapted so as to address the changing needs of its users and advancements in technologies used for learning. This research offers a current account of how the school has adapted in order to meet the needs of the pupils and of changes in modern life, while still maintaining adherence to many of Steiner's pedagogical insights and aims.

One of the main conclusions which can be drawn from this research is that the Steiner's approach is embedded in a holistic dimension that stands apart from mainstream educational models. It has been argued in Chapter 8 how the three notions of freedom, spirituality and creativity are connected to each other inextricably. It appears that these educational features of Steiner education are not addressed as separate domains, but rather as the result of the educational paradigm of Steiner Education, which places its primary focus on what a human being is and requires in order to learn and develop. As Steiner himself outlined, this is based on the notion of the threefold being who needs the three faculties of 'thinking', 'feeling' and 'willing' to be aligned in order to develop harmoniously. It is believed that this can be achieved with a well-balanced learning environment which caters not only to rational thinking, but also emphasises the importance of the emotional and physical necessities of the pupils and nurtures them as such.

What also appears from the data is that Anthroposophy is not explicitly taught or openly discussed with the pupils at school, nonetheless it provides a philosophical background which informs teaching approaches. This, I would argue, provides a fundamental educational philosophy and I agree with Stehlik (2008) that “such a philosophical basis is increasingly absent from secular state schooling systems, which strive to be politically correct and value-neutral yet as a consequence suffer from a lack of cohesive direction”. The educational philosophy stemming from Anthroposophy offers this cohesion, and it allows for the delivery of a more holistic form of education. Anthroposophy provides the teachers with the same values about what the goals of education should be, although they are free to subscribe to Steiner’s theories to different degrees. This freedom of choice exercised by the teachers can be seen as a value in and of itself and embodies one of Steiner’s goals: “to give conceptual *frameworks* and basic *principles*, on the basis of which contents and teaching methods could be creatively derived and continuously renewed” (Dahlin, 2017b, p. 140).

Due to the nature of Steiner’s work and his belief in maintaining a level of individuality and flexibility within the approach, Steiner Education can prove difficult to evaluate and examine. Each school to some extent represents a separate example of Steiner’s approach. They all make full use of Steiner’s literature, but each school may interpret Steiner’s framework differently. This fact raises the issue of discerning whether the positive results of Steiner Education depend upon Steiner’s ideas or rather on teachers’ natural abilities to borrow from his pedagogy and to apply his theories appropriately and effectively. In other words, the method could be successful due to the quality of teachers who carry it out rather than the method itself or vice versa. Dahlin (2017b, p. 126) explains that “if, for example, the evaluations prove disappointing, this may be due to teachers’ inability to put Steiner’s ideas into practice, rather than the ideas

themselves". Within this circumstance lies the tension experienced in Steiner Education between Steiner schools and contemporary society's requirements. Each Steiner institution needs to navigate the requirements implemented by their respective governments on educational standards, and this requires compromise and adaptation. At the same time, however, there is a willingness to adhere to Steiner Education philosophy despite such requirements. I argue that Steiner Education has an inherent quality of adaptability, rather than being monolithic and unchangeable. Steiner (2003, p. 127) said that

We do not wish to be fanatical and, therefore, we had to make compromises. Waldorf teachers must always be willing to cope with the practical problems of life. And if a student has to leave our school at the age of fourteen, there should be no problems when entering a high school or any other school leading to a university entrance examination.

It can be seen from Steiner's own writings that compromises have been an integral part of Steiner Pedagogy since its inception.

Steiner Education is this year celebrating its hundredth anniversary and it is an educational movement which has continued to grow and mature, with 1911 kindergartens and 1182 Steiner-Waldorf schools appearing in locations across the world ("Waldorf World List," 2019). The fact that Steiner's pedagogy is internationally widespread also indicates that it is a model of education which lends itself to adapt to specific contexts. However, the long-term success of this pedagogy still requires further research. The case study school seemed particularly aware of this

aspect, and in conversations with the teachers it was suggested that improvements in the school's general functioning and organisation were to be undertaken. With regards to the subjects taught in Steiner schools some considerations can be made. In the one hundred years that the Steiner pedagogy has existed, the world has changed dramatically, and arguably new subjects need to be introduced in order for this approach to remain contemporary relevant. Interestingly, due to the fact that Steiner did not provide a set curriculum but rather some teaching principles, it would seem that the challenge of tackling new subjects (such as informatics for instance) does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle, and the Steiner approach could easily adopt emerging subjects and technologies into its schools.

The challenge, as shown in this research however comes from a different dimension. One of the main differences in the Steiner educational philosophy is the unique focus on what education comes to mean — in essence the understanding of what the very purposes of education in fact is. In order to maintain adherence to Steiner's principles, a compromise needs to be reached when it comes to meeting some of the academic and practical elements of mainstream education, which are strongly curriculum-focused (Robinson, 2011). Teachers in mainstream schools may not have the possibility to experience the same freedom in teaching that is available to Steiner school teachers, or for example those who took part in this research. The necessity for the pupils to achieve high marks, to complete the curriculum in a certain amount of time, and the overall focus on the final results are elements that are potentially in contrast with Steiner's philosophy and the practices supported within Steiner schools.

On this subject negotiations and compromises are required. One of the risks Steiner Education faces is the one of closing in on itself in the attempt to maintain its principles pure and untarnished, while at the same time growing apart from contemporary society. I argue that losing touch with the reality of the context in which Steiner schools operate is a risk of which even Steiner was aware. Staley (1998, p. xxxi), in the introduction to *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner 1919-1922* (Steiner, 1998), states that “Steiner’s flexibility concerning students, their individual needs, and the curriculum may have been far greater than some [Steiner] Waldorf schools are willing to consider today”. The need to come to certain compromises on educational approaches has been a challenge since the foundation of the first Steiner school in Stuttgart, and looking at Steiner’s attitudes on this matter, it is possible to see that he was not against finding solutions to such challenges. The case study school observed in this thesis shows that policy and accountability requirements can be met. However, the methods adopted to preserve the underpinning philosophy in Steiner schools need to constantly be juggled and negotiated with the demands of different governments and systems.

The pupils who took part in this study overall showed a positive attitude towards their education and the school. Some elements, in particular, seemed relevant:

- The pastoral care — the strong bonds with the teachers and the help the students received from them, which seemed to cater to more than academic success.
- The lack of performative stress — especially in the lower school, they pointed out that the lack of grades and tests enhanced their educational experience.

They were learning ‘for the sake of learning’.

- The range of subjects studied, and for some students the possibility to explore artistic subjects fully.

Similar points were shared by the parent who was interviewed. From the teachers’ perspectives, it seems that this attention to the needs of the students and the creation of a welcoming, stress-free school environment were deliberate choices they made, and efforts were put in place to achieve these results. This shows that the teachers were really looking at educating the whole human being rather than aiming to impart the right amount of knowledge to perform well in an exam. I will reflect further on these educational elements in the next paragraphs.

10.3 Reflecting on good practices

I have argued that some elements of Steiner Education offer an interesting and sometimes unusual approach to teaching. What demands further reflection is whether these approaches could be informative for teaching in non-Steiner contexts. The intention of this study has been to provide a basis for further research, as these topics merit and require a degree of detail that it is not fully possible to achieve within the length of a thesis.

Some interest has been shown by academics on specific aspects of Steiner Education, spanning from Steiner schools implementation of the notion of spirituality (Oberski, 2006, 2011) to the way the sciences are taught (Oberski, 2003; Oberski & McNally, 2007), as well as a focus on the forms of representation in a Steiner classroom

(Nicholson, 2000). Wylie and Hagan (2003) reflected on the shift in the National Curriculum in Northern Ireland, pointing out the shift in the focus from the curriculum which moved “away from a strongly academic focus to a greater concern for personal, social and cultural values” (p. 153). A similar shift occurred in Scotland, after the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2006, 2008, 2010). What appeared interesting and innovative in the formulation of this national curriculum was that its main and core ideas were described not in terms of goals or aims, but in terms of *values, purposes, and principles* (Priestley & Humes, 2010). The reasons for the new curriculum were explained in these terms:

We need a curriculum which will enable all young people to understand the world they are living in, reach the highest possible levels of achievement, and equip them for work and learning throughout their lives (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 10).

In this context too, the approaches adopted by Steiner schools could potentially offer some valuable insights. Steiner’s approach is in fact based on certain principles, which together constitute a model of education that takes into account the human faculties of thinking, feeling and willing, rather than just addressing practical and academic concerns. His ultimate aim was to educate free individuals to be able to navigate the world with not only academic abilities, but also social and creative skills. In other words, Steiner education aims to educate the “head, the heart and the limbs”, which is to say “thinking, feeling and will”.

The model applied in Steiner Education seems to be, in some respects, close to the aims outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2008, p. 10) as well:

- make learning active, challenging and enjoyable
- not be too fragmented or over-crowded with content
- connect the various stages of learning from 3 to 18
- encourage the development of high levels of accomplishment and intellectual skill
- include a wide range of experiences and achieve a suitable blend of what has traditionally been seen as ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’
- give opportunities for children to make appropriate choices to meet their individual interests and needs, while ensuring that these choices lead to successful outcomes
- ensure that assessment supports learning

Steiner Education does offer a “curriculum” that covers the development of the child from age 3 to age 18. The experience-based learning that is characteristic of this teaching approach can potentially provide a rich array of ideas that could inform the approaches used by mainstream schools. Of course, one cannot overlook the fact that what is distinctive in helping Steiner schools to meet their aims is the freedom and autonomy given to the teachers — it is doubtful whether such a degree of freedom and autonomy would be possible for teachers in Scottish (or any other) state schools. The reasons for this are complex and due to the scope of this research will not be outlined here.

P. Woods et al. (2005) conducted a study in England based on 23 Steiner schools. The purpose of the study was to find potential 'good practices' which could inform the mainstream sector. Their findings supported the view that Steiner Education is strongly based on the nurturing of the *selfhood* of the students. The study argued that while still receiving a strong general education, the absence of test competition provided an environment which stimulated a positive learning experience. Furthermore, the article argues that Steiner schools could provide a blueprint for spiritual education because while Steiner schools are non-denominational spiritual elements were part of the curriculum. The study tried to point out elements from which the public sector could be inspired and vice versa. It was argued that this is not a simple task to transfer practices between schools and might not even be appropriate due to the expectation of achieving results and as a consequence of standardised testing, which are main features of state schools.

10.4 Further research

Assessing what pedagogical practices could be transferred from one school to another when it comes to differing educational philosophies can be difficult (P. Woods et al., 2005). Further research in this field could be extremely relevant. I argue that some practices undertaken in Steiner schools seemed to have very positive results on students. The pastoral care, the shared ethos of the school, the direct involvement of the teachers in the pedagogical choices and in the running of the school, as well Steiner's principles of child's development which make for the basis of his pedagogical approach are some positive elements found in the case study school. These practices could be adopted by non-Steiner schools without great difficulty.

However further research would be required to see how exactly these practices could be implemented in such contexts.

The topic of whether state schools could adopt Steiner practices without adopting the model as a whole was discussed by one of the teachers in the case study school, Agnes. She responded to the question of whether some practical elements could be transferred to another kind of school without the philosophical basis being there:

My experience is no. I mean there's aspects that can, and I've been involved in projects that I've worked with other primary schools, and there's things, you know, you can take the painting, or telling a story rather than reading a story, or the kinaesthetic learning, and the games we play, and they're all effective, but as an education... but — and for those individual things that we do, they're not really the kernel of what education's about, and that's understanding. A particular understanding of child development. Which is, you know, Steiner's view of how the human being unfolds and isn't a mini-adult from a young age, but you have to work with the faculties that a child has at that particular age. Watch for their transformation, their change, and then work with the new faculties as they emerge.

This is a topic which deserves further research. It is clear that the core of Steiner's pedagogy can be found in his interpretation of the child's developmental phases. The teachers operate according to these conclusions. In a way, telling a story, or taking part in movement exercises are believed to be meaningful only when placed and practised at the right time and for the right reasons. Here probably lies the key to understanding Steiner Education and its roots in holistic approaches to learning. The practices

adopted by and used in the case study school show that it is possible to foster not only the academic goals and intellectual needs of the pupils, but an emotional intelligence as well. By promoting an education which considers the physical and emotional needs of the pupils, the stages of their development and that values the individuality of each student, an alternative model of education is produced.

Further research should be done to explore the extent to which state school teachers in British schools feel they have freedom and autonomy — and whether or not they also feel that they can interpret their lesson approaches in a way that enables them to create individualised support for their pupils. Furthermore, it would also be essential to explore whether teachers in state schools want to have more freedom and autonomy, and if so, in what areas of their teaching practices this would be most useful. Following the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, which has called upon teachers working in state schools to be more directly involved in the creation of the curriculum content (Gillies, 2006; Priestley & Humes, 2010), some practitioners in state schools expressed concerns about the perceived lack of guidelines and clarity that accompany the implementation of this new curriculum (Carr, Allison, & Meldrum, 2006). This attitude towards the Curriculum for Excellence raises the question of whether an approach such as that of Steiner Pedagogy, with its characteristics such as the great degree of involvement of the teachers both in the creation of the curriculum and in the running of the school, would have a positive reception in state schools. Furthermore, following the concerns expressed by Agnes in relations to the transferability of some of Steiner's practices into the mainstream education system, it would be necessary to explore to what degree Steiner Education can compromise and adapt without losing its true nature. A comparative research — of Steiner schools and non-Steiner schools — would help to shed some light on these issues.

10.5 Conclusion

This research has been a journey for me, in many different ways. On a personal level, I had the opportunity to observe and study a teaching approach that I was familiar with from a different perspective. Over the year I spent in the school collecting data, I gained a deeper understanding of how a school that functions under the Steiner Pedagogy operates. From an academic perspective, this experience provided me with the opportunity to consider and adopt some research methods. As a result, I have become a much more confident researcher.

What have I learnt from this study? Certainly, I gained new perspectives on the Steiner teaching approach, but arguably I gained more than just a deeper understanding of this pedagogy. A fundamental question runs through this study: “what is or should be the purpose of education?”. While I did not address this question directly, it informed the study parameters applied in this thesis. Answering this theoretical question was beyond the scope and framework of this research, however subconscious reflections upon this question transpired in the judgements and opinions I have expressed throughout the work undertaken for this thesis. Furthermore, the length of this project — beginning with the scoping of the study, the selection, analysis and use of the data — created favourable conditions for a new critical evaluation of this significant question.

Steiner (2004c) expressed some ideas on the purposes of education, and discussed how the aims, means and purposes of education changed over the centuries in Europe

leading up to the 19th Century. He recognised that there were three primary evolutions in early education, each of which had a different focus and had occurred at a different time in history. These educational transitions began, in Steiner's perspective, with the Ancient Greek period, in which the ideal was the 'gymnast' and knowledge was still linked with physical health. Later the ideal became that of the 'rhetor' or 'orator', who was no longer the man or woman of practical skills, but, under the influence of a stronger culture of intellectualism, became the person of knowledge. In the modern period the new ideal has become associated with the 'doctor' or 'professor'. The outcomes of 'doctorial' education is, according to Steiner, that of resulting in abstraction. He argues that the new ideal of education does not seek to understand the human development, but merely to impart facts to the children (Steiner, 2004b, 2004c). He then continued by saying:

If I were to briefly summarize one aspect of the goal of Waldorf education, I would say (of course, merely in a preliminary sense) that we are trying to turn this "professorial" education into an education of the whole human being (Steiner, 2004c, p. 25).

Hence, he set forth the aims and principles of his pedagogy based on the understanding that education should serve the purpose of holistically developing the child. Steiner set out to change the educational system because he recognised that in his own time education was suffering from a crisis of becoming hyper-intellectualised and by consequence losing touch with the other facets that accompany learning and human development. He believed that a human being needs more than just abstract and intellectual knowledge to be a whole and satisfied adult.

A similar perspective, although with somewhat different aims, is held by Robinson (2011), who argued against the standardisation of education and warned that education had become too rigid, to such an extent that it was questionable whether it could still adequately prepare children for life. He argues that learning should not only serve as a preparation for what may come later, but should serve the purpose of connecting people with the present. Einstein (1973, p. 60) expressed this feeling by saying

Sometimes one sees in the school simply the instrument for transferring a certain maximum quantity of knowledge to the growing generation. But that is not right. Knowledge is dead; the school, however, serves the living.

I believe that Steiner Education can furnish unconventional perspectives on pedagogical practices. What I saw during my time as a researcher in the case study school was that among the students there was a sense of interest in learning for the sake of learning, free from the constraints imposed by checks and standards. The school instead emphasised a model of education that was focussed not only on academic and theoretical teaching, but on teaching from experience.

The impressions I am left with at the end of this study are not immediately linked with Steiner's theories, but rather with the uniqueness of the practices implemented by the teachers in the case study school. During my time at the school, I was struck by the deep sense on the part of the teachers of collective responsibility for the development of the individual pupils, and I remember the teachers striving to adapt so as to be able to meet the needs of the pupils. While this sense of commitment and collective responsibility is of course by no means limited to Steiner teachers, the focus in Steiner

Education on educating the child as a whole, of nurturing his or her spirituality, creativity and freedom, created an environment in which the children felt respected and free to learn in the ways that made sense for them. It has been questioned whether Steiner Education can 'move with the times' and keep up with a world that seems to change with ever greater rapidity. I have argued that Steiner Education has indeed proven that it is capable of adapting, resulting in an educational philosophy that is not fixed within paradigms and prescriptions, but retains as its constant core the timeless ideals of spirituality, creativity and freedom.

Appendix 1: Artwork



Figure 3 Artwork in a lower class: "Image of Martinmas"



Figure 4 Blackboard in a lower class

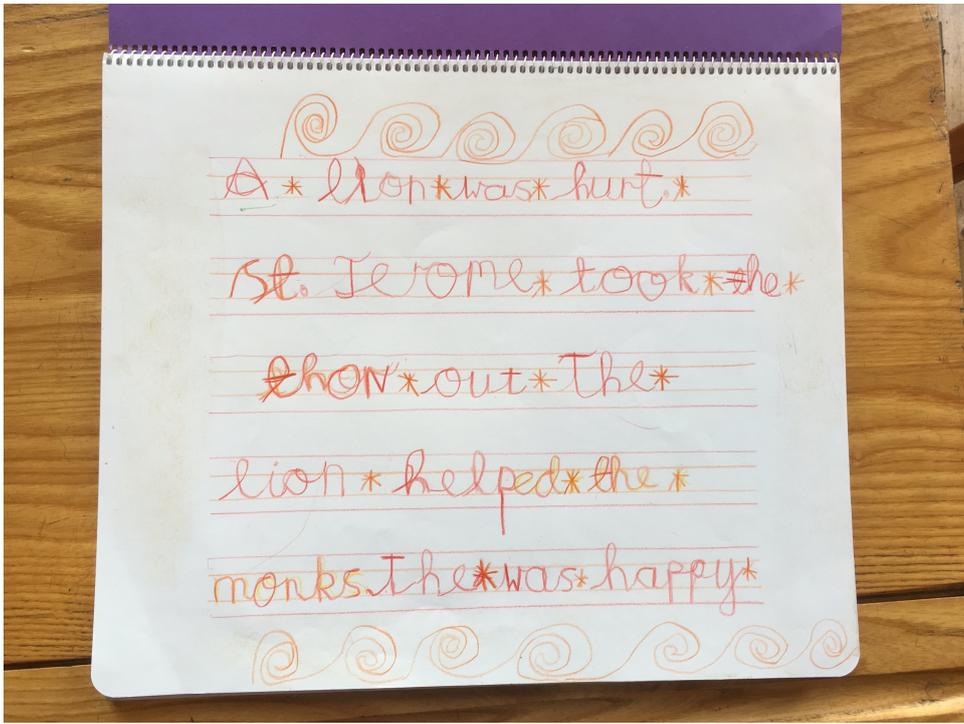


Figure 5 Practising joint writing in class 2



Figure 6 Drawing in notebook, class 2

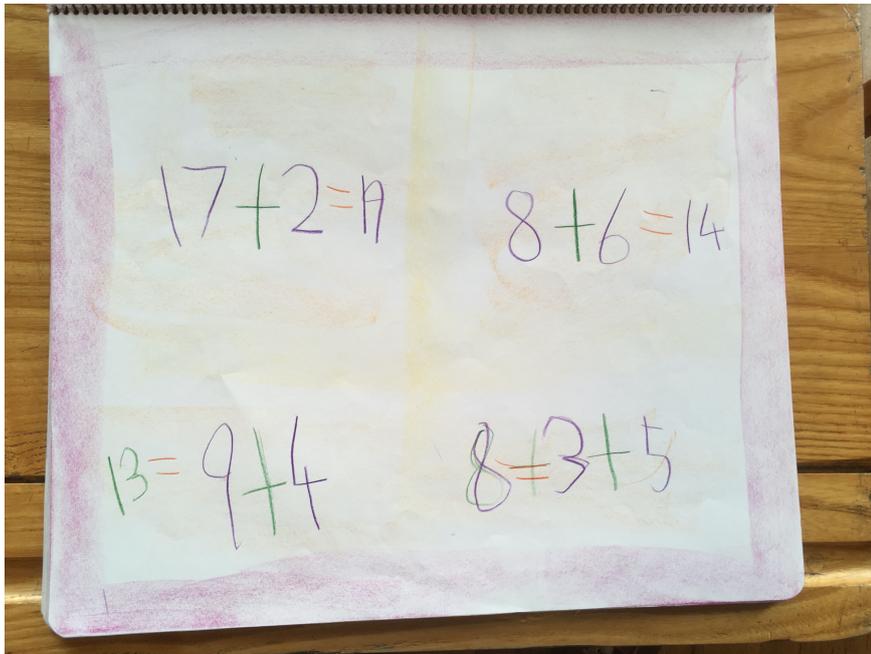


Figure 7 Mathematics exercises in class 2

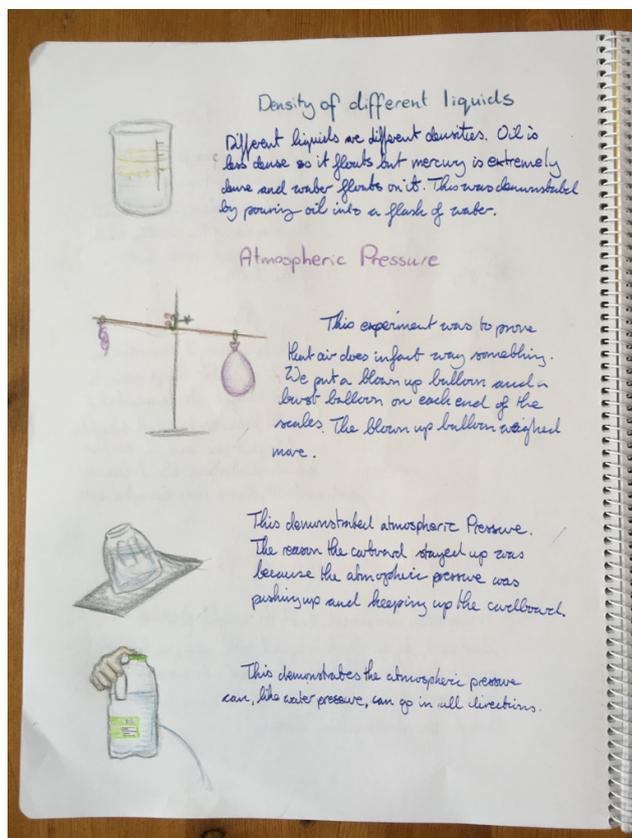


Figure 8 Notes of physics experiments in class 8

Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement



College of Social
Sciences

Plain Language Statement Parents/Guardians about children's participation to the study

Study Title

Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity

Researcher Details

Giuseppe Binetti, University of Glasgow, College of Social Science, School of Education, St. Andrews Building, Room 574

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Invitation Paragraph

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the following email address above or through the school.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of my research is to investigate the teaching method in Steiner schools. In particular, I will focus on "freedom" and "spirituality", on how this is taught to children and how this relates to the idea of creativity. What I would like to do is to explore how these fundamentals influence the learning environment and how Steiner teachers manage to convey them to students. The study will take place between 6 and 9 months.

Why have I been chosen?

All children in 7th (or 8th) grade have been invited. The study will involve a focus group with all the children that are willing to participate lasting approximately 50 minutes. A teacher will be there during this focus group. The focus group will aim to explore what is the children's experience in school. If you would be happy for your child to participate in the focus group

please indicate below. If you have any questions regarding this please do not hesitate to contact me at the details found at the top of this letter.

Do I have to take part?

All children are invited to participate in the focus group, however it is up to you to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part in this study. If you would not like your child to take part in the focus group you are still free to withdraw him/her at any time and without giving a reason. All the data collected up to the point of the withdrawal will not be used in the research.

What will happen to me if your child takes part?

The focus group will run during one day and it will last for about an hour. It will begin with a presentation of the purpose of the study and with a friendly chat in order to make all the participants comfortable. After this first part, I will introduce some questions. The aim is to have a chat together, and it will not be me questioning the children. I will encourage children to answer the questions also through drawing and modelling clay. Their artwork will be used to foster the discussion.

Will my child's taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed; due to the limited size of the participant sample. All information, which is collected about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. I would emphasise that no child's name, no member of staff, or the name and location of the school will be identified in any written reports of this study. Evidence gathered, in written forms will be kept in a secure place and only my supervisors and I will consult it. No video recording will be used in the class. I will take notes and the children will produce their own notes that I will use.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The data will be used as part of my PhD and in journal publications.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, please feel free to contact:

- First Supervisor, Dr Fiona Patrick: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk
- Second Supervisor, Dr Angela Jaap: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk
- The College Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Plain Language Statement for Teachers

Study Title

Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity

Researcher Details

Giuseppe Binetti, University of Glasgow, College of Social Science, School of Education, St. Andrews Building, Room 574

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of my research is to investigate the teaching method in Steiner schools. In particular, I will focus on "freedom" and "spirituality", on how this is taught to children and how this relates to the idea of creativity. What I would like to do is to explore how these fundamentals influence the learning environment and how Steiner teachers manage to convey them to students. The study will take place between 6 and 9 months.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because as a teacher at the Edinburgh Steiner School you are immersed in the Steiner philosophy. This is very relevant to this research project. Your expertise and experiences are therefore very valuable.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part and later on you no longer want to continue taking part, you are still free to withdraw without giving a reason. All the data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will not be used in the research.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed to discuss about your experience in a Steiner School for about 50 minutes. You will be asked to reflect on the teaching practice within the school and on how this may have had an impact on you.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed due to the limited size of the participant sample. All information collected during the study will be kept confidential. Any information about you will have your name removed so that you cannot be recognized from it. Finally, data will be stored and retained as outlined in the University of Glasgow guidelines, and then file will be deleted and destroyed by shredding.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

It is hoped that the results of the study can engage with the wide debate on the curriculum that is on going in Scotland since the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Furthermore, I believe this study can prove to be helpful for all those involved, since everyone is asked to reflect on elements of teaching that are of interest. The results also, will be used to increase academic knowledge and debates as they will be presented in conferences and published in journals. As time goes on, I will notify you with the completion of the research project. Please note that in all future presentations or publications, you will not be identified.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, please feel free to contact:

- First Supervisor, Dr Fiona Patrick: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk
- Second Supervisor, Dr Angela Jaap: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk
- The College Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Plain Language Statement for Parents/Guardians

Study Title

Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity

Researcher Details

Giuseppe Binetti, University of Glasgow, College of Social Science, School of Education, St. Andrews Building, Room 574

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of my research is to investigate the teaching method in Steiner schools. In particular, I will focus on "freedom" and "spirituality", on how this is taught to children and how this relates to the idea of creativity. What I would like to do is to explore how these fundamentals influence the learning environment and how Steiner teachers manage to convey them to students. The study will take place between 6 and 9 months

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because as a parent/guardian of a child attending the Edinburgh Steiner School, you are immersed in the life of the school. This is very relevant to this research project. Your experience is therefore very valuable.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part and later on you no longer want to continue taking part, you are still free to withdraw without giving a reason. All the data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will not be used in the research.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed to discuss about your experience in a Steiner School for about 50 minutes. You will be asked to reflect on the teaching practice within the school and on how this may have had an impact on you.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed due to the limited size of the participant sample. All information collected during the study will be kept confidential. Any information about you will have your name removed so that you cannot be recognized from it. Finally, data will be stored and retained as outlined in the University of Glasgow guidelines, and then file will be deleted and destroyed by shredding.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The data will be used as part of my PhD and in journal publications.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, please feel free to contact:

- First Supervisor, Dr Fiona Patrick: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk
- Second Supervisor, Dr Angela Jaap: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk
- The College Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Consent Forms



College of Social
Sciences
School)

Consent Form for Students (High School)

Title of Project: Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity.

Name of Researcher: Giuseppe Binetti

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Phone: 07535871499

First Supervisor: Dr Fiona Patrick

Email: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Dr Angela Jaap

Email: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised, that all the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times and that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

.....

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

.....

Date



University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form for Children

Title of Project: Rudolf Steiner’s pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity.

Name of Researcher: Giuseppe Binetti

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Phone: 07535871499

First Supervisor: Dr Fiona Patrick

Email: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Dr Angela Jaap

Email: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised, that all the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times and that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Parent/carer (if participant is under 16)

Name of the pupils

Signature Date

Name of Researcher Signature

.....

Date

Consent Form Teachers

Title of Project: Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity.

Name of Researcher: Giuseppe Binetti

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Phone: 07535871499

First Supervisor: Dr Fiona Patrick

Email: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Dr Angela Jaap

Email: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised, that all the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times and that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

.....

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

.....

Date

Consent Form Parents/Guardians

Title of Project: Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy: Freedom, Spirituality and Creativity.

Name of Researcher: Giuseppe Binetti

Email: g.binetti.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Phone: 07535871499

First Supervisor: Dr Fiona Patrick

Email: Fiona.Patrick@glasgow.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Dr Angela Jaap

Email: Angela.Jaap@glasgow.ac.uk

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised, that all the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times and that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

.....

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

.....

Date

Appendix 4: Example of questions for the interviews

Focus Group Schedule

Parent/guardians Focus Groups

- Why choosing a Steiner School – what influenced their decisions.
- What sort of knowledge about the Steiner approach they had before.
- What aspects of the Steiner approach do they think have been most beneficial for their child.
- Are there any aspects of Steiner schooling that they would wish to change?

Teachers Focus Groups

- Why did they choose to teach in a Steiner School?
- First contact with Rudolf Steiner and his thoughts.
- How did Steiner’s philosophy influenced their way of understanding children’s learning.
- How does Steiner’s work influence their approach in class.
- What are some of the benefits and challenges of this approach?
- What sort of relationship there is between the school (teachers and staff) and the parents.
- How a Steiner school is run and what challenges this presents.

Pupils Focus Groups

This focus group will explore the pupils’ experiences in the school. It will do so through asking questions around the following:

- Describing a school day
- Discussing what they enjoy about the approaches to learning in the school, and which aspects of the approaches they might change.
- Managing their work/learning
- What they enjoy about the Steiner school itself, and is there anything they would wish to change about the school.

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