RoSE
Research on Steiner Education

Volume 7 Number 2
pp. 44-65
December 2016
Hosted at www.rosejourn.com

The Transition Experience of Waldorf Elementary Graduates Attending Non-Waldorf High Schools

Peter Lawton

City of Lakes Waldorf School, Minneapolis / USA

Abstract. This study concerned the transition experiences and subsequent adjustment of Waldorf elementary graduates attending nonWaldorf high schools. Utilizing a qualitative and phenomenological approach, the study examined how 13 Waldorf elementary graduates experienced the academic and social challenges inherent in the transition to nonWaldorf high schools. Participants reported their academic adjustment to high school pertained more to new instructional methods than any academic content itself. New learning styles included a de-emphasis on artistic and experiential modes of learning in favor of more visual approaches. Participants explained the most significant challenge socially across the transition involved breaking into what presented as preformed social groups or cliques. Results were interpreted through the lenses of Steiner's (1996a) developmental profile of adolescence and theories of learning, as well as more mainstream motivational and learning theories including Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Bloom's (1956) cognitive stages of learning. The transition experience included three distinct phases: (1) establishing competence, (2) analyzing and assessing experience, and (3) achieving personal transformation and self-actualization. After learning the „nuts and bolts" of high school teaching methods and establishing membership in social groups, students analyzed and assessed their initial academic and social experiences in light of their former Waldorf experiences. In the third phase, students developed new academic motivations and established new friendships based on their future college and career aspirations and their emerging senses of self. Strategies to address social and academic challenges during the transition experience included an expanded view of pedagogy and the importance of a classroom community.

Keywords: Waldorf, high school, transition experiences, academic and social challenges

Zusammenfassung. Diese Studie beschäftigte sich mit den Erfahrungen und Anpassungsprozessen, die Absolventen von Waldorf-Grundschulen während dem Übergang zu nicht-Waldorf weiterführenden Schulen durchliefen. Durch einen qualitativen und phänomenologischen Ansatz wurde untersucht, wie 13 Absolventen einer Waldorf-Grundschule die Herausforderungen des Übergangs zu nicht-Waldorf weiterführenden Schulen erlebten. Die Teilnehmer berichteten, dass die akademische Umstellung sich eher auf neue Lehrmethoden als den akademischen Inhalt selbst bezog. Diese neuen Herangehensweisen umfassten eine geringere Betonung von künstlerischen und erfahrungs-beruhenden Ansätzen zugunsten von eher visuellen Lernmethoden. Die Teilnehmer erklärten, dass das Eindringen in bestehende soziale Gruppen oder Cliquen die bedeutendste soziale Herausforderung darstellte. Die Ergebnisse wurden sowohl durch Steiners (1996a) Theorien bezüglich der Jugendentwicklung und des Lernens, als auch durch eher gewöhnliche motivations- und lernbezogene Theorien, einschließlich Maslows (1943) *Hierarchie der Bedürfnisse* und Blooms (1956) *Kognitive Phasen des Lernens* interpretiert. Die Erfahrungen während des Übergangs umfassten drei verschiedene Phasen: (1) den Erwerb von Fähigkeiten, (2) das Analysieren und Bewerten von Erfahrungen, und (3) das Erreichen einer persönlichen

Wandlung und Selbstverwirklichung. Nachdem die Schüler sich an die Lehrmethoden der weiterführenden Schule gewöhnt hatten und sich sozialen Gruppen zugehörig fühlten, analysierten und bewerteten sie ihre anfänglichen akademischen und sozialen Erfahrungen angesichts der Erfahrungen in ihrer ehemaligen Waldorfschule. In der dritten Phase entwickelten die Schüler neue akademische Absichten und Freundschaften basierend auf zukünftigen Hochschul- und Berufsaspirationen und auf ihrem aufkommenden Selbstbewusstsein. Pädagogische Strategien, die soziale und akademische Herausforderungen während der Übergangsphase ansprechen, beinhalteten eine erweiterte Sicht von Pädagogik und die bedeutende Rolle der Klassengemeinschaft.

Schlüsselwörter: Waldorfpädagogik in den USA, Weiterführende Schule, Übergangserfahrungen, akademische und soziale Herausforderungen

Introduction

Scant research exists on the educational outcomes of Waldorf education as compared to those from more mainstream forms of education (Baldwin, Gerwin & Mitchell, 2005; Easton, 1995; Woods, Ashley & Woods, 2005). I located no published research on the experience of students transitioning from Waldorf schools to non-Waldorf schools following the completion of eighth grade, or any grade-level for that matter. The lack of research regarding the transition experience of Waldorf elementary students attending non-Waldorf high schools poses significant challenges not only for families making decisions about high schools, but also for Waldorf elementary schools as they seek to prepare their students for other educational settings. After providing a solid educational foundation using an alternative approach to „traditional" schooling, Waldorf elementary schools must necessarily ensure their students are prepared for other educational settings for the simple fact that many students continue their education in non-Waldorf high schools.

Despite the growing number of Waldorf schools, AWSNA (Association of Waldorf schools of North America) reported only 41 of 122 member schools in the United States include high schools – 34 of these are part of pre-K through 12 schools, and seven are stand-alone high schools (personal communication, 2016). The small number of Waldorf high schools in the US relative to the number of elementary schools may be considered part of a larger challenge for the American Waldorf movement of providing the full sweep of Waldorf education to interested families and students. A critical aspect of this overarching challenge is the need to prepare Waldorf elementary students for other educational environments such as non-Waldorf high schools. The challenge of preparing students for other educational settings was articulated clearly by Steiner (2000), who understood the importance of preparing Waldorf students for practical, modern life as well as other types of schools. In an opening course for the teachers of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart he said:

> [I]t will be up to us to prepare our pupils for other institutes of further education that they will have to attend when they leave the Waldorf school and before they step out into life. Thus, we must bring our pupils to the point when they leave of having the necessary qualifications for whatever further education institution will be suitable for them when they go out into life. (p. 118)

Steiner (1977) went so far as to suggest in another lecture that Waldorf schools must prepare their students for other institutions even if it means they have to sacrifice some of their own curricular objectives:

> We do not wish to be fanatical and, therefore, we [have] 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. (p. 127)

Because of the shortage of Waldorf high schools, and because of the number of Waldorf elementary school graduates attending non-Waldorf high schools, exploring the transition to high school was an important place to start serious research into the school transition experiences of Waldorf graduates.

Review of Literature

Two major bodies of literature are potentially relevant to the transition experience of Waldorf elementary graduates attending non-Waldorf high schools. These include literature regarding Waldorf philosophy and pedagogy, particularly Steiner's developmental profile of adolescence, and literature regarding the normative high school transition experience. Steiner's profile of adolescence as well as his theories regarding the nature of learning are detailed more in an analysis section. Although literature concerning the normative transition to high school is voluminous with regard to the challenges typically associated with the transition to high school from mainstream elementary, middle, and junior high schools, it is sparse with regard to the transition experience of students from alternative models of education. While Waldorf graduates belong to a demographic population typically weathering many transitional challenges (Baldwin et al., 2005), research into the normative high school transition may prove helpful both in describing general school transition experiences and providing a backdrop against which to interpret possible unique aspects of the transition experience of Waldorf elementary graduates.

The Normative High School Transition

Topics within the high school transition literature fall roughly into three basic categories regarding academic and socioemotional challenges, as well as structural factors associated with these challenges. In addition to these three areas of focus, a separate body of literature addresses the effectiveness of various school transition programs designed to ease some of challenges associated with the high school transition. Researchers found challenges in the normative high school transition experience included declines in grades (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991), attendance (Scott, Rock, Pollack & Ingels, 1995), promotion rates (Wheelock & Miao, 2005), increases in dropout rates (Roderick, 1993), and problem behaviors/delinquency (Jackson & Schulenberg, 2013). Socioemotional challenges included relational challenges (Langenkamp, 2009), anxiety and depression (Barber and Olsen, 2004), and declines in self-esteem (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Other emotional challenges included decreases in motivation (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998), and involvement (Catterall, 1998).

Researchers also identified structural factors associated with various academic and socioemotional challenges. These structural factors included demographic features such as socioeconomic status (SES), race, and gender (Gillock & Reyes, 1996), as well as structural differences between former schools and high schools (Alspaugh, 1998). Finally, research outlined transitional programs found to ameliorate some of the academic and socioemotional challenges associated with the transition to high school. Programs found effective in easing transitional challenges included those giving students information (Mizelle & Irwin, 2000), involving parents (MacIver, 2005), and providing social support for students (Maher, 2010).

Gaps and Tensions in the Literature

Especially significant to this study was the obvious gap in research concerning the experience of students transitioning to high school from alternative and non-traditional models of education (including Waldorf). A related gap in the literature concerned the paucity of research regarding non-traditional curriculums, methodologies, and programs which might ease transitional challenges, as well as aspects of mainstream curriculums, methodologies, and programs which might exacerbate or even cause transitional challenges.

The majority of studies in the transition literature utilized social address methodologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), which sought to „locate" struggling students, associating their struggles with external structural factors such as SES. Fewer studies explored actual internal teaching practices. Numerous studies identified successful transition programs, although a majority of these studies emphasized transition programs meant to ease the transition to high school organized as a fait accompli. There was ample research regarding how programming might help students transition into existing structures; there was far less research examining how high schools - or middle schools for that matter - might change methodologically or programmatically to make the transition easier.

A second major gap in the literature regarded methodology, as evidenced in the larger number of academic-focused, domain-specific, and quantitative studies compared to the smaller number of affective-focused, integrated, and qualitative studies. A related methodological gap was the fewer number of longer-range, longitudinal studies compared with one- and two-year studies focused in and around the transition itself.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach allowing for the exploration of specific curricular/methodological processes, as well as the examination of longer timeframes. A phenomenological approach further allowed for focus on the *phenomenon* of the transition experience (Creswell, 2013). In keeping with the primary concern of qualitative research, another focus of this study was the *meaning* students gained from their transition experiences. Meaning may be further interpreted as a measure of developmental appropriateness and motivation (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Eccles et al., 1993).

The phenomena of interest in this study concerned *what* Waldorf graduates experienced in their transition to high school and *how* they experienced it. Analysis of the transition experience is limited to academic and social challenges across the transition. Student attitudes regarding their overall high school experience are not included in the analysis, except to the extent that they intersected with transitional challenges. Since transitional experiences were unique to each student, and since one of the most important qualities defining experience is meaning (Creswell, 2013), this study utilized interviews as the main method of data collection. Qualitative research is concerned with process (Bogden & Biklen, 2007), and the transition experience is a process happening over time. Students needed time to process the overall quality of transition experiences. The interview, as opposed to other collection methods such as field observations, allowed for participant reflexivity on the transition experience.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

I conducted 13 in-depth, 90-minute interviews of former Waldorf students who attended non-Waldorf public and private high schools. I recruited Waldorf elementary graduates from Great River Waldorf School (a pseudonym), a K-8 elementary school in a Midwestern state, who went on to attend non-Waldorf high schools both public and private. I sent out mass emails inviting graduates to participate in my research, and I interviewed the first 13 graduates who responded to my queries. I limited my recruitment to students over 18 who were currently seniors in high school or who had recently graduated from high school. Of the 13 participants, nine attended large urban and suburban public high schools, three attended smaller urban and suburban parochial schools, and one attended a small performing arts charter high school.

Results

Students transitioning from a K-8 elementary learning experience in a Waldorf school to more „traditional“ school curriculums in comprehensive 9-12 high schools experienced important changes in the academic and social realms. Changes in the academic program required Waldorf students to adapt to differences in teaching methods and learning styles. Changes in educational environments also required students to forge new relationships with peers and teachers.

Academic Challenges

Interviewees were fairly unified in their descriptions of academic challenges associated with their transition to high school. Twelve of 13 participants reported doing very well academically their freshman year of high school, and half the interviewees described their high school academic programs as basically easy. No

participant reported feeling unprepared in any academic subject. All 13 participants said their main challenge was not any academic content itself, but acclimating to new instructional methods. The adjustment period was relatively short, less than a year for most.

Students reported learning styles in high school were more visually oriented, with fewer opportunities for creative (artistic) and experiential learning. Participants also reported teaching methods, including grading and testing, became more fact-based and concept-driven in high school. Student comments on grading and testing were fairly unified. While 12 of 13 interviewees were motivated to get good grades, many students felt grading was one-dimensional and heavily weighted towards the reproduction of facts. While there were individual exceptions with specific teachers, particularly in 11th and 12th grades, all 13 interviewees also reported a decline in teacher passion and connection to their academic disciplines across the transition to high school. (It should be noted, again, that these results pertain to student comments regarding academic coursework, and not arts programming, sports, clubs, and other non-academic activities.)

In addition to their experience adjusting to new styles of learning and teaching methods, all 13 participants reported their intrinsic connection to academic material declined in high school. Despite experiencing a decline in interest and engagement (meaning), students maintained their motivation to do well academically and achieve good grades. While there were exceptions in individual classrooms and with specific junior- and senior-level teachers, in general students found the academic material in high school less intrinsically meaningful than in the Waldorf school.

Learning Styles

Participants reported learning in high school was largely visual, centered on reading and the interpretation of texts, as well as the memorization of discreet facts. Students reported far fewer learning experiences in modes other than visual learning. All 13 interviewees described learning in high school as less „holistic." 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.

Students reported the most significant aspect of the transition in terms of adjusting to new learning styles was the lack of opportunities for creative (artistic) and experiential learning. Riley (a pseudonym) provided a laundry list of many different ways students learn:

> There's lecture type learning and then there's learning where you send that information back to someone else. There's learning where you involve a group and learn about the same concept again and then you study it by doing it yourself in a lab setting or something. Then you can also depict what you're learning artistically with music or with [art] you're doing in your main lesson book or something like that. You're involving all these different processes in your brain, just around one concept.

Riley first lists a more informational type of learning - transmitting information back and forth - before listing several transformational types of learning in which the learner actively participates in the construction of not only new knowledge, but new cognitive structures. Riley lists three transformational types of learning: social learning, experiential learning, and artistic or creative learning. Interviewees explained repeatedly that high school primarily utilized informational learning strategies, whereas other transformational forms of learning were more isolated and exceptional.

Student comments regarding the negative aspects of the general lack of opportunities for creativity in learning in high school included references to decreases in engagement, meaning, and motivation, lack of opportunities in the arts, an emphasis in quantity over quality, the loss of the social aspects of creativity, the relegation of art to the representation of facts or concepts, and an emphasis on facts themselves over relationships or connections.

Riley's list of different styles of learning included learning „by doing it yourself," or experiential learning. In addition to mentioning the lack of opportunities for creative learning, all 13 interviewees commented on

the lack of opportunities for experiential learning in high school compared to the Waldorf school. Students discussed different positive aspects of learning through experience largely missing from their high schools' academic programs such as the personal satisfaction of projects, field experiences, and applied learning, the social nature of shared experience, and opportunities for different and disparate experiences. Amy compared her Waldorf and high school experiences, describing experiential learning as „three-dimensional:"

> From high school it's all paper. It's all these two-dimensional things. Waldorf for me was very three-dimensional. Everything has its own feeling and different way of synthesizing things. High school seemed very much like taking a whole bunch of different ideas and synthesizing in the same way, bottlenecking everything down into a certain formula.

Interestingly, Amy explained one of the three dimensions of experience is „feeling."

Teaching Methods

All 13 interviewees reported high school teaching methods were less holistic and integrated than Waldorf methods. Less holistic aspects of teaching in high school included fact-based and concept-driven instruction (including the use of grading and testing), the increased use of lecture and its attendant note-taking, lack of teacher passion, and the use of textbooks, worksheets, and other forms of busywork. David made a distinction between „facts" and „understanding," saying, „Maybe I could learn all of the facts but then I wouldn't be understanding the subject." Kit echoed David's comments, remarking on her difficulty integrating discreet facts into more encompassing understandings:

> I [like] actually learning and having things that I would continue to remember and could grow on that concept. I don't like having pointless knowledge that'll just disappear as soon as you take the test, which is a lot of that stuff.

„Concepts capable of growth", is a theme that will play heavily in the analysis section.

Two teaching methods students consistently described as less holistic and integrated were grading and testing. Eleven of 13 students commented on the one-dimensionality of grades in high school, while nine of 13 complained about the inflexibility and inequity of tests. Students reported their most significant methodological adjustments across the transition concerned grading and testing.

Grading

A majority of participants commented on what they experienced as the one-dimensionality of grades. This one-dimensionality was reflected in student comments concerning the standardization of grades, lack of opportunities for subjectivity and expression, and the summative nature of many grading schemes. Amy described her experience of the one-dimensional nature of grading:

> Grading felt very reductive to me, and very judgmental, and too simple for what we were trying to look for. It felt like assignments could have been more broad and more thought provoking if teachers [didn't have to maintain] this grading system. They wouldn't have had to think of what exactly does an A mean? What does a standard A mean? They couldn't have this breadth of work from kids because it would take more time. It would take more work to grade it or whatever.

A majority of students also reported that grading contributed to a decrease in intrinsic motivation and meaning, and an increase in competitiveness and anxiety. Over half of the students interviewed commented on their experience adjusting to new ways of grading in high school, which included learning how to „work for a grade."

Testing

Nine of 13 interviewees complained about the inflexibility and inequity of tests. Less holistic and integrated aspects of testing reflected in student comments included the preponderance of summative testing, testing

methods addressing fewer learning styles, and „teaching to the test." Ellen explained that the phenomenon of teaching to the test limited creativity on the part of both students and teachers:

> I don't believe in standardized tests, like AP tests. I just think they're so dumb. The essays on the AP Literature test for example are just super basic, really easy stuff. I think with some of the books we were reading you could go so far into that and learn how to analyze them in really interesting ways and do interesting things with them. Write a play based off of it or something. Instead we were just practicing writing formulaic essays which is what you need to get a five on the test, which is super boring. When you're reading great literature you can do so many things, but we didn't.

Interest and Engagement

Students reported their academic adjustment to high school pertained more to new styles of learning and teaching methods than any academic content itself. All 13 interviewees also reported experiencing a decline in their interest in, and their engagement with, academic material. Students consistently reported the decrease in their academic engagement in high school was a direct result of the new learning styles and teaching methods already referenced. Students associated declines in interest and engagement with new learning styles, including lack of opportunities for creative, experiential, and cooperative learning, and a related decrease in opportunities for subjectivity and self-expression. Students also associated declines in engagement with new teaching styles, which included the emphasis of facts over relational understandings, one-dimensional grading schemes, „teaching to the test," busywork, and lack of teacher passion. Riley expounded on interest and engagement (meaning) in the context of experiential learning:

> When I was doing projects, I could find some way to - regardless of what concept it was - I could find some way to find meaning that was personal in that because you have so much scope to explore when you're working on that. A lot of high school is not like that. A lot of it is very prescriptive, and since meaning, as a concept, is personal and subjective and non-prescriptive, it doesn't work, because you can't ascribe meaning to something for someone else and assume that they'll also perceive that as meaningful. It doesn't really matter what the intentions are. Good intentions are great and all. You can't tell someone else something and tell them, this is meaningful.

Social Challenges

Student descriptions of their social adjustment to high school were less unified than those of their academic adjustment. Participants described their experiences with community, including their overall relationships with peers and teachers, as well as their experiences making new friends.

Community

The majority of student comments regarding community concerned school and class size. Nine of the 13 interviewees attended larger high schools. All nine reported a decline in their sense of overall community in their transition to high school, including their general relationships with peers and teachers. A majority of students reported their relationships with peers and teachers improved junior and senior years. Two of the four students attending smaller high schools described positive transitions in terms of their sense of community. (The negative experience of two of the participants attending smaller high schools is addressed further in the analysis section.)

Loss of Waldorf Community

Eleven of the 13 interviewees described their experience of community in the Waldorf school as differentiated from experiences of community elsewhere. Participants described their experience of community in the Waldorf school as a way of illustrating what they felt was missing in their transition experience, and as a

means of analyzing and assessing new forms of community experienced in high school. Aspects of community experienced in the Waldorf school and largely missing from high school included intimacy, unconditional support or acceptance, and opportunities for conflict resolution and collaboration. Riley commented on the relationship of the social „whole" to the individual „parts" in the Waldorf school:

> It's very nostalgic to look back at that because I haven't had those kind of close friendships since then, just flat out, I have not had friendships as good as I did in Waldorf. Many of [my Waldorf friends] went to [the state arts highs school]. I saw a lot of them there but we still don't have the same kind of intimate experience that you get when you're together every day for 11 years in some cases. I miss that a lot. It put us together. It's like you're a collection of individuals but together you're also something. You form a unit out of many individual parts, but that doesn't detract from the individual parts at all. That's not something I've found in high school at all, or anywhere else.

Community with Teachers

Eleven of 13 interviewees described a decline in personal connection with teachers across their high school transition. However, all 13 interviewees described positive experiences with specific teachers in their junior and senior years. Students shared different aspects of a positive sense of community with teachers missing across their high school transition including specific interest, effort, kindness, and a familiarity with their personal circumstances. Several students distinguished between the *style* of care exhibited by Waldorf and high school teachers. Said Andy: „I don't think that [high school teachers] cared as much about [our self-expression]." Amy said her high school teachers cared, but in a „less personal way:"

> I didn't feel the personal connection with my teacher to want to be able to give them the work. They had so many students going through there that they weren't going to remember anyway. I didn't have anybody to impress or live up to their standards. I think what was probably the most challenging about that first year was realizing I didn't have that. There wasn't going to be that person who was rooting for you all the time. They're rooting for you, but in a less personal way.

Several students spoke at length about the importance of teacher relationships and wondered to what extent their Waldorf experience contributed to their desire to connect with teachers on a more personal level. Kit mentioned a magical, „in between" space in her comments about connecting with teachers:

> [Waldorf] really helped me find the importance of connecting to your teachers and to what you're actually learning and not just having this individual experience, or even [this] shared experience, but this kind of in between.

Classroom Community

Over half of the interviewees shared comments concerning „classroom community." This refers to the sense of community experienced by students when they participated in academic programs and engaged in classroom activities, and may be conceived as a combination of several factors including the mood of the general student community, the personal connections made between students and teachers, and the types of teaching and learning methods employed. A central feature of a positive classroom community reflected in student comments concerned caring and warm student-teacher relationships. In addition, students said creative, experiential, and cooperative activities promoted a healthy sense of community in classrooms.

Participants reported a decline in the quality of their classroom community experience across their transition. Students attributed this decline to decreases in the quality of relationships with teachers as well as fewer opportunities for creative (artistic), experiential, and cooperative learning. As such, student comments regarding classroom community related directly to comments regarding declining interest and engagement. Riley explained part of the reason artistic activities contribute to a positive sense of community is due to their „emotionally exposing" character:

I think a lot of the things that you do [in the Waldorf school], like singing together or being in plays together, are emotionally exposing experiences. When you do that as a group, that is very bonding.

Making Friends

In addition to describing their experiences adjusting to new forms of community in their transition to high school, participants described the process of making new friends in terms of the larger process of moving from friends with „similar characteristics" to friends with „similar values." Interviewees described their initial experiences making friends in high school, which sometimes involved the separation from their Waldorf friends. One of the defining initial social challenges for many students was breaking into what presented as pre-formed social groupings, or cliques. A significant shift occurred in student friendships somewhere in their sophomore or junior years. Students initially maintained or formed friendships based on shared experiences, such as attending the Waldorf school or participating in the same sports or activities. Later, students reformed friendships based on more unique and individualized characteristics. Differences in participant experiences making friends in high school included the possible effects blind luck (i.e. picking the right high school), maturity, and temperamental differences. In general, self-described introverts experienced more anxiety surrounding the process of making new friends. Whereas Jeff described the process of making friends as the „defining challenge" of his transition to high school, Sally – a self-described extrovert – described the process of making new friends as „energizing" and „exciting."

In addition to individual temperamental differences, initial and ongoing social challenges may be the more natural consequences of different maturity levels. Kit made several comments about the process of identity formation, or moving from what might be called a „persona" stage to a „person" stage. Comparing initial social experiences in high school with Waldorf experiences, Kit said: „[In high school] it's sort of having to think more how you're perceived as opposed to being with people who already have a very solid view of you." Kit went on to explain some of her friends were „pretending" or „being what they [thought] they should be." Indeed, participants who described their friendships in terms of outward characteristics or personas, experienced more initial social challenges in high school than those describing friendships in terms of inner, dispositional qualities. Kit expounded on these maturational distinctions in terms of the differences between „self-consciousness" and self-awareness:

> I definitely have some friends that struggled in different ways, that kind of struggled in [the] sense of being extremely self-conscious, but then almost not really finding their spots with that. Eventually the people who I'm thinking of were able to come into themselves and be more comfortable. But I can also think of a few people who kind of relied for on the idea of what they thought it should be as opposed to what it was and then maybe got a little overwhelmed by that.

The phrase „coming into themselves" is a wonderfully succinct description of the process of identity formation.

Analysis

The story of the transition experience as told by Waldorf elementary graduates attending non-Waldorf high schools involved three distinct chapters, or phases: (1) establishing competency, (2) analyzing and assessing experience, and (3) transforming and self-actualizing. The transition experience may be compared to the process of learning to drive. Students in the initial phase of learning to drive gain competence by familiarizing themselves with basic knowledge, including the names and functions of the different parts of the car and basic traffic laws. Students also begin to apply their basic knowledge with behind-the-wheel practice, eventually driving solo. Young drivers in the second phase of learning to drive begin to analyze the driving experience. They begin to combine different, discreet aspects of the experience of driving into larger frameworks of understanding. They also begin to assess the value of driving. They ask questions like, „What can driving do for me?" or „What kind of driver am I?"

There (hopefully) comes a moment during this second phase of learning to drive when everything „clicks," when all the discreet aspects of the act of driving come together, and for the first time the driver is able to internalize all the physical and mental movements of driving into one fluid movement or into some sense of the whole. Now the driver can see beyond the act of driving itself and her eyes take in the horizon for the first time. At this moment, driving, which was formerly an end in itself, becomes the means to some other end. This integration marks the end of the second phase of learning to drive, and the driver enters a third phase in which they begin to use their driving ability to take them where they want and need to go. Now, transformed, they are truly in the „driver's seat." The driver in this third phase (again, hopefully) uses their driving knowledge and ability to self-actualize, to fulfill their own unique destiny or life project.

Figure 1 shows the progression of these three phases, beginning with establishing competency, through analyzing and assessing experiences, to transforming and self-actualizing.

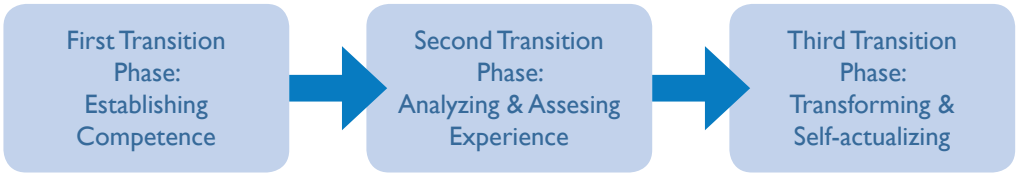

Figure 1. Three Phases of the Transition Experience of Waldorf Elementary Graduates Attending Non-Waldorf High Schools

I limit myself in the subsequent analysis of the three phases to the major transitional challenges experienced by Waldorf graduates in the first two phases of their transition. These challenges included acclimating to new instructional methods and establishing one or several personal connections with other students in phase one, and a decline in interest and engagement in academic material, identified in phase two, but experienced throughout high school. Additionally, analysis is limited to specific transitional academic and social challenges and does not include analysis of the overall high school experience.

Phase One of the Transition: Establishing Competence

The first phase of the transition experience of Waldorf elementary graduates to non-Waldorf highs schools involved the need on the part of students to establish competence academically and socially in their new school programs. Students initially attempted to establish their academic competence by achieving good grades. This outward measure gave them a way to compare their performance with other students and experience a positive sense of self-esteem. Social competency involved establishing one or more personal connections within the larger and more impersonal environment of high school. The initial transition phase was relatively short for most students, lasting less than a semester.

Academic Competence

Eccles et al. (1998) categorized basic questions young adolescents ask themselves in terms of their academic motivation. The first thing adolescents ask themselves is a question intimately related to competence: „Can I do this?" (Eccles et al., 1998). Regarding the question „Can I do this?" students reported their initial academic challenges in high school concerned not the academic material itself, but the adjustment to different instructional methods. Students first had to learn the „language" of high school before answering the question „Can I succeed?" academically.

Bloom et al. (1956) developed a taxonomy or classification of different levels in the process of learning, each successive level predicated on successful completion of the previous level. The first three levels in Bloom's description of the learning process are remembering, understanding, and applying (understanding in the traditional sense of familiarity or knowing definitions; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl,

1956). The next two levels are analyzing and evaluating, followed by a sixth level – creating (Bloom, 1956). Taken as a whole, Bloom's (1956) first three levels of learning – remembering, understanding, and applying – may all be understood in terms of academic competency.

Considering the transition from Waldorf to high school in terms of Bloom's (1956) first two levels – remembering and understanding – participants described learning to recognize and understand new terminology and processes associated with new instructional methods. Terminology included rubrics, GPAs, weighted grading, and syllabi; processes included note-taking, reading text books, and taking multiple choice tests. In terms of the third level of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy – applying – students described their initial attempts at applying their basic understandings of new instructional methods in their first graded assignments and tests (which several students described as disastrous).

Academic Competence in the Normative High School Transition Literature

Research concerning the normative high school transition identified elements associated with declining grades across the transition to high school. These elements related to Bloom's (1956) first two levels – remembering and understanding – and included the need on the part of students to adjust to new instructional methods (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982). Beresford (2013) found the highest level of student concern across the high school transition was in the area of what he termed „academic nuts and bolts." These were defined as the knowledge of how high school works – requirements, structures, and terminology – and more importantly, the knowledge of where to go to get help.

One of the new structural elements Waldorf graduates experienced in their transition was the move to a departmentalized organization of classes and schedules in high school. Researchers identified transitional challenges associated with moving from more self-contained school organizations to more period-based, departmentalized environments (Alspaugh & Harting, 1995). A significant element in participant descriptions of establishing competence involved understanding how grades worked. In his exploration of the high school transition experience for Montessori graduates, Ward (2013) identified several challenges possibly related to students' Montessori experience including meeting deadlines and understanding grading systems. The experiences of Montessori graduates learning a new educational system in high school may be compared to similar experiences of Waldorf graduates.

Social Competence

Wentzel (2005) reviewed literature linking positive academic outcomes with social competency, defined as the process of establishing personal connections with teachers and peers, gaining approval from others, and behaving cooperatively with classmates. Waldorf graduates sought to achieve social competence in this initial transition phase by establishing one or several personal connections with other students. This provided them a sense of belonging and may be understood in terms of levels of motivation or need. In Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, individuals must first satisfy basic needs or motivations before turning their attention to higher levels of motivation. Establishing social competency may be interpreted in terms of Maslow's (1943) third and fourth stages - belonging and self-esteem.

Smaller Schools Research

The majority of participant comments regarding their initial difficulties establishing a sense of belonging (including breaking into cliques) during their initial transition involved school size, both with regard to the large size of the high schools in question and the small size of the Waldorf school. Smaller high schools emerged in the high school transition literature as one of the most important structural characteristics associated with academic and social success across the high school transition (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Lee & Smith, 1997; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987). Positive academic and social outcomes,

including feeling a sense of belonging, occurred more often in smaller high schools with student populations under 1000 (Lee & Smith, 1997). All nine of the participants attending larger high schools reported feeling less personal connection with teachers and a less familiar connection with the student population in general than at their Waldorf elementary school. Two of the four participants attending smaller high schools described community in their schools more positively than the nine attending larger schools.

Lee and Smith (1997) further explained the positive outcomes associated with smaller schools did not follow for a smaller subgroup of students who were unable to locate a peer group in high school (Lee & Smith, 1997). Kinney (1993) found the more polymorphous environment of large high schools to be largely positive for those students who had experienced marginalization in their more hierarchically-structured former schools. In fact, of the four students interviewed in this study attending high schools smaller than 1,000, only two developed positive friendships and reported feeling a close-knit sense of community comparable to their Waldorf experience. The other two participants described feeling like outcasts in their respective smaller high schools. Both students experienced difficulty finding their „crowd" and eventually switched schools, one to a larger urban high school and one to an even smaller arts-based school. Interpreted through the lens of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, neither of these students were able to overcome their initial transition challenges in part because of their inability to establish social competence by achieving a sense of belonging. In terms of Kinney's study (1993), they may have been unable to achieve a sense of belonging precisely because of the small size of their respective high schools.

Lee and Smith (1997) used a national sample to attribute positive outcomes in smaller schools to greater opportunities for social participation with peers and personal relationships with teachers. Personal connections with teachers emerged as one of the most significant factors associated with a positive transition experience (Beresford, 2013). Simmons et al. (1987) hypothesized that students transitioning from smaller schools into larger schools may experience a form of cumulative stress from meeting a large number of new peers, while at the same time acclimating to new schedules and instructional methods. This cumulative stress may be part of what was experienced initially by Waldorf elementary graduates attending larger high schools.

Phase Two of the Transition: Analyzing and Assessing Experience

Once students experienced some initial success or competency in the academic and social realms, they embarked upon a secondary transition phase. After learning the „nuts and bolts" of high school (as in the process of learning to drive), students in this second transition phase began the process of analyzing and assessing the value of their academic and social experiences based on whether the academic program fit their learning needs and style, and whether the friendships brought with them from the Waldorf school or made initially in the first few months of the transition met the criteria for satisfying long-term friendships. The secondary transition phase – analyzing and assessing experience – lasted longer than the first phase, between one and two years.

Eccles et al. (1998) explained that after students ask themselves „Can I do this?" the next question they ask is „Why do I want to do this?" The first question involves competence and relates to Bloom's (1956) first three levels of learning – remembering, understanding, and applying. The second question concerns value and relates to Bloom's (1956) fourth and fifth levels of learning – analyzing and evaluating – in which students break down information into component parts and begin to judge the value of that information or experience.

Students in the second phase began to analyze their initial high school academic experiences; they began to assess those same experiences in terms of value. Students also made many comparisons during this second phase between their academic and social experiences in high school and their former Waldorf experiences. This second stage largely involved a meaning-making activity, engaging students in reflection regarding the relevance of their academic program, and the nature and quality of friendships. Upon analysis, students reported a decrease in their personal connection to academic material across their transition to high school.

This decrease in meaning was experienced most intensely freshman and sophomore years, and improved slightly junior and senior years based on the unique attributes of particular teachers.

Students additionally reported an increase in extrinsic motivation across their transition to high school occurring concurrently with declines in intrinsic motivation and meaning. For instance, despite the fact that the majority of participants described grades as one-dimensional, they nonetheless felt invigorated by receiving good grades and satisfying the need to „know" how they compared to others. Students were excited by their experience of the extrinsic value of excelling in a graded, competitive academic environment. Part of what students described as positive in their assessment of the value of their academic experiences in high school involved the belief that they compared favorably to others in the „real world," as well as the feeling they were learning the „real world" skills they would need in college and beyond. Students found value in favorable performance appraisals.

The motivation of students to maintain good grades or succeed in terms of outward measures of performance is certainly not viewed here as a challenge. However, the decline in intrinsic motivation across the transition to high school, that is to say the decline in interest and engagement in learning itself, is certainly a challenge begging analysis. The first academic challenge of acclimating to new instructional methods involved a relatively simple analysis. Students first had to learn the „language" of high school methodology before applying that knowledge to academic content. The second academic challenge of declining interest and engagement is a much more complex issue. Decreases in interest and engagement also presented a longer-standing challenge to students. Whereas the process of adjusting to new instructional methods lasted under a year for the majority of participants, the decrease in intrinsic motivation continued throughout high school.

To explore this phenomenon, it is necessary to take a major detour from analysis of the actual transition experience of Waldorf elementary graduates, and explore learning from a more theoretical or philosophical perspective. Rudolf Steiner, of course, offered just such a perspective. But Steiner was not alone. Steiner's (1996a) understanding of intelligence, as well as his developmental profile of adolescence, has been echoed by many of the leading educational thinkers of the past century. Researchers have similarly corroborated many of Steiner's propositions.

Meaning and Rudolf Steiner's Holistic and Developmental Picture of the Human Being

The reasons students attributed to their waning interest and engagement across their high school transition involved their assessment of the instructional methods employed in high school, in particular the fewer opportunities for creative (artistic), experiential, and cooperative learning, as well as an emphasis on facts over relational understandings. Steiner's (1996a) holistic and developmental understanding of the human being offers a unique lens through which to make sense of this challenge of meaning. Firstly, Steiner's (1996a) holistic picture of learning offers an explanation to the question of how new, visually-oriented instructional methods encountered in high school might lead to a decline in interest and engagement. Secondly, Steiner's (1996a) understanding of human development, particularly the developmental profile of the young adolescent, offers an explanation of how an emphasis on discreet facts and concepts over relational understandings might likewise contribute to waning interest.

Steiner's (1996a) Holistic Understanding of Learning

Part of Steiner's (1996a) holistic understanding of the human being pertained to the nature and seat of intelligence, which he understood to reside in the whole organism. In Steiner's (1996a) picture, individual consciousness and intelligence encompass the acts of thinking, feeling, and willing (volition). Holistic understandings of intelligence likewise include conscious, subconscious, and unconscious activity. Overall intelligence consists of conscious activity (thinking), subconscious or dreamlike activity (feeling), and

unconscious activity (willing/volition; Steiner, 1996a). Steiner (1996c) said of the modernist's tendency to understand intelligence solely in terms of the conscious intellect: „DesCarte's dictum 'I think, therefore I am' should really be changed to: on June 2, 1867, I *was* from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. because I thought during that time" (emphasis added; p. 58).

With this view of intelligence and brain function in mind, the decrease in meaning reported by students across their high school transition may, in fact, relate to decreases in opportunities for artistic and experiential learning. If our overall intelligence consists of volitional and feeling activities in addition to purely thinking activities (to the extent that such things exist in our everyday lives), then passive, visually-oriented instructional methods lacking opportunities for more active experience and expression would necessarily offer only a peripheral view or experience of any topic. This partial (one might say, one-dimensional) view of reality applies to any learner, but in the sense of, say, Gardner's (2011) multiple intelligences, visually-oriented instruction might disadvantage more kinesthetic learners. Furthermore, visually-oriented learning, that is to say note-taking, reading textbooks, filling in worksheets, and taking written tests, takes place largely in isolation. In addition to reporting fewer opportunities for creative and experiential learning, participants reported fewer opportunities for cooperative and social learning.

Let us then consider the social aspects of a more holistic view of learning encompassing thinking, feeling, and willing. Art, for example, is a traditionally discreet discipline integrated with all other subjects in the Waldorf school, and, according to interviewees, almost completely absent in core academic subjects in high school. Taking a more holistic view of intelligence, art is not simply an expressive activity; it is a way of knowing (Steiner, 1996a). It is also an inherently social activity, the lack of which contributed to what participants reported as a lack of meaning. The cultivation of social awareness and cohesion are equally important to any academic goal in the Waldorf school (Rawson & Richter, 2000). From a larger societal or political standpoint, Steiner (1996c) said our modern tendency to departmentalize knowledge and appeal only to the intellect works to maintain the status quo of society. He believed only a holistic education recognizing the importance of activity and feeling could help create the conditions for social renewal (Steiner, 1996c). In this belief, Steiner was joined by two of the leading educational thinkers of the 20th Century, Dewey (1997) and Freire (1993).

Dewey (1997) directly associated lack of meaning with partial or fragmented views of reality and the disintegrated curriculums of many modern schools. What he called the collateral education of attitudes, likes, dislikes, and most importantly, the desire to continue learning, was more important than the explicit academic content of any lesson (Dewey, 1997). Freire (1993) believed that to truly understand reality, individuals must have a *feeling* sense of the phenomenal whole. The development of what Freire (1993) called criticality entails the developmental extension of consciousness. He said of criticality, „the cognizant subject knows critically… by perceiving the *relationships* among objects and their reasons for being" (emphasis added; Freire, 1993, p. 182). Oppressive ideologies, he wrote, „[separate] the cognitive, the affective, and the active aspects of the total, indivisible personality" (Freire, 1993, p. 173). The cognitive, affective, and active aspects of the personality represent thinking, feeling, and willing respectively.

A holistic understanding of the human being includes recognition of the ways thinking, feeling, and willing all constitute overall intelligence. The decline in meaning across the transition to high school may then be interpreted in part based on the partial views of realty offered by instructional approaches appealing directly to the intellect, or based mainly on visual-centric activities, as well as the socially isolating effects of these more passive stimulations of the intellect. The decline in interest and engagement may be further interpreted in terms of the developmental profile of the adolescent and their cognitive development.

Steiner's (1996a) Developmental Profile

Steiner (1996a) believed humans progress through archetypal, developmental stages. Instead of some mechanical process by which knowledge or skills are accumulated, human development is more sculptural in nature, each successive stage resulting from the metamorphosis or gestalt of the former stage (Steiner, 2007).

Instead of viewing children as emerging adults, Steiner (1996a) based his pedagogy on the understanding that children are qualitatively different than adults in their relationship to the world. Steiner (1977) argued against basing pedagogy on anticipated capacities such as abstract thinking and judgment, and then attempting to call forth these latent capacities in the developing child. He explained the human intellect doesn't fully absorb anything forced upon it from the outside; instead the intellect absorbs what is already taken in through the senses or feelings (Steiner, 1977). In this sense, part of what students experienced as a decline in meaning in high school may be lack of „absorption" in the absence of sensory or emotional content.

Steiner (1996c) said all learning in adolescence should be directed towards identifying interrelationships in every part of life. He believed a more abstract, concept-driven education was appropriate only in later adolescence and after high school (Steiner, 1996c). Only in later adolescence have humans developed their understanding of interrelationships and connections to allow them to retain a holistic understanding (i.e. a meaningful understanding) of life while delving into partial realities or learning specializations (1996c). Steiner (1996c) said young adolescents learn with their whole being (sensory-motor system, feelings, intellect), and are particularly susceptible to being locked in fragmented and disintegrated ways of understanding themselves and their world. Part of what participants described as missing from the fact-centric approach they experienced in high school were big-picture, relational understandings, frameworks, or contexts. Interviewees directly associated a steady diet of facts to declines in interest and engagement.

A developmentally appropriate and active educational approach seeks not only to educate what students know, but *how* they know. When students develop how they know, their new thought structures may be applied to any new situation. When students simply learn more information, they are somewhat bound by their existing cognitive structures. Kegan (2009) distinguished between informational and transformational learning. Informational learning increases knowledge within an existing cognitive structure. In other words, it adds to *what* we know but not *how* we know. Transformational learning changes existing structures and ways of knowing; it changes how we know (Kegan, 2009).

Steiner (1996a) believed all concepts should be clay-like, so they may grow and stretch as the child grows. He believed imaginative images were capable of growth and change as children reconstructed or reshaped them to fit new and increasingly complex situations (Rawson & Richter, 2000). As constructive developmentalists, Dewey (1997) and Kegan (2009) both understood the task of education is to create the proper environment for transformational learning to take place. The challenge from Dewey's (1997) perspective was not the absence of experiences, but their defective character. He said the central problem of education is to „select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1997, p. 27). teiner (2001) said giving a student an abstract concept without building up the proper experiences and feelings was like giving him „stones for bread" (p. 29). „Bread" is nourishing, transformational; the carbohydrates are converted to energy, the proteins to muscle mass. „Stones" are not transformed; they are a weight that must be carried or cast away.

The general pedagogical challenge, then, is identifying experiences having the characteristics of „bread" or „fruit." Developmentally speaking, however, each developmental stage will have its own unique form of educative experiences (bread) leading to transformation, i.e. the growth of consciousness, i.e. changes in how we know. Kegan (1994) called the type of educational experience capable of transformation or growth an evolutionary experience. And he explained that such an experience must act as a bridge with one footing securely in the student's current consciousness, and the other footing anchored ever so slightly in the direction of growth. With the bridge analogy in mind, the educator must not only have a solid understanding of where she wants the bridge to land, but where, exactly, it must begin.

Adolescent Development

Steiner's (1996a) picture of the birth of the intellect proper at adolescence echoes Piaget's (1972) formal operations stage of cognitive development. In the prior concrete operations stage (which represents the

period of elementary school), individuals are able to use concrete representations to reason abstractly. Now, in the formal operations stage beginning with adolescence, individuals are able to begin to understand abstractions and symbolic logic without intermediary concrete representations (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Adolescents begin to be able to reason both hypothetically and deductively (Piaget, 1972). *Begin* may be the operative word.

Staley (2009) applied Steiner's (1996a) picture of adolescent development and the birth of the intellect proper to illustrate differences in the formal operational skills of early adolescents (high school transition age) and older adolescents (age 16 and beyond). Staley (2009) called these two phases negation and affirmation. Adolescents in the negation phase flex their new intellectual capacities in a process akin to cutting teeth. They are fascinated with thought, but their lack of experience with the exercise of reason makes their judgments premature and brittle (Staley, 2009). In the affirmation phase, older adolescents begin to control their thinking capacities and apply them to their personal development, gaining the ability to rudimentarily discern, judge, analyze, and synthesize information (Staley, 2009). According to Steiner (1967), *adolescents are not fully able to apply judgment formed by abstract thinking alone until the ages of 18 or19*.

Indeed, recent research has shown older adolescents are more likely than younger adolescents to display evidence of formal operational skills, such as understanding the difference between opinions likely to satisfy their goals, and learning from prior decision-making successes and failures (Byrnes & McClenny, 1994). Whereas early adolescents vacillate between relativism (believing any idea or anyone's perspective is as good as the next) and dogmatism, older adolescents begin to use evidence and reason to discern the accuracy and validity of evidence (Byrnes, 2005).

Steiner (2007) believed the intellect may only work holistically with material already learned through direct experience and emotional connection, which continues to be the model for all learning even into adolescence in Waldorf schools. Research has identified several factors affecting the reasoning skills of adolescents. Corroborating Steiner (2007) and Dewey (1997), researchers found reasoning skills are enhanced when applied to an existing knowledge base familiar and appropriately structured (Byrnes, 2005). A second factor affecting reason is motivation. Researchers also found adolescents reason better when they are personally interested in the subject matter (Klaczynski, Byrnes, & Jacobs, 2001). This, of course, ties in with what participants described as a decline in interest and engagement with academic material across the high school transition. A third factor affecting reason is the processing demands of the task. The more abstractions needing to be held simultaneously, the greater the likelihood the individual will resort to former methods of reason or take a focalized view of the whole (Byrnes, 2005).

In addition to the partial views of realty offered by instructional approaches appealing directly to the intellect, or the socially isolating effects of passive educational experiences, the decline in meaning experienced by Waldorf graduates across their transition to high school may be in part due to the imposition of knowledge beyond young learners' capacities and learning styles. Simply put, creative, experiential, and cooperative learning is not only authentic and meaningful, it is developmentally appropriate.

Phase Three of the Transition: Transforming and Self-Actualizing

In the third phase of the high school transition experience of Waldorf elementary graduates, students (as in the driving analogy) were securely in the academic „driver's seat." Students achieved basic competencies in an initial transition phase, and analyzed and assessed the value of their experiences in a second phase. Students in the third phase integrated their knowledge of high school into more holistic and internalized understandings. Transformed by the activities of analysis and assessment, they now made their „own road" academically and socially. This third phase coincided for many with a positive shift in their experience of academic programs between 9th and 10th, and 11th and 12th grades, as well as a positive shift in the nature and quality of relationships with both peers and teachers. Learning in this third phase was more transformative than in previous phases, in large part because it was self-generated. Learning was also self-actualized because it was guided by more self-aware, existential purposes.

Limitations, Implications and Recommendations

This study has several possible limitations, including the self-selecting nature of Waldorf students. Other possible methodological limitations include the self-selecting nature of participants, demographic features such as gender, race, and SES, the limited scope of high schools attended, questions of the generalizability of Waldorf class teachers (participants represented six Waldorf class teachers, two of whom stayed with their classes all eight years), and the ages of the participants and their chronological distance from the initial transition itself.

Implications for Waldorf Elementary Schools

High school readiness is perennially on the minds of Waldorf elementary teachers, middle-school-aged students, and families, both current and prospective. Given the methodological differences between Waldorf schools and „traditional," comprehensive high schools, the high school transition experience is a lightning rod for many parents in their assessment of the ultimate value of Waldorf education.

The main concerns expressed by teachers and families in the Waldorf School traditionally involve the academic content of high school. Teachers, students, and parents worry Waldorf elementary graduates will not be prepared in specific content areas. Areas of concern are somewhat obvious given the unique attributes of Waldorf methodology in practice. These concerns include technology (Waldorf elementary schools have no computers), and science (Waldorf science utilizes a phenomenological approach). Other concerns include differences in instructional practices and methods, including test-taking (Waldorf students take substantially fewer tests, and the tests tend to involve more qualitative measures than high school testing). If the results of this study are any indication of the general transition experience of Waldorf graduates, concerns about specific academic content may be unwarranted. None of the 13 interviewees mentioned feeling unprepared in *any* specific content area, including science and technology (except with regard to keyboarding skills). Neither did any participant mention feeling underprepared in other content areas, such as math, language arts, or world languages.

While no participant reported feeling unprepared in any specific content area, one of the most significant findings of this study concerned student preparedness for the different styles of learning and methods of teaching taking place in non-Waldorf high schools. In this sense, concern over test-taking in high school may be warranted. However, the first phase of the transition experience, which in part involved gaining academic competence by learning the nuts and bolts of how high school worked, was relatively short, lasting less than a semester for most students. The adjustment to new instructional methods across the transition appears to be a more significant, although short-lived, challenge than academic preparedness.

It is beyond the scope of this study to contemplate any changes to traditional Waldorf practice. However, it may be fair to suggest that in conversations within faculties and with current and prospective families, the topic of high school teaching methodologies is more immediate and relevant than the topic of content readiness. Interpreted through the lens, for instance, of Bloom's (1956) cognitive taxonomy, students may not be able to even address possible content gaps until they first acclimate to new learning styles and teaching methodologies. In other words, the question of whether or how Waldorf eighth-graders should be formally introduced to technology or science terminology may be less important than the question of their readiness to experience syllabi, rubrics, multiple choice tests, weighted grades, and performance-oriented grading. The question of what, if anything, Waldorf schools may do to specifically prepare students, for instance, for taking multiple choice tests, is further complicated by the fact that based on learning styles some students reported having no issues at all acclimating to such testing methods, while others struggled with more quantitative testing and grading schemes throughout high school, even after learning the nuts and bolts of such methods.

Another traditional area of concern for prospective and current Waldorf families involves the impression of the Waldorf school as an insulated or protected social bubble. Traditionally this is not a lightning rod issue like the academic-preparedness concern, but it is a lingering question for Waldorf families, particularly

as their children reach middle-school-age. The question of how to communicate the story of the social transition to high school is somewhat more complex than how to relate the academic transition. The positive effects of a small community for younger children notwithstanding, the challenge of moving from the smaller Waldorf school to larger high schools was more significant for those students with shyer, more introverted temperaments. Furthermore, attending smaller high schools resulted in a positive social experience for only two of the four participants attending such smaller schools. School-size research yielded similarly complex findings. Research studies concerning what types of elementary, middle school, or junior high school models best prepare students for the transition to high school were mixed (Alspaugh, 1998; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994; Simmons et al., 1987; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2011).

Perhaps the implication for communicating the story of the social transition of Waldorf elementary graduates to non-Waldorf high schools involves anticipating the unique, socioemotional experience of each individual student, as well as providing a picture of the normative high school transition. As the literature showed, some of the social challenges related by participants may be interpreted in terms of the „normal" high school transition experience, or as challenges experienced by freshman regardless of their former school experiences. Research, indeed, confirmed some of the socioemotional challenges experienced by Waldorf elementary graduates. These socioemotional challenges included relational challenges (Langenkamp, 2009), anxiety (Barber and Olsen, 2004), and decreases in motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Communicating this picture of normative, socioemotional, transitional challenges may be helpful in ameliorating the concern on the part of some families that Waldorf students will necessarily be at a disadvantage attending larger, more impersonal high schools.

Recommendations for Future Waldorf Transition Studies

Finally, this study identifies the need for other Waldorf transition studies, including those occurring during elementary school or after high school, as well as further exploration into the high school transition experience in terms of diversity (i.e. gender, race, SES). Further implications for Waldorf transition studies involve the need for longer-range emphases. I described three phases of the high school transition experience in my analysis, and related those phases to developmental theories regarding motivation and learning. For instance, as in Bloom's (1956) cognitive taxonomy of learning, individuals must necessarily proceed through initial stages of learning concerning basic terminology and processes before being able to analyze and assess the value of that same knowledge. If, in fact, as I claim, students necessarily went through a phase of establishing competency in large part by first learning the methodological nuts and bolts of high school before they were able to analyze and assess their initial academic experiences, then it may be fair to assume that students in their initial transitionary phase would not be in a position to analyze their experiences fairly or holistically.

My concern over the ability of students in the throes of their transition experience to have the capacity to analyze and assess that same experience influenced my decision to interview seniors and high school graduates. I worried freshman would over-react to areas of perceived lack of preparation without being able to bracket or contextualize initial transitional challenges with ongoing or structural challenges. For instance, I worried freshmen might report knowing absolutely *nothing* about „real" science, only to report several years later wanting to pursue a career in science expressly *because* of their Waldorf science experience, or in spite of their high school science experience. (Several students, in fact, expressed such transformations.) This is not intended as a criticism of high school science curriculums; it is a concern about how Waldorf science is portrayed. Interviewing seniors and older students allowed for initial transitional phases to play out, and it allowed the participants to contextualize and assess their own transitional experiences, which I do not believe they would have been able to do as freshman or even sophomores.

Furthermore, interviewing seniors and high school graduates revealed further transitional phases such as the change from intrinsic to more extrinsic measures of motivation. A recommendation for future studies involving Waldorf transitions is to take a longer-range view exploring longer time frames, thus allowing students time to acclimate and adjust to new experiences before evaluating those same experiences. Taking a

snapshot of the transition experience at any point in time may be a bit like analyzing one aspect of a circle. Isolating any given moment in the circle, the circle will present itself as a point, or an infinitely small line. Only by taking a longer-range view does the nature of the curve come into view.

References

Alspaugh, J. W. (1998). Achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school and high school. *Journal of Educational Research,* 92(1), 25.

Alspaugh, J. W., & Harting, R. D. (1995). Transition effects of school grade-level organization on student achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 28*(3), 145-49.

Baldwin, F., Gerwin, D. & Mitchell, D. (2005). *Research on Waldorf graduates of North America.* Retrieved from http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/documents/Survey_WaldorfGraduates.pdf

Barber, B. K., & Olsen, J. A. (2004). Assessing the transitions to middle and high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19*(1), 3-30.

Barone, C., Aguirre-Deandreis, A. I., & Trickett, E. J. (1991). Means-ends problem-solving skills, life stress, and social support as mediators of adjustment in the normative transition to high school. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19(2), 207-225.

Beresford, M. J. (2013). *The high school freshman transition* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ball State University.

Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. New York, NY: David McKay Company.

Bogden, R. & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723.

Byrnes, J. P. (2005). Cognitive development during adolescence. In G. R. Adams & M. D. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence*. Retrieved from http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9781405133029_chunk_g978140513302913

Byrnes, J. P., & McClenny, B. (1994). Decision-making in young adolescents and adults. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology,* 58(3), 359–388.

Catterall, J. S. (1998). *Risk and resilience in student transitions to high school.* American Journal of Education, 106(2), 302-333.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Easton, F. (1995). *The Waldorf impulse in education: Schools as communities that educate the whole child by integrating artistic and academic work.* (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University Teachers College).

Eccles, J. S. (2005). Subjective task value and the Eccles et al. model of achievement-related choices. In A. Elliott & C. Dweck (Eds.), *Handbook of competence and motivation*. (105-121). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Eccles, J. S., & Midgley, C. (1989). *Stage/environment fit: Developmentally appropriate classrooms for early adolescents.* Ames, R. E., & Ames, C. (Eds.). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., & Schiefele, U. (1998). Motivation to succeed. In N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.) & W. Damon (Series Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology.* (1017-1095). New York, NY: Wiley.

Felner, R. D., Ginter, M., & Primavera, J. (1982). Primary prevention during school transitions: Social support and environmental structure. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 10*(3), 277-290.

Fowler, W. J., & Walberg, H. J. (1991). School size, characteristics, and outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 13*(2), 189-202.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic books.

Gillock, K. L., & Reyes, O. (1996). High school transition related changes in urban minority students' academic performance and perceptions of self and school environment. *Journal of Community Psychology, 24*(3), 245-261.

Jackson, C. M., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2013). Alcohol use during the transition from middle school to high school: National panel data on prevalence and moderators. *Developmental Psychology, 49*(11), 2147-2158.

Kegan, R. (2009). What „form" transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning*. (35-53). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kinney, D. A. (1993). From nerds to normals: The recovery of identity among adolescents from middle school to high school. *Sociology of Education,* 66(1), 21-40.

Klaczynski, P. A., Byrnes, J. E., & Jacobs, J. E. (2001). Introduction to the special issue on the development of decision-making. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 22*(3), 225–236.

Langenkamp, A. G. (2009). Following different pathways: Social integration, achievement, and the transition to high school. *American Journal of Education, 116*(1), 69-97.

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1997). High school size: Which works best and for whom? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 19*(3), 205-227.

MacIver, D. J. (2005). Meeting the needs of young adolescents: Advisory groups, interdisciplinary teaching teams, and school transition programs. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 71*(6), 458-464.

Maher, D. (2010). Supporting students' transition from primary school to high school using the internet as a communication tool. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 19*(1), 17-30.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological review, 50*(4), 370-396.

Mizelle, N. B., & Irvin, J. L. (2000). Transition from middle school to high school. What research says. *Middle School Journal, 31*(5), 57-61.

Pearce, J. C. (2003). *From magical child to magical teen: A guide to adolescent development*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press.

Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood. *Human Development, 15*(1), 1-12.

Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (1969). *The psychology of the child*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Rawson, M. & Richter, T. (Eds.). (2000). *The educational tasks and content of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum*. Forest Row, East Sussex: Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship.

Roderick, M. (1993). *The path to dropping out: Evidence for intervention*. Westport, CT: Auburn House.

Scott, L. S., Rock, D. A., Pollack, J. M., & Ingels, S. J. (1995). *Two years later: Cognitive gains and school transitions of NELS: 88 eighth graders.* Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Seidman, E., Allen, L., Aber, J. L., Mitchell, C., & Feinman, J. (1994). The impact of school transitions in early adolescence on the self-system and perceived social context of poor urban youth. *Child development, 65*(2), 507-522.

Simmons, R. G., Burgeson, R., Carlton-Ford, S., & Blyth, D. A. (1987). The impact of cumulative change in early adolescence. *Child Development, 58*(5), 1220-1234.

Staley, B. K. (2009). *Between form and freedom: Being a teenager.* Gloucestershire, UK: Hawthorn Press.

Steiner, R. (1967). *The younger generation*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1977). *Soul economy and Waldorf education.* Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1996a). *The education of the child and early lectures on education*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1996b). *Education for adolescents*. Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1997). *The essentials of education.* Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (2000). *Practical advice to teachers*. London, UK: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (2001). *Rudolf Steiner's observations on adolescence: The third phase of human development.* D. Mitchell & C. Clouder (Eds.). Fair Oaks, CA: The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America.

Steiner, R. (2007). *Balance in teaching*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Ward, G. M. (2013). *A study of teachers' perspectives on Montessori students' transition to a traditional high school*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of South Carolina.

Weiss, C. C., & Baker-Smith, E. C. (2010). Eighth-grade school form and resilience in the transition to high school: A comparison of middle schools and K-8 schools. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 20*(4), 825-839.

Wentzel, K. R. (2005). Peer relationships, motivation, and academic performance at school. In A. Elliott & C. Dweck (Eds.), *Handbook of competence and motivation*. (105-121). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Wheelock, A., & Miao, J. (2005). The Ninth-Grade Bottleneck: An Enrollment Bulge in a Transition Year that Demands Careful Attention and Action. *School Administrator, 62*(3), 36.

Woods, P., Ashley, M., & Woods, G. (2005). *Steiner Schools in England*. Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http:// www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR645.pdf