

Master thesis

Starting School in a Waldorf Setting: Perspectives from Class
Teachers and Their Students

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the transition to school and the subsequent adaptation period in the context of Waldorf education, focusing on the intersecting perspectives of class teachers and their students. In this research, Waldorf education is presented as a *Bildung*-oriented pedagogy, meaning it supports the development of each student's unique potential. Teachers and students are studied as active agents in an interconnected relationship through the concepts of learner agency and educational authority. A basic qualitative study, inspired by a narrative approach, was used to conduct this research, based on interviews with two teachers and six first-grade students. The findings highlight the crucial nature of the first months of school, which establish foundational connections for students to themselves, to school, and to learning. They also illustrate the importance of fostering an educational relationship in which a balance is sought between student agency and teacher authority—a balance that is reflected in students' early experiences of learning and discovery. This study outlines key insights that can be drawn from the Waldorf pedagogical approach regarding school entry. It shows how educational values can be embodied in practice and through a constructive educational relationship oriented toward *Bildung*. It particularly highlights the benefits of the class teacher model, which builds a long-term relationship with students to support this transition. The study also demonstrates the value of integrating insights from educational sciences to re-examine Waldorf pedagogical principles regarding this key school transition period. It reveals bridges that can be built between a pedagogy that has long existed outside the realm of empirical research and the broader field of education.

Keywords: Educational authority, learner agency, *Bildung*, school entry, Waldorf education

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1. Introduction

Starting primary school is a pivotal moment in a child's life, marking a critical point in their development and the emergence of new learning capacities (Zhao, 2017; Loebell, 2019). Numerous studies have focused on re-evaluating this transitional and adaptive period—particularly the first year of primary school—with the aim of better supporting children (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Ogay, 2017; Zhao, 2017).

The Waldorf education model, in both its curriculum and theoretical foundation, emphasizes significant values and methods related to this transition (Avison & Rawson, 2014; Barkved, 2022; Greubel, 2014; Loebell, 2019). These values are anchored in a holistic, long-term vision of child development. Thus, upon entering school, knowledge is not introduced in an abstract way but is connected to the child's awareness through a pictorial and imaginative teaching (Barkved, 2022). Each student is encouraged to progress at their own pace, as with reading: ideally, each child should learn to read based on their own inner readiness, within the first three years of school, rather than according to an imposed timeline (Avison & Rawson, 2014; Steiner, 2020).

However, no empirical studies to date have specifically examined the transition period within Waldorf education settings. Such studies could shed light on how Waldorf educational values are enacted in practice, how the curriculum is applied during this critical adjustment period, and the benefits that could be gained from it in the field of education in general.

1.1. Background

This thesis focuses on the first year of primary school, considered here as the second half of a transitional phase that includes the final kindergarten year, as outlined by Zhao (2017). Zhao suggests that this initial year of primary school should be seen as a year of adaptation, advocating a gentle introduction to learning, in particular through play, which he terms a “study preparation period.”

In this thesis, I will refer to this phase as the “school adaption period”, the second half of the transition between kindergarten and primary school. This phase encompasses not only academic preparation but also essential educational objectives. Key elements include habit forma-

tion, social learning, and emotional balance (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Zhao, 2017). Both of these dimensions—academic and social-emotional—are considered in my discussion of the adaptation period.

Historically, the first year of school was viewed from a school-readiness perspective, with expectations focused on the child's cognitive abilities and their ability to adapt to learning and knowledge acquisition. This has sometimes made the transition abrupt for many children (Zhao, 2017) or even resulted in failure (Kokkalia et al., 2019).

Since the 1970s, research on school transition, based on an ecological view of child development, has shifted these paradigms (Tudge & Rosa, 2019). The student is now recognized as a developing individual and a unique agent. This perspective implies that schools, as much as children, must adapt, with teachers encouraged to respect each student's individuality and developmental pace (Zhao, 2017).

Waldorf education, as a child-centered pedagogy, aims to support the development of each child's unique potential at their own pace. This education is oriented toward *Bildung*, or the cultivation of the individual subject through learning (Dahlin, 2017; Schieren, 2019). Entry into school aligns with these values, where the adaptation period is viewed as a growth opportunity, and initial learning is introduced with an emphasis on individual development (Greubel, 2014).

The question of entering school also raises the issue of the student's encounter with the teacher as an authority figure and educator. Here, too, paradigms have shifted. Since the 1970s, the traditional authority of the teacher has been called into question (Robbes, 2017). Some researchers argue that the teacher's role has since been progressively devalued (Meirieu, 2018), shifting from a respected educator to a mere facilitator of learning (Biesta, 2013).

However, recent studies, emphasize the importance of teacher personality for student outcomes (Schmelzer, 2019). Researchers are thus revisiting the teacher's role as both authority and educator, suggesting it should be rooted in a relational quality and grounded in respect for the student's personhood (Robbes, 2017; Biesta, 2013; Meirieu, 2018; Hedgoose, 2008).

1.2. Personal Motivation

My interest in the transition to school dates back to my Waldorf teacher training, around 15 years ago. During that time, I had the opportunity to attend a welcoming ceremony for first-year students at a Waldorf school in France. I was deeply moved by this celebration, where the teacher greeted their new students for a journey that could last up to eight years.

The significance of the event, as I perceived it, lay in the value placed on the students' journey. I felt that the start of school was presented as the beginning of a grand adventure. The teacher, singing while playing guitar, welcomed the students as if they were boarding a ship bound for a distant, enticing destination. Each child's welcome, as a new member of the crew, felt particularly warm and inviting.

With this study, I have not only witnessed the departure but have also had the chance to explore, through the stories shared by students and teachers, the early stages of this voyage—an adventure of human discovery and the pursuit of knowledge.

1.3. Research Problem

As we have seen, shifts in theoretical paradigms and empirical studies have provided a more holistic understanding of the transition to school, one that respects the individuality of the child. In contrast, the lack of studies on this transition within Waldorf schools seemed problematic to me, particularly given the recognized contribution of Waldorf education in adapting the curriculum to the holistic development of the child. This has been acknowledged through various field studies (Ashley, 2009; Dahlin, 2017; De Souza, 2012; Randol & Peters, 2015; Woods, Ashley, & Woods, 2005). One would expect significant contributions from Waldorf schools in this area, which is so closely tied to developmental issues.

I believe it is important to explore, question, and evaluate how Waldorf schools manage this transition, both in light of current knowledge and with the goal of understanding and sharing the unique contributions of this educational approach.

Another aspect I found crucial to explore empirically is the issue of teacher authority during the transition. While the adaptation of the school as an institution to the child—through considerations of the curriculum, parent relations, the connection between kindergarten and

primary school, and teacher training systems—is vital, the child’s first encounter with school is primarily through the figure of the teacher. Understanding how the teacher establishes their authority during this transition is, in my view, a key process that needs further investigation.

Authority, in its relational aspect (Gheaus, 2018; Avison & Rawson, 2014; Robbes, 2017; Steiner, 1997), highlights the broader question of the educational relationship. This raises key questions: How can the balance between student agency and teacher authority be achieved? How can teachers guide students while respecting their individuality? How can students exercise autonomy while maintaining respect for their teacher? And how can teaching and learning be harmonized? These questions seem fundamental to me regarding the first months of school, when the teacher-student relationship is being established.

1.4. Research Purpose and Questions

The aim of my study on school entry within the context of Waldorf pedagogy is to understand the dynamics between teachers and students during the adaptation period to school, as I believe that a deeper understanding of this mutual adaptation relationship is essential. I seek to better comprehend both students and teachers as active participants. The concept of the student as an actor refers to the notion of agency, while the role of the teacher will be studied through the lens of authority. During the adaptation period, the introduction to learning plays a central role. This issue will also be explored from the perspective of the teacher-student interaction.

Therefore, I aim to explore the question of school entry and the adaptation period by focusing on these two main actors to better understand their experiences and roles. I have thus formulated two research questions for this study.

- How do first-grade pupils experience their transition and adaptation period into school within a Waldorf education setting? In what ways do their primary teachers understand and facilitate this process using Waldorf pedagogical methods?
- What are the experiences of pupils during their initial stages of learning at school? How do teachers perceive, introduce, and implement these early learning experiences?

1.5. Contributions

This study aims to contribute to discussions on the adaptation period in schools through the lens of a child-centered pedagogy that resists the global trend toward acceleration (De Souza, 2012). I hope it will facilitate the sharing of experiences that may inspire researchers and educators in the field of education more broadly. Specifically, I aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the establishment of the teacher-student educational relationship can be conceptualized.

Additionally, this study seeks to raise questions about Waldorf education practices concerning the transition process. I hope it will provide valuable insights to those involved in facilitating transitions within the Waldorf context.

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

In the introduction, I aimed to guide the reader through the origins and objectives of this study on school entry. I outlined a central research problem and introduced my research questions.

The literature review is divided into three sections. First, I introduce Waldorf education and the first-grade curriculum in relation to the concept of *Bildung*. Then, I present research on the transition to school, focusing on the notion of the student as an agent. Finally, the third section explores the teacher-student relationship, navigating between symmetry and asymmetry, and connects this to the concept of educational authority. The chapter concludes with a presentation of my conceptual framework.

The Methods chapter details the methodology used for this study. I explain my choice of a "basic qualitative study" inspired by a narrative approach. I describe how I conducted interviews with two teachers and seven first-grade students. This section also discusses various aspects of the research process: participant selection, ethical considerations, and data analysis methods.

The Findings chapter presents and analyzes the data thematically. It is structured into two sections corresponding to the two research questions. The first section focuses on the adaptation

period to a general educational level, while the second delves into the introduction of learning in relation to the school transition.

The Discussion chapter addresses the research questions by engaging in a dialogue between the findings and the literature. Through the interpretation of my findings, I aim to draw out meanings that can be shared within the research community. This chapter is structured into three parts, each discussing one of the main themes emerging from my study.

Finally, the conclusion provides a concise overview of the key takeaways from this study and its potential implications.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This study aims to explore and deepen the understanding of the school entry period within a Waldorf context, with a focus on the encounter between pupils and teachers. The school entry period and the first-grade curriculum are examined as pivotal moments in the pupil's educational journey. This study also provides an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of school, learning, and teaching in a Waldorf context, and it contributes to a broader dialogue on these topics within the scholarly debate on education.

The first part of the chapter explores Waldorf education in relation to the concept of *Bildung*. It presents how schooling is designed in terms of its progression and the educational goals it aims to achieve. This contextualization aids in understanding the first-grade curriculum within the broader framework of Waldorf education. Central to this discussion is the Waldorf perspective on child development. The concept of *Bildung* sheds light on the Waldorf educational goals and methods used to achieve them. The second part of the chapter addresses the challenges pupils face when transitioning to school, examining their initial learning experiences through the lens of learner agency. The third part focuses on the teacher's role in guiding pupils during their first steps at school, with a particular emphasis on the concept of educational authority.

2.2. Waldorf education, a pedagogy of *Bildung*

2.2.1. The notion of *Bildung*

Bildung a resurgent concept

Bildung is a complex educational concept originally associated with both Romanticism and the Enlightenment, with a history of over 200 years. The theory of *Bildung* has evolved through the contributions of various prominent educational scholars (Sjöström and Eilks, 2020). A common feature among all *Bildung* theories is their view of education not merely as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but as a lifelong process of self-development in relation to the world (Buttigieg and Calleja, 2021). According to Biesta, a *Bildung*-oriented education "is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills, and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their 'coming into the world' as unique, singular beings"(Biesta, 2007, as cited in Buttigieg and Calleja, 2021). Thus, *Bildung* is fundamentally concerned with the holistic education of the individual

Wills (2017) suggests that *Bildung*, as a pedagogical concept, is experiencing a renaissance within contemporary education, primarily because it offers a counter-paradigm to a functionalistic view of education and aligns with the notion of the learner as an agent—a key aspect in current educational discourse. Buttigieg and Calleja (2021) support this view, noting that because the outcomes of *Bildung* are unquantifiable, "it is currently often thus used as a fighting word against the extreme measurability in the educational sphere (p.3)". They argue that the notion of *Bildung* has more than regained its lost popularity.

The resurgence in popularity of *Bildung* can also be attributed to its evolution as a contemporary concept. Today, *Bildung* has evolved alongside postmodern epistemologies. A new tradition of *Bildung* emerged in the 1950s and 1960s with scholars like Erich Weniger and Wolfgang Klafki, later influenced by late/postmodern perspectives. This new *Bildung* tradition emphasizes the role of citizens in a democratic society, promotes more reflexive and critical thinking, and moves away from an essentialist vision of the self, which is now seen as emergent and provisional (Sjöström and Eilks, 2020). The harmonious development of the self in the classical building tradition has evolved to include the notion of self-deconstruction and reconstruction.

Steiner-Waldorf educational goals aligns with the notion of Bildung

The Steiner-Waldorf education movement emerged with the establishment of the first Waldorf School in Germany in 1919, a collaboration between Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and prominent spiritual figure, and Emile Molt, owner of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. Molt aimed to offer an alternative to traditional schooling to workers' children in his factory, focusing on a humanistic approach tailored to children's needs (Dahlin, 2017).

Waldorf education emphasizes self-education, transformative learning, and engagement with the whole personality, all of which align closely with the notion of Bildung (Rawson, 2021; Tyson, 2018). Tyson (2018) argues that Bildung is a central concept that can be used to empirically explore the non-measurable aspects of Waldorf education, going so far as to describe Waldorf education as a pedagogy of Bildung. Tyson (2017) defines Bildung as biographical experiences in education and links these experiences to "increased autonomy, understanding, character formation, as well as ethical and aesthetic development" (2017, p. 20).

Rawson (2021) explores the contemporary developments of the notion of Bildung. According to him, contemporary Bildung theory offers a perspective on self-formation as transformative learning, and can also be associated with the notion of emergent spirituality. Self-formation is not viewed as a continuous process but rather involves crises, existential encounters, deconstruction, and reconstruction. This aligns with Schieren's (2019) definition of learning from a Waldorf perspective, which he conceives, among other aspects, as a transformative process.

2.2.2. An education toward freedom

Waldorf education often portrays itself as an "education towards freedom". This phrase serves as the title of Calgren's book (1976), which introduced Waldorf schools to a global audience in the 1970s. Today, for example, it is prominently featured on the Federation of French Steiner-Waldorf School website¹. The notion of freedom in Waldorf education is understood as the result of a long educational process, as the development of the individual. It can therefore be closely related to the concept of Bildung.

The concept of freedom in Waldorf education is understood as a self-realization. Zech (2019), contends that the Waldorf curriculum fosters individuation and "recommends making the bio-

¹ <https://pedagogie-waldorf.fr/decouvrir-pedagogie-waldorf/>

graphical intentions of each human being fruitful for society, that is the specific potential that is and lives in every one of us (p.216)". In essence, Waldorf schools aspire to support each child and youth on the path of their life project.

The concepts of life project and potentialities both imply a developmental journey. According to Steiner (2020), education should prepare children for freedom. Ashley (2009) building upon Calgren's work emphasizes that in Steiner-Waldorf education, freedom is not merely an external acquisition like a declaration of human rights but an inner experience rooted in self-awareness.

Schieren (2019) articulates this process as the exploration, revelation, and empowerment of latent inner capacities within the context of the world.

Waldorf education strives to consider the life motives that each human being carries within them, which are partially hidden from the individual consciousness, and which must be solicited in multiple ways in the process of educational development. Ideally, education leads the young human being to a deep understanding of himself, to an ethical and moral orientation, and to giving himself motivations which, starting from a fundamentally idealistic disposition, generates the strength to achieve in his life individual goals. (p.60)

Schieren thus emphasizes that Freedom in Waldorf education embodies the realization of one's potential and implies moral and aesthetic dimensions.

This "education toward freedom" could lead to misunderstandings because it might suggest that in a Waldorf school, students are given significant freedom of choice and action. Ashley (2009) explains that while an atmosphere of freedom may be present, it's important to understand that Waldorf schools are fundamentally different from, for example, the Summerhill school model or other educational models where children are granted freedom to choose what they do, where and when they do it. In Waldorf education, reverence for the teacher and recognition of authority are considered central, especially during the early school years (Steiner, 2020), and students are only included in important decision-making processes from high school onwards (De Souza, 2012). Although students' creativity is encouraged and students' expressions taken into account, most activities are selected by the teacher. De Souza (2012) argues that there is a high degree of structure in Waldorf education.

The notion of freedom is also a driving force behind school organization (Dahlin, 2017, Schieren 2019, Ashley, 2009). Collegiality is a preeminent feature. Dahlin (2017) claims that "ideally, organizational and administrative questions should be decided on by the whole college of teachers, unanimously" (p.121). According to him, decisions based on strict a hierarchical order are not compatible with a SW approach, even if he admits that many schools have to make concessions to comply with state regulations or because they need to achieve more efficiency in decision-making. Despite these evolutions, Schieren (2019) claims that weekly teachers meetings in every school carry the democratic ideal. Dahlin speaks of schools as mini-societies that respect the rules given by their local context but who ideally keep a sense of their unique destiny together with parents and pupils.

To conclude, the notion of freedom in Waldorf education understood as the result of a long educational process, as the development of the potential of the individual in relation to the world can therefore be closely related to the concept of Bildung.

2.2.2. Waldorf perspectives on child development

The concept of child development rooted in Steiner's educational anthropology conceptualizes major stages in this journey toward freedom and self-realization. It is based on anthroposophy, a philosophy that is over a hundred years old (Dahlin, 2017). However, its interpretation and application have been critically discussed in light of contemporary research by numerous scholars associated with the Waldorf movement (Schieren & al., 2019). One way to approach this theory of development is to connect it to the notion of Bildung.

The progressive unfoldment of human constituents

Anthroposophy views the human being as a complex system or microcosm, conceptualizing humans as a four-fold organism consisting of physical, etheric (life forces), psychic, and "I" constituents. Steiner refers to these constituents as different "bodies" or "essential members". Human development is one of the concepts related to this four-fold structure (Dahlin, 2017).

The concept of child development in seven-year phases (Dahlin, 2017) is fundamental to understanding Waldorf education. One simplified way to describe it is as a process of individuation unfolding through various stages aligned with the four-fold structure of the human being.

At each new stage, a "body" that was previously enclosed within a protective envelope emancipates itself.

Loebell (2019) writes that Steiner metaphorically calls each transition from one phase to another a "birth". The first seven years of life pertain to the development of the physical body, the subsequent seven years to the "life body", followed by the "psychic body" in the next phase, and finally, from around the age of 21, the development of the "I" or individuality, where the true self can fully manifest. Each stage corresponds to the potential development of new faculties and represents a new phase of individuation, fostering autonomy and freedom (Dahlin, 2017).

Loebell (2019) argues that the concept of seven-year developmental stages can help teachers recognize the importance of creating a protective environment around the growing child. In this approach, teachers envelop children in a secure space, allowing their still-developing "bodies" to grow in a supportive setting. Building on this perspective, De Souza (2012) notes that Waldorf schools, guided by their unique view of child development, resist the broader trend toward accelerated learning. Instead, they aim to foster an environment where children can fully experience their childhood.

According to Loebell (2019), Steiner's perspective on human development promotes a holistic understanding of the diverse faculties within each child, ensuring that no single faculty is prioritized at the expense of others. By highlighting the step-by-step development of the body, inner self, independent judgment, and autonomy of the individual, this approach aims to support balanced and harmonious growth. However, Loebell claims that Steiner's developmental framework is valuable only if it honors each child's individuality. It must, therefore remain non-normative and adaptable to each child's unique path.

The child at the age of school entry

Following Steiner educational anthropology, by the age of seven, a child's body undergoes significant individualization, with inner organs reaching their final form, signaled by the change of teeth (Kranich, 2006; Loebell, 2019). This marks the end of early childhood and the beginning of a new developmental phase. According to Steiner, this phase involves the "life body," which previously shaped the physical body but now supports the child's inner life

(Dahlin, 2017; Barkved, 2022). As this shift occurs, the child begins to develop new cognitive, emotional, and social faculties, such as autonomy, emotional stability, and abstract thinking, which are crucial for their desire to learn (Loebell, 2019).

According to the Waldorf education perspective, if the child primarily develops through their will and physical body before the age of seven, they now need to develop inner faculties like feelings, imagination, and memory. Imagination, feelings, and memory are related to the life body's forces of growth (Barkved, 2022).

Steiner thus suggests that during the first years of schooling, bringing only intellectual, abstract knowledge into the classroom would be harmful to the child. Instead, he proposes that pupils are most at ease and blossom when they discover "living concepts" in a pictorial and imaginative way. Barkved (2022) demonstrates how Steiner's assertion that pictorial and imaginative thinking is a foundation for later abstract thought aligns with discoveries from neuroscientist Kjeld Fredens, who argues that abstract thought is based on pictorial-poetic thought.

At this stage, the Waldorf perspective on the child can also be compared to St-Exupery's motto from "The Little Prince": "One learns only with the heart." In this story about childhood or the child within us, the little prince does not understand adults who have forgotten their inner sensitivity. Due to their one-sided or abstract perspective on the world, they are locked in themselves and cannot relate to others, including the natural world. (Palmkvist, 2009)

2.2.3. The curriculum of first grade

A curriculum integrated to a large time-frame

In Waldorf education, the curriculum for Class One is designed to align with the beginning of the second seven-year developmental period. Class One marks the initiation of an ideally eight-year cycle, coinciding with the second seven-year period. Throughout this cycle, a class teacher guides the main lessons and maintains continuity with the same group of students over the years. Thus, Class One signifies the commencement of a long-term relationship between teachers and their pupils. Moreover, it marks the beginning of an enduring bond among students, with some remaining together until their graduation. (Avison and Rawson, 2014).

Thus, the first-grade curriculum is part of a long-term vision. This first year is designed as a foundational period in which the establishment of "good habits of classroom life and work" (p. 57) is encouraged (Avison and Rawson, 2014). Emphasis is placed on respect for others, nature, and the environment, along with fostering a curiosity for exploring the world. Building a trusting relationship between students and their teacher is a cornerstone of this foundational year.

A holistic curriculum

The introduction of early formal learning is designed to provide complete experiences that involve the body as well as inner experiences including feelings and imagination. Activities such as form drawing, where students create shapes through whole-body movements before drawing them on paper, help bridge the transition from movement to writing. Avison and Rawson (2014) explain that this approach connects students to the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of shapes, which form the basis for learning to write.

Writing is introduced through stories that personalize letters, linking their shapes and sounds to imaginative narratives. Each letter has its phonic property and its shape which emerge progressively from a story. Inside the story, the letter's sound is repeated and emphasized often through a little poem, such as "The flaming fish is as fast as a flash" and the letter's shape emerges from a picture of the story. Rawson, Masters & Avison (2013) illustrate this process:

for example, after a story about a fish winging in the water, a fish can be painted or drawn. Out of the fish an « f » can gradually develop and out of the waves, a « w ». Speech can also be enlisted, with little verses using the sounds for which the letters are being learned. Thus via picture, speech, and writing, the children are led as closely as possible to the nature of the sound. (p.51)

Avison and Rawson (2014) explain that with this method the children can gain a personal relation with the letters and that it will give them the incentive to write them beautifully.

Steiner (2020) devised this method so that children can relive a creative experience similar to that of the individuals who created the first pictograms in Egypt, Mesopotamia, or China. Returning to the pictorial aspect of writing allows one to experience the creativity inherent in the actual signs, rather than presenting them as abstract conventions.

The same qualitative approach is used for the introduction of numbers and then the first mathematical signs. The notion of quality is paramount. By encountering the quality of each shape, letter, sound, color, sign, and number... the child encounters the qualities present in the world and within themselves. The qualities that students experience in the first grade are broad universal tendencies and are often presented in polarity, such as straight and curved lines, each with their quality and forming the basis of all other shapes.

The learning of qualities and basic concepts goes hand in hand with the learning of a large number of basic skills including crafts, knitting, music, and singing. Two foreign languages are generally introduced. Fairy tales play an important role and focus on the unity between human beings, nature, animals, and the heavens.

In conclusion, the first-grade curriculum exemplifies the core intentions of Waldorf education, highlighting the importance of nurturing a long-term relationship of trust and facilitating the child's encounter with both self and the world through letters and numbers. Additionally, it demonstrates how concepts related to the adult world are not imposed externally, but rather emerge organically through the child's experiences, aligned with their imaginative consciousness.

2.3. Becoming a pupil

2.3.1. Transition from kindergarten to primary school

Numerous scholars highlight the importance of the transition from kindergarten to school, for each child's development and educational trajectory (Bosterli and Maulini, 2007; Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2016; 2019; Ogay, 2017, Zhao, 2017). This transition is generally described as challenging for the child and having long-term implications for their future development and learning abilities. It involves being introduced to the "profession of a student" and adapting to a particular mode of knowledge appropriation and the school's implicit demands (Bosterli and Maulini, 2007). Kokkalia et al. (2016) assert that it is a key moment in a child's life and educational path: "This transition from kindergarten to primary school constitutes a significant point in children's development, entailing definitive effects on their personality and the formation of their behavior, but also on their school performance" (p. 5).

Two key concepts emerge from the literature on the transition from kindergarten to elementary school: *system* and *holistic development of the student*. This section will present these concepts and their implications.

The Systemic Aspect of Transition

In the 1970s, the concept of a *system* emerged as a framework for understanding human development. A major contribution to this field was Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development (Tudge and Rosa, 2019), which, after over a decade of study, proposed that human development results from a synergy between the developing individual and the context in which they are situated. While the individual plays an active role in their development, they are also interdependent with other actors, with these interactions forming a system. This system can either support or hinder healthy development.

The system can be viewed on a small or large scale (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Tudge and Rosa, 2019; Zhao, 2017). For instance, schools, kindergartens, and families form a micro-system, while the macrosystem includes a country's policies, culture, ideologies, and social values. Between these levels, elements like parents' working conditions or local education policies also play a role, with interdependence occurring at all levels.

Since Bronfenbrenner's contribution, numerous studies have used ecological development theory and the concept of systems to explore the transition from kindergarten to school (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Ogay, 2017; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Zhao, 2017). These studies often focus on relationships between various actors, such as between parents and the school, schools and kindergartens, and on the role of public policies in education.

A significant theoretical implication of ecological development theory is the idea that schools—as a subsystem—and the broader system must adapt to the child just as much as the child adapts to them. Thus, the concept of *school-readiness*, a central idea in understanding the school transition, is no longer limited to the child alone. As Williams and Lerner (2019) state, "School readiness includes the readiness of the individual child, the school's readiness for children, and the ability of the family and community to support optimal early child development" (p.1).

This perspective invites a critical examination of the school institution. Ogay (2017) demonstrated how implicit expectations within schools could hinder students' adaptation, while Zhao (2017) showed how schools and teachers have long imposed expectations on young students.

Considering the Whole Child

The second key concept for understanding transition highlighted in the literature is the importance of considering the child's overall development—their full personality—not only their cognitive skills upon school entry (Kokkalia et al., 2016; Zhao, 2017). This approach now encompasses physical, language, social, and emotional domains (Kokkalia et al., 2016), which are essential to effective learning. These factors are particularly critical at school entry, a period when the child builds their personality through interaction with a group (Zhao, 2017). The child is seen as an active agent in their transition, with intrinsic motivation and well-being being central. A long-term view of development is encouraged (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2016; Zhao, 2017).

For the school adaptation period—the first months of first grade class—Zhao (2017) recommends assessing children based on their adaptability as a whole, rather than solely on academic outcomes. Criteria such as an interest in learning, self-confidence, curiosity, the ability to listen, and self-perception are noted as important. This shift reduces pressure on academic performance and instead emphasizes students' attitudes, habits, and motivation. Finally, Zhao suggests a "study preparation period" with activities centered on play to support the cognitive transition from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.

2.3.2. Transition in Waldorf schools/towards active participation

Transition operated by the school itself

Regarding Waldorf education, as we saw in the first part, the transition to primary school is mainly viewed through the lens of the transition between the first and second seven-year phases of development. This is reflected in the curricula of kindergarten and primary school, which are conceived in radically different ways. In kindergarten, the child develops through free play, activities, and imitation in a setting that replicates family life. Chalkboards and no-

tebooks are absent. The child then enters school and begins formal learning in a classroom setting (Avison and Rawson, 2014; Barkved, 2022; Loebell, 2019) .

However, the elements of continuity are important and the transition happens gradually. The first three years of the second seven-year phase are thus considered an echo of the first phase of development(Loebell, 2019). The child is still considered to be in a state of "dreamy wholeness" (Avison and Rawson, 2014). Learning the first concepts goes through a preliminary phase of activity and imitation, which partially recalls kindergarten activities. The importance of circle games or music approached in the pentatonic mode are also examples of activities that retain a quality close to kindergarten and are still widely practiced during the first three years of school (Avison and Rawson, 2014). Greubel (2014) characterizes this passage between kindergarten and school in Waldorf education as a progressive transition between implicit and explicit learning.

The transition between kindergarten and school is therefore designed to gradually introduce explicit learning while respecting the rhythm of each child. The goal is to stimulate the child to learn from themselves, from their desire. This is the case, for example, with writing and reading, which can be acquired at different paces for each child during the first three years. Thus, it is as much the school and the teacher adapting to the child as the reverse.

Transition operated by the child herself

If the transition is thought of as progressive and adapted to the rhythm of each child, its transformative character is emphasized. During the transition, the child experiences new possibilities but also faces new challenges. "At the same time, there are changes in likes and dislikes, and these bring with them the possibility of boredom, social disharmony, uncertainty, and anxiety, and together with all this the first inkling of a struggle with personal identity" (Greubel, p.134).

Thus, the passage from one phase to another is not simply given; the child is an actor in their development. The transition involves the child in their personality, each making the passage according to their rhythm and personality. The child must overcome challenges related to moving from early childhood to childhood, as their consciousness and relationship to the world changes. Greubel (2014) explains that many researchers see crises and adaptation to

difficult situations as the origin of development. The transformative potential of crises is an essential idea for thinking about transitions in Waldorf education.

The first grade welcoming ceremony and the introductory address on learning

Two distinctive aspects emerge from the literature on transitions in Waldorf schools, particularly concerning the first day of school.

The first is a celebration known in English-speaking contexts as the Rose Ceremony². This event is organized to welcome students entering first grade. The whole school community gathers to witness this important shift in a child's life. As each new student approaches the front row of seats, they are greeted by an older high school student who presents them with a rose. Once all students are gathered, the teacher typically shares a story with the new class. These ceremonies take various forms in Waldorf schools around the world.

Yotov (2018) has conducted a case study on this ceremony, focusing on the first day of school at a Bulgarian Waldorf school. He describes the welcoming ceremony for first-grade students as a rite of passage. The use of symbolic elements—such as an arch or bridge, the presence of teachers and students, music, and storytelling—helps to symbolically introduce students into a new institution that embodies certain values and within which they will have a meaningful role.

Another distinctive feature is what might be called an introductory address on learning. In his "First Teachers' Course", Steiner (2020) advises to the teachers to speak to the students in their first hours of school to introduce the meaning of learning and what it means to be a student. He offers a sample speech intended to help students understand that they are in school to develop their faculties under the guidance of adults who have already traveled this path.

For Steiner, it is essential for children to realize that they must learn in order to grow and to approach this journey with gratitude toward the adults teaching them. Steiner believes that students should actively engage in their learning, recognizing that they are growing for their

² <https://www.waldorfpublications.org/blogs/book-news/29067713-the-rose-ceremony-in-waldorf-schools>

own development, all while holding a sense of admiration for their teachers. He sees this as a fundamental foundation for all future learning.

In conclusion to this sub-section, one can say that the Waldorf school proposes a challenging situation for the child that allows them to transform, but great attention is given to accompany the child individually and secure them in this passage. Becoming a student is at the heart of this process. While Waldorf pedagogy seems to offer an interesting and original contribution concerning the transition to school and the introduction of learning, it has unfortunately not been explored empirically.

2.3.3. The Student as an Actor in Their Educational Journey

A child entering school becomes a student. But what is their role as a student? Should they conform to expectations, or can they start from their motivation? To understand the educational journey from the student's perspective, the concept of learner agency has become fundamental (Manyukhina and Wyse, 2019) It can be simply defined as the student's ability to impact their learning.

The concept of agency plays an important role in educational policies worldwide. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, endorsed by most member states of the United Nations, recognizes the notion of participation as a fundamental principle. This implies that the child is considered an agent (Jerome and Starkey, 2022). The OECD³ also promotes learner agency in its program: "student agency for 2030". States incorporate the importance of active student participation in the learning process into their educational policies. The concept of agency is related to the idea of learning to learn, which is one of the five basic domains of the framework developed by the French education system⁴.

Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) write that the idea of considering children as actors in their education is based on "long-standing philosophies of child-centered teaching, appearing for example in the works of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Rudolf Steiner" (p.2). Manyukhina and Wyse write that these educational philosophies have been complemented by

³ <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/future-of-education-and-skills-2030.html>

⁴ <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-socle-commun-de-connaissances-de-competences-et-de-culture-12512>

the development of children's rights, recognizing the child as a person and not merely as a being in development.

For Manyukhina and Wyse (2019), the concept of agency now allows for a rigorous and empirically informed exploration of how to promote child-centered education. They report that several studies demonstrate the positive effects on learning, both academically and in terms of student well-being when the student is considered and engaged in meaningful experiences.

However, Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) write that discussions on curricula do not take sufficiently into account the notion of learner agency. Yet, according to them, the curriculum is the tool that enables the operationalization of student agency. They show that curricula based on the acquisition of knowledge and skills certainly have results regarding societal integration, but are often detrimental to the individual agency. Studies indicate for example the negative effects of exams, particularly on students' self-esteem.

Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) believe that a more significant place should be given to child-centered curricula. These curricula are designed to allow for the co-construction of knowledge and emphasize values and attitudes more than outcomes.

A strong focus on generic as opposed to disciplinary knowledge and skills, a consistent emphasis on values and attitudes as equally important educational outcomes, and encouragement of pedagogical approaches that are conducive to achieving the aims of whole-person development and lifelong learning are the key features distinguishing the learner-centered curriculum model from the knowledge-based and skills-oriented types (p. 12).

According to them, the curriculum of the future should incorporate more elements present in child-centered models to enable students to exercise their capacities. The concept of agency allows for a holistic approach that enables students to develop as individuals. These recommendations, according to them, align with the directions given by UNESCO for a sustainable future.

The concept of agency is often related to pupil voice, which is becoming increasingly significant in studies about education (Hopkins, 2008). Hubert and Braud (2017), French educationalists expert in pupil voice, also support the idea of co-constructing knowledge at school. They write that pupils are experts in their school. According to them, the knowledge developed at school should be produced through a dialogical approach that incorporates both pupils'

and teachers' points of view. They claim that pupil voice can help improve the curriculum and enhance teachers' self-perceptions and methods. They give the example of a passionate history teacher realizing some shortcomings in her teaching methods after listening to reports from one of her pupil's interviews. They claim that many teachers would be willing to listen to and take into account pupil voices if they were supported. Hubert and Braud argue that integrating pupil voice is a factor in pupils' well-being, allowing the school to be a place for the pupils.

The concept of learner agency can also be an important tool for exploring how the child exercises their role as an actor within the context of Waldorf education. Allowing the child to express their life motives in the world aligns well with the notion of agency. Indeed, according to Manyukhina and Wyse (2019), “agency is best defined not simply in terms of an individual’s will and capacity to act, but as ‘the socioculturally mediated capacity to act’ ” (p. 5). This dual gesture of self-awareness and the ability to impact not only oneself but also the world aligns with the aims of Waldorf education.

The ability to feel like an active participant in one's education and to be considered as an individual seems to be the strength of Waldorf pedagogy. Dahlin (2017) compiled the results of international studies on Waldorf pedagogy. One important aspect is the fact that Waldorf students have a more positive outlook on the future and the impact they can have. They are more focused on their personal relationship with knowledge and studies, identify with their school, and are enthusiastic about their learning experiences. Randol and Peters (2015) draw the same conclusions, and they also report that the feeling of having learned how to learn is higher than in other educational contexts.

In conclusion, one can say that the Waldorf school proposes a challenging situation for the child that allows them to transform, but great systemic attention is given to individually accompany the child and secure them in this passage. Becoming a student is at the heart of this process. While Waldorf pedagogy seems to offer an interesting and original contribution concerning the transition to school and the introduction of learning, it has not been explored empirically. Studies based on contemporary educational concepts would therefore be necessary to document this crucial moment in each child's journey.

2.4. The Teacher-Student relationship

My research focuses particularly on the transition to school and the initial learning experiences from the perspective of the teacher and the student. This third section will therefore explore more specifically the interaction between the teacher and their students within the school institution.

2.4.1. Education and authority as gifts to the pupil, suggesting asymmetry in the relationship

Entering school means encountering with the teacher as someone who teaches. According to Meirieu (2018), the teacher's role has been discredited, and their personality anonymized by an overwhelming bureaucracy since the 1990s. Biesta (2013) goes as far as to speak of the disappearance of the teacher. According to him, this disappearance is due to the emergence of purely constructivist educational theories that reduce education to the notion of learning.

According to Biesta (2013), these constructivist trends in education—which he relates to neo-liberal ideology—lead to a negation of the role of the teacher as a teacher. The teacher becomes a learning facilitator and a resource for the pupil. Biesta, on the contrary, argues for the recognition of the teacher as a person who has a truth to offer, not solely as someone at the disposal of the pupils. Biesta calls this truth that can be given by the teacher "the gift of teaching".

This type of truth can only be taught if the pupil is ready to receive it as a gift. The pupil must recognize that the teacher has something to teach. The pupils understand that they cannot learn everything on their own. They are surprised by the teaching that can bring new viewpoints on their life, new ways of doing things, and new ways of being in the world.

Gheaus (2018) shows that, for some researchers, the state of childhood, which entails dependency and vulnerability, is a state that should be exited as quickly as possible. This view leads to an education that promotes the earliest possible autonomy, with the goal being to escape a harmful state of dependency. Gheaus challenges this approach and presents the viewpoint of various philosophers who have shown that the period of childhood also contains inherent benefits linked to its condition.

The special goods of childhood of interest here are the experiencing of caring affection from adults whom the children can trust and love wholeheartedly and unstructured time during which children engage in fantasy play, experimentation, and undirected exploration of the world and of their minds. (p.66)

Dependency and vulnerability thus should not be seen as negative only because this state also offers the opportunity to enjoy life without responsibility and thus with greater freedom, as well as to be the object of loving attention.

The question of authority (or its absence) seems fundamental to understanding how a teacher welcomes and guides a student upon their entry and during the first months of school. This is particularly the case in my study, which takes place in the context of Waldorf education, where authority is a key concept. In the Waldorf curriculum, the notion of authority is indeed associated with the second seven-year period of development and, therefore, must be established during the first months at school. Establishing progressively a benevolent authority relationship is one of the main educational aims of the teacher during the first grade (Avison and Rawson, 2014; Steiner, 2020).

Robbes (2017), a renowned French researcher in education, reminds us that from an anthropological perspective, authority is recognized as a founding principle of humanization. Drawing on Marcelli, he writes that authority is what enables a child to be introduced into human relationships. Authority acts as a protective boundary that allows each generation to be gradually introduced to the world. Authority is the intergenerational transmission of the capacity to become a human subject, autonomous and creative.

Just like Robbes, Steiner (2020) also links intergenerational transmission and authority. According to Steiner, students and teachers must understand the importance of connections between generations from the very first lesson. He suggests that teachers introduce learning by fostering a sense of reverence for previous generations.

Your teaching will not be successful unless it is permeated with a certain respect for the previous generation. This needs to be cultivated in the children, albeit in a very subtle way that speaks to their feeling life. Children need to look up with respect and reverence to the achievements of older generations and to everything they still must learn at school. This helps them to see the higher being in the adults around them. You will not achieve much without having awakened this

feeling. (p. 98)

This sense of reverence for previous generations will form the foundation of a just authority based on the principle of transmission rather than power and obedience.

2.4.2. Educational authority, suggesting symmetry in the relationship

Robbes (2017), examines the transformations of the concept of authority within contemporary society and in the field of education. He argues that a reductive view of authority, equating it with coercive power and discipline, has led to an educational deadlock. His works aim to re-define this notion and rehabilitate its practice within an educational framework.

According to Robbes (2017), the dominant trend in French society until the end of World War II was an authoritarian conception and exercise of authority, which he calls traditional authority. This type of authority was legitimized by the status of the individuals exercising it. In the field of education, traditional authority was the dominant model. The status of the teacher allowed them to exercise unquestioned power and to use physical or psychological coercion on the class or individual students. Robbes observes that today, although physical violence by teachers has decreased, coercion and violence are more likely to occur at a psychological level. This type of authority, although heavily questioned, has not entirely disappeared.

Robbes (2017) explains that the questioning of traditional authority, beginning at the end of World War II and intensifying with the cultural revolution of 1968, led to a rejection of authority as such. He refers to this as 'evacuated authority'. This concept represents the societal and educational trend of "refusing the idea of authority and its exercise, due to its supposedly illegitimate and anti-educational nature (p.19)." According to him, the harmful consequences of rejecting authority, which has included a crisis in intergenerational transmission and a loss of guidance for young people, have prompted some segments of society to call for a return to traditional authority, particularly since the 2000s. This perspective has been echoed by parts of the media, politicians, and public opinion. According to Robbes, both evacuated authority and traditional authority are anti-educational models, leading students either to suffer from violence or to feel insecure in the world.

These conceptions of authority overlook the original meaning of the word, which refers to the term "author": "by delving into the origin of the meaning of authority, the word has its root in

auctor (author) and is related to *augere* (to grow, to increase)" (Robbes, 2017, p.80). Authority thus refers to the ability, through the acquisition of knowledge and skills, to become one's own author.

The author would be someone who, by acquiring certain knowledge and skills, gradually conquers the ability to authorize themselves to access personal responsibility and autonomy, in their own life and in their relationships with others. The subject of their existence, they build themselves through an unfinished story, the elucidation of which contributes to developing sufficient self-confidence...(Robbes, 2017, p.36)

Authority therefore includes the notions of autonomy, self-confidence, and personal responsibility, it equates with self-authorisation and leads to a strengthening of one's personality.

Robbes (2017) specifies that authorizing oneself can only be learned through contact with others and leads to augmentation and creation. The intergenerational transmission process is not merely about passing down a tradition but about enhancing it through a creative encounter.

However, the author only enhances tradition if its transmission occurs through a creative process, hence the indispensable pedagogical reflection of the teacher. Enhancement occurs when a teacher is willing to confront their knowledge and shortcomings with their students, without being too destabilized by their unforeseen reactions, but with the concern to help them take actions that can enable them to engage in their process of self-authorization. (p. 83)

Thus authority can be defined as a process of transmission of the ability to create.

Edgoose (2008) advocates for a teaching approach open to the unexpected, grounded in Levinas's ideas of hope and time. He suggests moving away from a monological vision of the future, where teachers view themselves as authors of an idealized outcome, and instead embracing a dialogical conception based on messianic hope. In this view, the future emerges through unpredictable interactions with others, particularly students. According to Edgoose, Levinas emphasizes that the future is shaped by our encounters with others, which are inherently unpredictable. This unpredictability, evident in classroom dynamics, challenges teachers to focus on the present reality and engage meaningfully with their students.

2.4.3. Toward a beloved authority

The concept of "beloved authority" used in the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum to describe the authority exercised by primary school teachers can be linked to the search for an authority that is expressed through relationships, respect for the child, and protection. The term "beloved authority" can be compared to Marcelli's transformation of the French word "surveillance" equivalent to watch over into the word "bonne-veillance", good watch or good attention. "bonne-veillance" is thus "a benevolent supervision that consists of watching over one's child in such a way that they are shielded from bad experiences but can also have and receive good experiences, the foundations on which a trust relationship can be built" (Marcelli as quoted in Robbes, 2017, p. 75). In the same way, beloved authority is an authority based on care and trust aiming to offer children constructive experiences and to protect them from negative ones.

Avison and Rawson (2014) explain the notion of beloved authority in Waldorf education. Like Robbes, they rely on the etymology linking authority to the word author. According to him, an adult who manages to acquire self-mastery (rather than seeking to exert power over others) commands authority among students who also seek this self-mastery. Avison and Rawson explain that authority is sought by the student and must be freely accepted, not obtained through coercion. The main task of the teacher, especially during the early years, is to gain the trust of the students who perceive that this authority is exercised in their interest. Thus, beloved authority also includes a notion of reciprocity. To be effective, it must be freely consented to by the student. It becomes a cherished relationship of care and respect.

For Steiner, the teacher's effort is crucial because they serve as a role model for the child who is in the process of self-development (Dahlin, 2017). Therefore, a teacher must prioritize their personal development and learning if they expect the same from their students. Schmeltzer (2019) reports that Steiner encourages teachers to enter the classroom "with fear and trembling" and to be able to say at the end of the year, "It is you who have learned the most" (Steiner as quoted in Schmeltzer, p.236). In Steiner's pedagogy, reciprocity almost becomes a reversal: it is the teacher who must learn and fear the most. Only through this effort can authority be just and beloved. Otherwise, it will ultimately be justly rejected (Avison and Rawson, 2014).

The concept of beloved authority, in my view, can only be understood in connection with the teacher's self-work, which is one of the cornerstones of Waldorf education. Teachers must continually cultivate and develop their own abilities in order to guide the child in a fair and appropriate manner. This includes developing inner abilities such as attentiveness and an inner connection with the child. The practice of concentration and meditation exercises is recommended for teachers. (Schmeltzer, 2019)

2.4.4. Empirical Studies on the Teacher and Their Authority

The new perspectives on the importance of the teacher and authority in education are supported by empirical studies. A major publication is John Hattie's synthesis of 50,000 studies in his book *Visible Learning*. According to Schmeltzer (2019), "it strikingly highlights the importance of the teacher's personality and their relationship with students for the success of any learning (p.232)." Hopkins (2008), in a study conducted with 180 students aged 7 to 11, reports that one of the criteria mentioned by the students for good working conditions in the classroom is having a teacher who is firm and fair. She indicates that similar results have been found in other empirical studies. These studies tend to confirm that students seek fair authority and guidance from the teacher.

The results of empirical studies tend to show the positive impacts of the emphasis on teacher's personality in Waldorf education. Randoll and Peters (2015) report that teacher-student relationships are more appreciated than in other school contexts. According to them, these results are due to the variety of activities offered, especially artistic ones, and the teacher's ethics. The significant authority given to the teacher in Waldorf education thus seems to go hand in hand with a positive relationship with the student. This would tend to prove that the concept of beloved authority is effective. Randoll and Peters also report that a survey on the class teacher principle shows that this system provides a stable and secure relationship for the student.

Nicholson (2000), in a qualitative study about the teaching methods of a class 6 teacher in a Waldorf school during a three-week lesson block on medieval history, explains how the teacher uses a great variety of forms of representation to convey meaning and understanding. These forms include storytelling, visual arts, written work, reciting, singing and music, preparing a play, and moral lessons. Nicholson shows how the teacher engages individually and creates multiple layers of experiences that complement one another. This study illustrates the

class teacher's holistic approach to teaching. It can be compared with Biesta's notion of teaching as a gift. The teacher does not simply transmit knowledge but offers multiple opportunities for experiences (in which she engages) to the students.

To conclude, beyond certain trends that sideline the teacher in favor of programs designed at a meta-level, numerous studies support the unique role of the teacher and reposition it in its relational and creative dimension. The teacher is also seen as the one who connects generations. The rehabilitation of their role as a teacher and their authority is increasingly perceived as essential, especially for sustaining a truly democratic society.

2.4.4. Symmetry and asymmetry

If some trends have focused education exclusively on the teacher or the child, this section has shown that many researchers see this as a dead end. Education is thus conceived as a process involving co-construction, encounter, reciprocity, and mutual respect. The two main actors can strengthen each other.

The concept of the student as an agent can relate to the notion of authority. Both notions indeed speak of the same process of being the author of one's own life. It can be said that the student as an agent learns to acquire authority. Thus, empowering the student does not happen at the expense of the teacher, or vice versa. Empowerment can instead occur through interaction; it is the result of a system. Thus, entry into school can be seen as a crucial moment for the powerful transformative potential of this educational possibility. It should lay the foundation for this relationship.

The educational relationship therefore implies, to quote Robbes (2017), a symmetry. The school is a learning institution that seeks to understand the students to be ready to welcome them. The teacher engages in an intense process of questioning, self-work, and learning. On their part, the student is an expert in their school, a person to be respected in their unique identity. They possess unique assets.

On the other hand, differences and asymmetry are not denied. The child and the student are vulnerable and must be able to rely on fundamental anthropological structures guaranteed by institutions and adults. If this asymmetry is a source of abuse, rejecting it, according to the

authors presented, carries an equally great risk. Therefore, it must be acknowledged but seek an educational legitimacy based on children's rights.

2.5. Conceptual framework

The concepts used in the study about the *period of adaptation to school* were *Bildung*, *learner agency*, *educational authority*.

Bildung refers to education as a process of self-development in relation to the world. A *Bildung*-oriented education emphasizes learning as transformative, meaning that knowledge and experiences are deeply integrated into an individual's personal faculties. The ultimate goal of a *Bildung*-oriented education is the emergence and development of the individual as a whole.

The concept of *learner agency* highlights how students actively participate in and shape their own educational journeys. This idea is crucial for understanding how students take ownership of their learning, viewing education from the student's perspective. It aligns with the principles of "learning to learn" and emphasizes the importance of pupil voice.

The concept of *educational authority* addresses the teacher-student relationship in both its symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects. This concept underscores the significance of the teacher's role while also emphasizing the importance of reciprocity in the relationship. *Educational authority* is closely linked to teaching approaches that incorporate relational dynamics and mutual respect. *Educational authority* is linked to the ability to become an author, to authorize oneself. This concept resonates with the role of the class teacher in Waldorf education, who must embody a benevolent authority, a guiding figure dedicated to nurturing the child's potential.

The notion of *Bildung* refers to educational goals and has been identified as a concept that helps elucidate the objectives of Waldorf education. I take the standpoint that pedagogical and educational goals necessarily manifest through the teacher-student relationship. The implementation of an education oriented toward *Bildung* can only occur within this educational relationship. To explore this, I draw on the concepts of learner agency and educational authority. It is through authority and agency, as well as through learning and teaching, that education (*Bildung*) takes place.

The *period of adaptation to school* is studied through this lens. A child's adaptation to school is linked to educational values, which in this study are defined within the framework of *Bildung*. Thus, this transitional period is seen as a means of guiding the emerging individual, offering the child an opportunity to develop their potential in a new way.

This study focuses on how the adaptation process unfolds through the involvement of both the student and the teacher. The adaptation period is examined from the perspective of the student learning to become an actor (agent) and the teacher establishing their authority (author).

The concept of learner agency serves as a tool to understand the adaptation process from the student's perspective within a Waldorf setting. The concept of educational authority is used to deepen our understanding of the class teacher's efforts to support the students during this transitional phase. It allows us to examine the paradoxical role of the teacher, who must both welcome the student as a child and as an individual in a symmetrical relationship, while also acting as a mentor and guide in an asymmetrical relationship for the developing students.

The concepts of *Bildung*, learner agency, and educational authority, particularly in relation to the transition period, seem best suited to shed light on a child-centered pedagogy. A pedagogy which is oriented toward *Bildung* and gives a central role to the teacher's authority.

2.6. Summary

In the first section, Waldorf education is explored in connection with the concept of *Bildung*, focusing on the child around their seventh year and the first-grade curriculum. *Bildung* refers to an education that emphasizes the holistic development of the individual in relation to the world. Waldorf's motto, "education towards freedom," aligns with *Bildung*. This path is conceptualized through significant seven-year developmental phases, during which various faculties gradually unfold. At around the age of seven, the child is seen as accessing deeper internal capacities, which become essential drivers for learning. The first-grade curriculum reflects this, describing the initial stages of learning as holistic, with a clear connection to a long-term vision for the child's development.

The second section examines the transition into school and the process of learning the role of a student, with a focus on the concept of *agency*. Current perspectives emphasize the critical

importance of this transition in shaping the student's future success in school. This process is now recognized as complex, involving various actors, including parents, teachers, and the wider educational environment. Increasingly, the individual child is considered, with a particular emphasis on motivational factors. The concept of *learner agency* is explored in depth as a key framework for understanding and supporting the child as an active participant in both school and the broader world. This concept also enables empirical study and the implementation of child-centered pedagogical approaches, such as those found in Waldorf education.

The third section delves into the teacher-student relationship through the lens of *educational authority*. Starting school introduces the student to the figure of the teacher and the manner in which authority and teaching are exercised. This section demonstrates that authority, when understood in educational terms, is not contradictory to a child-centered pedagogy or to the view of the student as an active agent. Instead, authority is seen as a guiding force that fosters the student's own sense of authorship. The concept of educational authority helps frame the teacher-student relationship in both its symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The aim of my study is to explore how a particular period of schooling is experienced by both teachers and pupils: the first months of grade one class. A crucial time for pupils who discover school and learnings but similarly for teachers who are welcoming very young pupils they have never met before in a new context and undertake the task to introduce the first learnings.

In order to study this theme I outlined the following research questions:

- How do first-grade pupils experience their transition and adaptation period into school within a Waldorf education setting? In what ways do their primary teachers understand and facilitate this process using Waldorf pedagogical methods?
- What are the experiences of pupils during their initial stages of learning at school? How do teachers perceive, introduce, and implement these early learning experiences?

This chapter outlines the methods used in the study. First, I explain the rationale for choosing a basic qualitative study, inspired by narrative traditions. Next, I explain the process of selection of participants. Third, I provide an overview of the data collection methods. Then, I detail the method of analysis. Following that, I address the issues of quality and ethics as well as the study's methodological limitations.

3.2. Rationale

My study comes with the framework of constructivist philosophical tradition, which posits that reality is not objective but rather individually and socially constructed (Giliberto, 2014). In the context of education, this philosophy highlights the learner's active role in the process of knowledge construction. According to Montecillo (2024), learners "construct knowledge through their experiences and interactions with the world, rather than passively receiving information from teachers." This approach is central to child-centered pedagogies and thus relates to my research's topic.

As Given that the aim of my study is to understand the experiences of both teachers and students in the school setting, I opted for a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research enables the exploration of social realities through the experiences and perspectives of individuals immersed in the studied context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Among the various qualitative methods, I chose a basic qualitative study inspired by a narrative approach using interviews. According to Merriam (2015) the overall purpose of a basic qualitative study is "to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p.24) and it is particularly well suited to study educational processes.

A narrative approach specifically focuses on the meanings conveyed through stories. Within this framework, it is emphasized that individuals construct their identity and reality through storytelling (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As such, narratives provide valuable insights into how people interpret their experiences, aligning well with a constructivist perspective.

My study focuses on students and teachers as individual actors, exploring education through the concept of *Bildung*, which is central to my conceptual framework. As discussed in the literature review, *Bildung* refers to the transformative biographical experiences within education

(Tyson, 2017). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) note that a key feature of the narrative approach is its focus on individual experiences, making it especially well-suited to this study.

Another key aspect of my study is the focus on the teacher-student relationship. The events that occur in the school setting affect both teachers and students, making this relationship central to the educational experience. Once again, the narrative approach seemed fitting. According to Clandinin (2016), narratives must always be understood relationally.

Working from the definition of narrative inquiry, I note how this simple definition, in many ways, assume the relational—the relational between the person and his/her world; a temporal understanding of the relational between past, present and future, including the relation to the intergenerational; the relational between person and place; the relational between events and feelings, the relational between us as people; the relational between physical world and people; the relational in our cultural, institutional, linguistic and familial narratives; and so on. (p.23)

A story is always shaped by the individual's interactions with various aspects of life, including relationships with others. Therefore, a narrative approach offers a valuable tool for deepening the understanding of teacher-student relationships. characteristic of my study is the focus on the teacher-pupil relationship.

A third characteristic of my study is the focus on practical and experiential aspects of the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum. I intend to study the enacted and experienced curriculum or life-course curriculum. According to both Tyson (2017, 2018) and Clandinin (2006, 2016, 2018) the knowledge of the curriculum as a whole cannot be gathered abstractly or technically. It is a knowledge that lies within the actors. Teachers and pupils have a unique and precious knowledge. Their knowledge is storied knowledge (Clandinin, 2018). In other words, it is narrative knowledge, and its richness is, according to them, best rendered through a narrative approach.

Lastly, I would also like to mention that the narrative approach suits particularly my frame of mind. As a history teacher, I tell stories almost every day. I am particularly at ease and used to dive in some other people life, to see the reality through their eyes. To choose the narrative approach meant also to exercise my narrative inclination in the realm of research about education.

3.3. Sampling and data sources

For my study, I employed purposeful sampling. As defined by Savin-Baden and Major (2013), purposeful sampling involves the "careful selection of members of the community likely to provide the best information" (p. 314). Therefore, participant selection was aligned with the specific objectives of the study.

Since my research focuses on the student-teacher relationship and the co-construction of knowledge between these two groups in the context of a first-grade class, I chose to interview both teachers and students. Participants were selected from two different first-grade classes in separate institutions.

First, two teachers were selected from different Waldorf schools in France. The primary criterion for teacher selection was their familiarity with Waldorf education. I decided that the participants should have formal training in Waldorf education and at least five years of teaching experience in a Waldorf school. Additionally, they needed to be currently teaching as the main teacher in a first-grade class. Ultimately, two teachers were selected and anonymized as "Tina" and "Jack." Both have completed formal Waldorf training.

- Tina has been teaching for ten years in Waldorf schools in both England and France. She has primarily taught 6th to 8th-grade classes, initially as a subject teacher and later as a class teacher.
- Jack has thirteen years of experience as a class teacher in both state and Waldorf schools, mainly at the primary level.

Pupils were selected from the two first-grade classes during a preliminary visit, a process detailed in the following sub-chapter. I selected six children, aged six to seven years old: four girls and two boys, anonymized as Mary, Zita, Lily, Stephanie, Alain, and Tom.

3.4. Data collection method

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted through interviews with a first-grade student and a teacher. Malmqvist et al. (2019) assert that pilot studies are especially valuable for novice researchers,

as they enable them "to be better informed and prepared to face the challenges that are likely to arise in the substantive study and more confident in the instruments to be used for data collection" (p.1). Janghorban et al. (2014) explain that planning data collection is not a mechanical process but requires creativity on the part of the researcher, which a pilot study can stimulate by providing a more grounded understanding of the research environment.

In the context of my research, the pilot study mainly helped me recognize the particular challenges of interviewing young children and allowed me to refine my approach by using more concrete and image-based questions. I also became more fully aware of the importance of building a trusting relationship before conducting the interview. This insight encouraged me to plan a preliminary visit prior to the interviews, which I describe next.

Preliminary visit

Before conducting interviews with both teachers and student participants, I carried out a three-day visit to the classroom. The purpose of this visit was to meet the participants in their natural setting and to select the child informants. I am presenting this approach here because it is part of the method for collecting my data.

My interactions with the teachers began with phone conversations after they had agreed to participate and signed the consent forms. During these informal discussions, we delved into the details of the project, planned my classroom visits, and scheduled the interviews with both the teachers and the students. We agreed that I would be present each morning during the main lesson.

The first day in the classroom was dedicated to observation and informal meetings. The teacher introduced me to the class. On the second day, I introduced the project to the children in terms appropriate for their age, using a narrative approach. I shared my story as a researcher, recounting my visits to friends in different parts of the world. I spoke vividly about their way of life, incorporating a dialogue between me and my friends. Essentially, I told the children about my plan to write a book about the adventures students entering school in France, a book that my friends would be very interested to read.

A key aspect of this introduction was emphasizing that the children were important participants and would be considered collaborators if they chose to participate. I asked if they would

be willing to help me write the book about their first-grade adventures. This approach aimed to involve them as active contributors rather than passive informants. I chose to use the word "book" because it is a concept that is more concrete and familiar to children than a master's thesis. The term "thesis" does not resonate with their lived experiences or vocabulary.

After sharing my story, I initiated a conversation with the class by asking the students what events since the start of school they thought would be interesting to share. Although I did not record their responses or use them as data, this informal conversation served as a valuable preparation for the interviews and helped me refine my interview questions.

On the third day, I engaged in small group conversations and invited those interested to show me parts of the school and discuss them. Again, this was very valuable for me in order to better understand the context. The fourth and fifth days were dedicated to the interviews themselves.

The warm welcome from the students, their enthusiasm in interacting with me, helping me understand their classroom life, and sharing stories about themselves reassured me of the value of this visit.

Interviews

I used interviews as the sole method for gathering the data necessary for my study. As Merriam (2015) explains, "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 108). In the context of my study, interviews are justified because the research focuses on the first month of schooling, a period that cannot be fully observed in just a few days. Additionally, the goal is to understand this experience from the participants' perspective, gaining insight into how they perceive and live through the situation.

Choice of semi-structured interviews

I chose semi-structured interviews as my method for collecting data. Since my study focused on a specific situation—the transition and adaptation period—I needed a structured format to ensure the discussion stayed on topic, while also allowing flexibility for participants to express their unique perspectives. This is the strength of semi-structured interviews. As Smith

(1996) explains, "the interviewer's role in a semi-structured interview is to facilitate and guide rather than dictate exactly what will happen during the encounter" (p. 16). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow the participant's emerging views, rather than imposing a preconceived interpretation of the situation (Merriam, 2015).

The interview design was influenced by a narrative approach, which meant my goal was to give participants the freedom to develop and share their stories. My method involved probing for stories that illustrated a participant's statements. For example, when a teacher mentioned that students contributing to a lesson enriched their experience as a teacher, I followed up by asking for stories or examples of this. Similarly, if a student told me their teacher was kind, I asked them to describe a specific event where the teacher had been particularly kind.

Another important aspect of the design was informed by Tyson's (2017, 2018) methodology. I focused on documenting events and actions, as Tyson argues that educational practice should be more thoroughly documented, and he developed a framework for empirical research in this area. His approach aims to collect rich narratives that illustrate how teachers implement the curriculum, making their practical expertise visible. This principle also applies to students, who have a unique practical experience and expertise regarding their school life and learning experiences.

In conclusion, my interviews were designed to encourage the emergence of stories that accounted for specific events and actions. While stories and examples of actions were not the sole data collected, they were used as a complement to a more standard form of interviewing. These narratives served as rich illustrations of the participants' points of view.

The interviews with teachers lasted approximately one hour, while the interviews with students ranged from 20 to 30 minutes. The first round of interviews took place in December 2021, and the second round was conducted from May 2022, as it was delayed due to the illness of the teacher.

Interviews with Children: Ethical and Methodological Considerations

Since children were among my participants, I took special care to follow ethical guidelines for involving them in research. Informed by the literature (Farrell, Tisdall, & Kagan, 2015; Kor-

tesluoma, Hentinen, & Nikkonen, 2003; Gibson et al., 2018), I implemented the following steps:

Children were invited to participate voluntarily. They were asked to join individual interviews only in a group setting to prevent a situation where a child might give consent simply to please me or out of a sense of obligation. Once children expressed an interest in participating, I individually explained what their involvement would entail, making it clear that they would be interviewed and recorded, but that their real names would remain confidential. I also emphasized that their participation was entirely voluntary and not something they should do to please or obey anyone. I mentioned that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. Each child was given a consent letter to take home and sign with their parents.

For the interviews, I let each child choose where they wanted to sit. I also sat on a small chair, at the same level as the participating children. These measures aimed to establish a non-dominant position. As Gibson et al. (2018) explain, sitting at the same level "helps establish a rapport where [children] feel comfortable to talk, rather than feeling like they are being interrogated" (p. 121). I used simple, concrete language that the children could easily understand and that would not make them feel uncomfortable. My focus was on maintaining a relaxed, child-friendly atmosphere, rather than adopting the stance of a distant adult researcher with specific expectations. I reassured them that there were no right or wrong answers. My previous work experience with young children, including a year as an assistant in a kindergarten, helped me find a suitable approach for interacting with the children.

Conducting interviews with children presents a unique challenge, requiring a specialized methodology. I primarily followed the methodological considerations of Kortessluoma, Hentinen, and Nikkonen (2003) to adapt my interview design and approach. I also sought advice from a colleague who is a primary school teacher. According to Kortessluoma, Hentinen, and Nikkonen, "the chance of apprehending children's experiences lies in the child inside the adult" (p. 437). They argue that every adult has a personal memory of childhood and can connect with a child-like quality within themselves.

This effort to understand and perceive the child as they are, including their vulnerability, is crucial for any research involving children. It leads the researcher to create a more horizontal

relationship with the child and to adjust their language to suit the child's age and development.

Regarding the interview questions, the choice of words and language was especially important. Kortessluoma, Hentinen, and Nikkonen (2003) emphasize that questions should be tailored to "the linguistic and cognitive stage of development of each child" (p. 438). They also recommend translating academic terms into the language children use. Therefore, I adapted the vocabulary to suit the children's age. I also consulted with a colleague experienced in working with this age group to refine the wording of the questions.

3.5. The Analyzing Process: From Open Coding to Thematic Organization

As Merriam (2015) suggests, analysis should not begin only after the transcription of all data, but rather occur progressively throughout the research process. I adhered to this approach, conducting the analysis in three phases. First, I analyzed data from the pilot study, followed by data from the first institution, and finally, data from the second institution.

For each phase of analysis, I manually transcribed the data. I then proceeded with open coding, the first step in the coding process. Codes represent segments of data that seem significant in answering the research question (Merriam, 2015). Open coding, also called initial coding, involves an exploratory mindset where the researcher remains open to any emerging insights. Multiple rounds of coding were applied to the same data set, with each code representing a unit of meaning that could range from a single sentence to a longer narrative. I used conceptual or metaphorical keywords as codes to capture the essence of the data. For example, I applied the "mirror" metaphor to describe sections of data where a symmetry emerged between the experiences of pupils and teachers. While coding, I underlined key parts of the data and made annotations, such as reflections, questions, and comments, in the margins.

After open coding, I moved to axial coding, which involves identifying patterns and grouping related codes into broader categories (Merriam, 2009). Axial coding, also referred to as analytical coding, enabled me to organize the codes into larger themes. During this phase, I wrote memos inspired by Clandinin's (2006) concept of interim research texts. According to Clandi-

nin, interim research texts are "often partial texts that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further compose storied interpretations and negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings" (p. 47). These memos represented my initial interpretations of the data.

In the final stage of analysis, I synthesized all the data and previous analytical work to refine and organize the emerging categories. I used mind maps to explore and test relationships between categories, and during this process, I excluded or merged categories when they overlapped or were not mutually exclusive. At one point, I felt overwhelmed by the various possibilities, but a decisive step was to return to a simple guiding question: What findings are most critical in answering the research question? This helped me narrow down the analysis to two main categories, each divided into three sub-categories. These categories became the foundation for the thematic presentation of my findings.

To further clarify my positionality during the analysis, I wrote autobiographical memos. These memos, as described by Clandinin (2006), are narratives that reflect the researcher's personal journey as they enter into the stories of others. They helped me understand how meaning is co-constructed through the interaction between the researcher and participants.

3.6. Ethics

I notified the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) about my research project and received their approval before commencing the fieldwork. The participants were informed that their data would be safeguarded, anonymized, and not published or shared with third parties. They were also made aware that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time. To protect the institutions involved, pseudonyms were used for them as well. I prepared a consent letter detailing the implications of the study to ensure participants were fully informed of their rights and could provide formal consent to participate. Prior to my preliminary visit, an email was sent to the parents of the class, informing them that I had been granted permission by the teacher to visit the class as part of my study. I assured them that no data concerning their children would be collected during my visit. Data would only be gathered from children willing to participate in interviews, and only with their parents' consent.

3.7. Quality assurance

In this chapter, I have aimed to share with the reader the approaches that enabled me to bring coherence to this study, thereby ensuring its quality. Along with this overarching coherence, I relied on three specific strategies to strengthen quality: (i) experience over time, (ii) positionality, and (iii) peer review.

Experience over time refers to the practice of “staying in the field for an extended period” (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p.477). I describe this process in my preliminary visit. While the time frame of my study may appear brief—five days with each class, including three days of preliminary visits and two days dedicated to interviews—it allowed me to build a gradual rapport with participants, integrate into the group, and better understand the context. This aspect is particularly important in narrative studies, where a story is always relational and co-constructed; thus, the time invested in building these relationships was essential.

Positionality relates to the way in which the researcher influences the research process (Merriam, 2015). In the introduction of this thesis, I share the background I bring as a Waldorf teacher, and in this chapter, I explain how I introduced the study to the students by sharing my own story as a researcher. This is a way to make explicit that my approach is not neutral. To clarify my positionality throughout the analysis process, I also wrote autobiographical memos. These memos are narratives that recount the researcher’s own journey as they enter the stories of others (Clandinin, 2006). They help clarify how narratives and meaning are co-created, emerging from the interaction between researcher and participants.

Lastly, peer review was another important aspect. I shared my research approaches with a colleague, an elementary school teacher, throughout the study. Beyond what I have already described regarding the interview guide preparation, she also helped confirm how my data aligned with my findings and interpretations. Having herself twice welcomed students at the start of their eight-year school cycle, she provided valuable insight into the relevance of my study.

3.8. Summary

This chapter was a detailed presentation of the method used for this study. The aim of the study is to explore the first months of schooling from the point of view of both teachers and pupils. A basic qualitative study inspired by a narrative approach was used in order to conduct the study. The sample was made of eight participants, two teachers, one male and one female and six pupils aged 6 to 7 years old, five girls and two boys. The teachers were familiar with Waldorf education and recognized having an expertise as main teachers. The participants belonged to two first grade classes from two different institutions in France. Semi structured interviews were used as a mean to collect the data. They were carried within the context of a one week visit in each classroom. Open coding followed by axial coding was used to draw out categories. Methods of narrative analysis like interim research texts were used as a complement. The codes have been developed inductively. Categories that emerged from the analysis became findings presentation's chapters and subchapters. The data were safeguarded in order to respect the anonymity of all participants. The participants were informed in detail about the study. They were informed of their rights and signed a consent letter. A particular care was taken with the approach to pupils, the consent letter was signed by their parents. In order to insure the study's quality I used mainly three strategies: (i) experience over time, (ii) positionality, (iii) peer review.

4. Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of my study, which seeks to understand how first-grade students experience their entry into school and how their transition is perceived and supported by their class teacher within a Waldorf education context. I also explore how initial learning experiences are introduced to first-graders and how these experiences resonate with the new students.

This chapter is organized into two main parts corresponding to my research questions:

- How do first-grade pupils experience their transition and adaptation period into school within a Waldorf education setting? In what ways do their primary teachers understand and facilitate this process using Waldorf pedagogical methods?
- What are the experiences of pupils during their initial stages of learning at school? How do teachers perceive, introduce, and implement these early learning experiences?

Each section is structured according to the themes that emerged from my analysis of the data.

As detailed in the previous chapter, I conducted fieldwork over a week in two first-grade classrooms at two different French schools, where I gathered data through semi-structured interviews with both students and their primary teachers. In total, I interviewed two experienced teachers and six students. Teachers in both schools undertake the long-term role of class teacher, potentially leading the same class for up to eight years, following the Waldorf class-teacher principle (Randol and Peters, 2015). Similarly, students remain with their classmates throughout their primary years, contextualizing their school entry experience within this distinctive framework.

The first part of my fieldwork was conducted in December at Oak Tree School, a small countryside school serving 115 students. Many of the school's activities are connected to the surrounding woods and rural environment. The class consisted of nine students aged six and seven, who will join a combined two-grade group the following year, bringing the class size to approximately 20 students. Tina, the main teacher, has 10 years of teaching experience in Waldorf schools, primarily with students in grades five through eight, making this her first experience with a first-grade class.

The second part of my fieldwork took place in May at Little River School, a large French Waldorf school situated in a suburban area, with around 400 students. The school is set on a two-hectare property that includes a meadow, vegetable garden, beehives, and a stream running through the grounds. The first-grade class here comprises 26 students aged six and seven. The primary teacher, Jack, has 13 years of teaching experience and recently completed an eight-year cycle as the main teacher for his previous class.

This chapter provides insights into these teachers' and students' experiences, highlighting the nuances of early adaptation and learning in a Waldorf educational setting.

4.2. Becoming a pupil, rediscovering oneself as a teacher

In the first part of my interviews with students, I asked them about their experiences at the start of school, beginning with their expectations and hopes before entering first grade. They were also asked to reflect on what actually happened and to share their most meaningful experiences during those initial months. The teachers, in turn, were asked about their expectations, plans, and goals for their new role. They also shared significant moments about the period of adaptation from their perspective and offered insights into what the beginning of school meant for their students.

4.2.1. A decisive transition for the child

Based on responses from both teachers and students, it appears that, for students, entering first grade is more than simply growing older or moving to a higher level—it represents a profound transformation. Starting first grade signifies a shift from the early childhood world of play to the world of learning; it is about becoming a new person, a true "pupil." This transition doesn't happen instantly but unfolds over several months. For children, this isn't just a gradual development but a significant challenge, involving both inner and outer transformations as they adapt to the new world of school.

The stakes are high; this is a sensitive, pivotal time in their lives. How will they adapt to new classroom rules and responsibilities? Will they be able to overcome the challenges of learning and classroom life?

At both Little River School and Oak Tree school, the first-grade welcoming ceremony is the inaugural event marking this important change. Held at the very start of the new school year, the ceremony takes different forms at each school, but a common feature is the presence of the entire school community and the teacher, all gathered to welcome the new pupils. Each pupil is greeted individually, and the teacher shares a story. This is accompanied by some symbolic actions like passing through a portal or under an archway of students. This event serves as symbolic a passage—a gateway to a new world—as the child enters the school and becomes part of a community of pupils from the first grade to high school. At both schools each first grader is paired with a ninth-grade mentor, whose role will be to watch over their successful integration.

Mary a pupil at oak tree school evokes this event. She says that she can remember very well because she considers it as a great celebration. « I especially remember the passageway. I was really waiting for it to happen, so I remember it well. It was a great celebration... » All pupils in different ways recall this event as outstanding.

After the ceremony the pupils discover their classroom, begin using their new tools, meet their classmates... the class begins! Both Tina and Jack, in discussing these young pupils, insist on their heightened sensitivity. They speak about their enthusiasm, openness and sense of wonder, as they explore new activities. They also feel their guilelessness, innocence and fragility during these encounters. Pupils face a new situation, have only a very few reference points and have to open to new potentials. While they are eager to take risks and learn they are also easily frightened.

From the pupils' perspective, a sense of wonder, an enthusiasm for discoveries emerges as they recount their first experiences of school. Pupils pay attention to many small details that are very meaningful to them: gestures, signs, small acts of kindness, words, colors and more. Tina likens her pupils' attitude to the world of elves and fairies, the small, hidden beings beyond the adult world's perception. She thinks that this imaginary world resonates with the children's mindset. Reflecting on her pupils Tina remarked, "Well, here is my current elfin class". Her pupils, if good conditions are given can reveal much about themselves but if something disrupts their sense of security, they may withdraw into their own secret inner world.

Jack and Tina say that their pupils express all their sensitivity mostly through acts, attitude or tone of voice and not through direct meaning. Jack is touched by his pupils' innocence and guilelessness. He takes the example of a pupil's look when he individually greets him before entering the classroom in the morning.

Well Alain for example, I'm always touched in the morning when he arrives by the way he looks at me when he greets me: he has such a look when he tells you good morning! Sometimes he's a little cheeky but he really does have that innocence, you know...(Jack)

Jack says we must be able to perceive what pupils express. It is not self-evident. Here Alain's cheeky side could hide the total openness he feels towards his teacher. The short expression through a look in the morning could be unnoticed.

Tina and Jack shared a lot of examples like this in which their pupils' feelings are always demonstrated through acts, attitudes or tones behind a simple word. They say pupils' intentions and feelings are mostly tacit. They explain that children's great sensitivity is at first hidden to the world of adults and does not express itself directly through language. Tina explained how behind the word « mistress », there was a much more important meaning than one could think with such a simple word. She recalls the first day at school when pupils called her mistress for the first time.

Well straight away it was well « Mistress ! » (...) it was about children willing to be here and that, that touched me too. They were all the same, there was this side when we are shy, we dare not but we are here we want to be here. There really was this reverence that no one ever taught them that was there and uh, yes it was this « mistress », it resonated quite strongly well uh because it was there right after a little scratch : « mistress » and really you've become the person of reference that we cling to.(Tina)

For Tina it meant that pupils gave her their complete trust and called for it. She realized how her pupils gave their trust without thinking, almost instinctively, in the same way they do with their parents. Another manifestation of trust from her pupils was the way they came to show many things to her (drawings, small injuries, little tokens from nature...). She felt their need to be seen, to feel her attention towards them, her caring attitude.

The fragility and vulnerability of the students has already been mentioned. As we have seen, the transition brings the child to face great challenges. During this time, he or she has not yet fully become a pupil and is not yet equipped for the new situation. Jack states that the first tacit expectation of his pupils is to feel secure. Pupils need to find a positive working atmosphere in which they value themselves and dare to engage. Jack says that, especially at the beginning of school the parting is very thin between giving one's best, appreciating one's work and depreciating one's work and showing the worst of oneself.

They also expect that we provide the conditions so that they may be able to study well. It's also a bit about security. We feel they are happy when during the lesson they were able to give... they were able to draw a beautiful picture, they were able

to... And that they expect it from us and there is this shift when they give the good from themselves, but if the good conditions are not there, well then they don't give the good but will rather, then will... (...) The shifting point is quite subtle I find between the moment when children like what they do and so take care in it and the moment when they don't like it so don't take care anymore or even denigrate it.(Jack)

This example shows how quickly children can change from one feeling to its opposite. It shows how fragile a child is regarding his first steps at school. A pupil from Little river, Zita tells how difficult it is sometimes for her to understand the lesson but how she does her best and tries to think of herself as a good pupil to overcome her difficulties. She says that she sometimes even has dreams picturing herself as a good working pupil. « Sometimes I have dreams I don't tell my parents because I don't want to, I have dreams I work very well and that I am a good pupil ». She relates this with her whole heart and one can feel that this is a very important existential and intimate thing. The fact she mentions that she does not tell it to her parents seems also to indicate how this is a very personal and secret feeling. This is again an indication that feelings are generally not expressed directly but that some things are very delicate.

One of the questions I asked the pupils at the end of the interview was about their difficulties, drawbacks or things they disliked at school. It is interesting to note they had difficulty to share any. They were generally very enthusiastic, proud and happy to be in the first grade but when I insisted a little, they all spoke about two unpleasant things. The first they say is when there is not a peaceful atmosphere, too much noise or disputes. The second is when the teacher has to scold someone or is angry with something.

Regarding the teacher, they seem not to include an acted way of saying something is wrong but when they feel their teacher is really out of temper. For example at Oak tree school, a few pupils told me how one of their favorite moment is when their teacher « gets red angry », they find it really funny. They can relate to some expressions of disagreement that do not make them afraid or nervous. This seem to confirm the first need children have among the many challenges and discoveries to feel secured by positive general atmosphere and a reliable and trustful referent person.

4.2.2. Teacher's self-transformation

Jack and Tina both are conscious of the vital role they play welcoming new pupils into school. They know that their first task is to form a harmonious group and to accompany each pupil during the first month so that each one finds his or her space and new reference points. But they also all know that to do so they have to go through self-transformations. Jack and Tina both come from an 8th grade class. They must do the transition from a class of teenagers to 6- and seven-years old children. They also must make sure that their own personal transition goes well. For them also, many questions arise, and the stakes are important.

In the same way children ask themselves if they will be able to cope with the new situation and to be « good pupils », Tina and Jack ask themselves if they will be worthy of the task they face. This is a question they ask themselves before taking on their new teaching role and which determines their choice taking a first grade class but which continues to be present after the start of school. Jack says each morning he try to remember this fact.

That's what I'm trying to do, to be worthy of that in the morning, especially in the morning when arriving before them, to be worthy of the fact that they are this way, I mean, I don't know how to express it but that very candor, that openness in fact we must be there, present to perceive it (Jack)

The main question they each ask themselves with their own words could be formulated like this: am I able to adapt to the universe of 6 to 7 years old pupils and answer their need? For them to adapt means to be able to relate to the sensitivity we have describe in the previous part of this chapter. It means being enthusiastic towards small manifestations and events, attentive to details, open minded. It means to find a childlike way of relating to the world. It is an ability to perceive what the child experiences. This is never accomplished but a daily effort.

Tina and Jack approach their task not only as experienced professionals who know what to do but also in an attitude of openness, self-questioning. To them, in a way or another, this is exactly the attitude they need to have. They have partly to forget their certainties and all their adult way of thinking to be able to understand and enter in relation with their pupils. They must renew themselves in order to also pass into another world, the world of early school and the world of a new class group with new individuals and a new dynamic. Tina has always

taught to middle classes (from 5th to 8th grade) children, at first the challenge seems too high when the position was put forward to her.

I wasn't picturing myself... class 1?! I was telling myself no, everything separates me from class 1 in fact and I couldn't see how I could relate because I had become more « head » after having taught the middle class (...) I was telling myself: « no that's too much ... it's too big a challenge for me now to go back to » (Tina)

But after some discussions with colleagues and inner questionings, after meeting the future grade one pupils at the end of the school year, she started feeling more and more curious towards the whole idea and decided to step into the adventure.

It was a challenge: am I able to do it? It was heavily weighed, juggled, uh well and I stepped into it! And I stepped into it because uh suddenly, I don't know how, it called me. I cannot tell why; I saw the children and I wanted it. (Tina)

Tina then explains that for her the stake was to be able to be less in the intellect and find the child within herself, the enjoyment and concern for simple things, a rich imagination and creativity. Going through this process she is very happy now and explains that the pupils helped her a lot to continue her transformation after the start of the school year. She prepared the first lesson and thought there would not be enough content, enough nourishments for them, but she was relieved to see that the pupils brought the missing life to what she had prepared. She was relieved to see that pupils could teach her how to do so. It was quite magic for her to note that each activity was filled with pupils' enthusiasm and energy and became so natural.

Jack explains he had no difficulties to find the inner flexibility to enter again in the rich imagination needed to introduce activities and first learnings. He is particularly fond of all this atmosphere. Yet the transition from his former class to the new was not easy for him. He had a lot of difficulties to feel a bond with his new class group and especially with some pupils. He says that only in spring he could at last tell himself the shift was done, he could now identify himself with his class.

Well, that is something I had already experienced during my first eight years. It's that I felt this shift that is collective but also at the individual level, with some pupils with whom I could only see the side... with whom I had difficulty in tying a bond and so I couldn't see... For example, Liséa, she's the kind of girl, you know, you think she's going to take a plane, she at the beginning would cry a lot, she would cry like this « maouaouah », she would do severe tantrums and uh pfff,

she would be aggressive a little bit you know, but in fact, uh, little by little, I felt my bond with her was being tied. Uh, so with her it was particularly strong because at the beginning as I told you, it was difficult. But in fact, yes, for me it was decisive when I felt I had a bond even with those with whom I couldn't manage to at the start. For instance, at the start I also had trouble relating to Martin... He has a tendency like that to always say the opposite of what one is saying, to annoy the others a little too frequently, so when I managed to feel something warm towards these children, it did change something for me, whereas for others it was easier. (Jack)

For Jack the main challenge of the transition was to find a real openness and flexibility to understand and welcome children's behavior to create a bond.

Listening to Tina and Jack speaking about their own questions, fragility and the self-transformation they had to go through, I was touched to note that in a way both pupils and their main teacher were experiencing the same kind of process. I observed a symmetry. At a certain level the teacher is a professional adult with a rich experience. He or she plans learnings and activities and guides pupils. But on another level the teacher experiences the same things in a similar temporality together with his or her pupils. The teacher sometimes feel he or she has a task maybe too big ahead of him or her, doubts of his or her capacities and faces his or her own limits. If we follow the symmetry in certain situations the pupil can become the one who teaches. He can teach his or her childlike sensitivity to the teacher. Being attentive to what his or her pupils show is a way for the teacher to transform himself or herself.

To sum up, it seems an essential matter as a teacher to question oneself and be open to self-transformation to relate in an authentic way to the pupils. Maybe it is a general and simple rule for teachers at any level, but it seems particularly important when the children are faced with the important challenge of becoming a pupil.

4.2.3 The transition's temporality

The perspective of a larger timeframe

In order to accompany the entry at school respecting children's integrity, the theme of time has emerged. Time is necessary, the metamorphosis from the state of -not being a pupil- to -being a pupil- should not be enforced but happens at the right moment in time for everyone. A self-transformation cannot be planned from outside. Moreover, the time of transition at the

start of school is thought in relation to the larger timeframe of the 8-year cycle. Not every problem should be solved right away, one must be patient.

Tina evokes the puzzle metaphor to explain the idea of progression with a class. According to her it is no use to want to put too quickly all the pieces, the picture will take shape through the years ahead.

You see it is a big puzzle in the beginning and there are many little pieces that are put together and that keep being put together step by step during all the years to come. And to know what shape it will take? that's still very blurred, even if you have a direction you...(Tina)

Tina says we must have an intention and a direction but that we cannot control the reality and want quick achievements. We must accept the slow emergence of the results of our work with the pupils, they become little pieces waiting for others and will allow, in the end, to build slowly a more complete picture.

Jack on his side just achieved an eight-year cycle and is now well aware of the time factor. He has witnessed some of his former pupils' great transformations and could not have imagined at the time that they could happen. Back then, he was worried that they would actually fail.

I remember my first 8 years teaching, there were moments during which I would panic telling myself: « these kids are... it's not right at all, they won't learn this or that » or « they are too impolite and it's going to be terrible ». Actually, I ended up with class 8 pupils who were really adorable and who were studying well and all that so I thought, here is the fact to have this image to know where we're going. In a certain way it must ease the work and as a matter of fact it does ease it, I find, moments like yesterday when I told myself: « ok, right now they are not nice but later they will be...(Jack)

Now Jack is more confident. Even when there are unsettling or worrying situations with a child or with the class group, he knows he has to be patient and confident that many positive things will emerge through time, working together with the pupils. For him it is very important to keep a good relationship with pupils and not to break it because some of their attitudes seem unbearable at the moment. Jack says when he gets out of temper and has to scold a child, he thinks of the long-term relation they are going to have. It helps him at the same time to find more inner peace and to be reassured pupils are not intractable.

When I have to do this, it gets me down you know, and here there's the question of the eight years because I am sure that if I taught them only this year, well you

tell off a child whom you will leave at the end the schoolyear. But when you are to build a relationship, in any case in my concern, in the prospect to build that relationship, I would like to avoid that, to have to scolding a child but at the same time I put it into perspective because there are some children I got angry with (laugh) in class 1, eight years before and with whom I have had a beautiful relationship afterwards so all that is after all quite... children, they are flexible, more than we are, you can tell... (Jack)

Jack speaking of his relations with pupils highlights again the perspective a larger timeframe can give the teacher-pupil relationship at the beginning of school.

Transitional key moments

If the entry at school is placed in the perspective of a larger timeframe, in itself it has its own temporality. We are now coming back to the transition itself. In this study, I call transition the time of adaptation at the beginning of school. We have seen that the transition for both teachers and pupils does not happen just because the school starts. It happens step by step. Each teacher, each class group and each pupil experience it differently. Listening to the participants it became obvious that there were some key moments during this process. Key moments are understood as events seen as important by the participants which demonstrate a change, a transformation.

I identified two types of key moments: (i) Key moments of identification as a class group, (ii) Key moments in pupil/teacher relationship.

The first are experienced as a class group, including the main teacher. They are strong experiences that help the group identify itself as a class group. The second are experienced at the individual level. The event manifests a step, a significant progress for an individual pupil in relation to his or her teacher.

The first event I identified as a key moment has already been described at the beginning of this chapter. It is the first-grade welcoming ceremony. The welcoming ceremony is very important for all participants and stands out as the first mark point. It officialises a new situation and ritualizes a passageway. It is a first magical moment that helps become a pupil, and a class group. This ceremony unites the two kinds of key events because it has both an individual (teacher welcoming individually each pupil) and a collective (the class gathered to listen

to the story) quality. This strong event is the first of a series which ends with the result : I feel fully as a pupil/teacher now in my class.

In Tina's class an afternoon play time of the pupils in the wood with their teacher seem to have been decisive. The story has been told by Lily, one of the pupil, but all the pupils of the class saw it as outstanding. One autumn afternoon the class went for a walk in the neighboring wood with their teachers. They played around a kind of hole in the forest. There was a muddy slope to slide on, a big trunk to walk on, many leaves on the ground ... They enjoyed the spot a lot and had great fun. At one point, they played all together. Which had apparently never been the case or at least in such a way.

We were playing all together and mistress, she was in the big hole over there preparing the snacks. It was at that time my favorite moment with the boys. Before they were always deciding so it was annoying because everyone would decide otherwise, no one would be the chief and all. No chief, nothing unkind no...(Lily)

In her story Lily insisted on the fact they were all together. She tells how every pupil took part without domination from certain individuals and that the boys and girls also found a common ground. All the event is about having great fun outside, but it seems to stand out only because it culminated with a feeling of being a united group including boys and girls. Tina explains how in her class the gender matter was an issue and how boys and girls had very different behaviors. This aspect will be developed in the last part of this chapter. Here these differences are forgotten, and the class group felt united and can identify as a unique group. It is important to note that the teacher is present, has its role in Lily's account of the event. The class group identify itself including its main teacher.

In Jack's class one common key event seem to have been the carnival fest at school. All pupils recalled it with a lot of joy and especially the moment they had together in the classroom with their teacher. Some pupils told me how their teacher did a very special maths lesson in which everything was wrong and reversed. Here is Tom's version of the event.

At Carnival, in fact and that really made me laugh, it was with numbers, the one was the twelve, the thirteen was the two. He would say total nonsense during the lesson. What was funny too was that he (the teacher) was saying: « M.X (teacher's name), he told me that you know perfectly well how to count ». Then he was saying: « You may show how you can count » and the children were

saying anything while taking the stick. And after that, M.X would say: « Good! » Whereas you see, he was saying he was not M.X. He was costumed as grapes. He had stapled plenty of purple balloons to his t-shirt. He had a paper crown with a little leaf twirling around a branch and Nils too had done the same. (Tom)

This event manifests how all members of the group, including the teacher can relax and forget the differences between each pupil. There is no better or bad pupil in math. All the class group recognizes the teacher amazing sense of humor and is taken by surprise. The teacher on his side can for a moment forget his sometimes-heavy responsibilities and the pressure to make his pupils learn.

The two examples of key moments that have been presented show how important it is for the group to go through strong common experiences in which the aspect of differences vanishes for a moment. They are key moment of identification as a class and help each one to feel included and at home in the classroom. This is an important aspect in the process of becoming a pupil which means not only accomplishing individual tasks but also integrating a class as a group. These moments are also important for the teacher, they are opportunities to create a bond with the whole group of pupils.

If each pupil needs to identify with his or her class as a group, the individual relationship with the teacher is also essential. How can one become a pupil without a reaction of trust with his teacher? Some pupils tell how satisfied they are when they have the opportunity to spend more individual time with their teacher or when he or she has acknowledged something coming from them. Teachers guide individually sometimes in a tacit way each pupil. On their part, pupils try to understand and integrate teachers' expectations. For the teacher manifestations of pupils' engagement, will to improve something and trust are also decisive because they show that their effort are fruitful. Again, there are important steps in this process.

Tina recalls for each child in her class some significant moment. She says that everyone has something to overcome to really feel well in the classroom, with his or her classmates and with the teacher. this is part of becoming a pupil. She takes Lily's example. A very independent child who according to her has a very rich life at home and great trust in her parents and so does not give trust and accept help easily from anyone else. That can become a problem in the class. It is not only a question for her but also for other children who do not want to accept the fact they can make mistakes and need to be helped. So Tina takes time to explain to the

class how mistakes are part of learning. One day Lily's attitude changes. She asked the question:

Uh well it was yesterday or the day before, when she asked me: « Can you help me ? » whereas so far it was « I can do it on my own » so all of a sudden yes, we can see a step has been taken. (Tina)

This simple ask for help is seen by Tina as an important expression of a shift. A transformation has happened in Lily who integrates a very important lesson from her teacher: being a pupil is recognizing her limits, the possibility that she can make mistakes and ask advice from teachers. This key event marks a step, Lily as become a bit more of a pupil now.

Key events for the child always happen through simple acts. One day, a pupil's voice is strongly heard during a common recitation whereas this pupil used to stay in the background. A child always in his own world takes the hand of his teacher during a walk and starts a conversation. These are key moments for the teacher as well. They are successful moments for them, they can be happy to observe the child's progress which is of course their mission to encourage and foster.

To sum up transitional key moments, both common and on the teacher/pupil level are step that allow the pupil to pass from a situation of complete newness to a situation of being a pupil integrated in a classroom with reference points concerning his role as a pupil. They are also signs for the teacher that he or she manages to answer children needs and is establishing a fruitful relationship with the class.

4.3. Initial learnings as encounters

In the first part of this chapter, we saw how the entry in grade one class requires a particular attention and is the time when teacher foster a reassuring and positive relation to school for the pupils. The second part of this chapter will now explore how first learnings are experienced and enacted. In order to explore this situation, I asked pupils about their most meaningful learning experiences and teachers about their pedagogical aims, the way they introduced and experienced first learnings with the class.

4.3.1. learning as an encounter

It appears that for the teachers, in the first grade, the approach towards knowledge, the working quality present during learning activities is more important than direct results. The way a child will enter in relation with learning will be decisive for years to come. This is the first encounter. here again the stakes are important. Will a child conceive learning as something imposed by the teacher? Will he or she conceive it as something one get rewarded for? A competition or a cooperation? Something stressful or joyful?

For Tina and Jack, here again a long-term vision is important. Pupils should first learn to find the right attitude when working in class. This is well understood by some pupils. When asked about important things she learnt since the start of school Nina a pupil at oak tree school said, « well, to apply oneself », to the same question Lily answered, « to hold the wax blocks ». The wax blocks are used for drawing and writing. They are the main tools at school. Nina and lily, tell how happy they are at last to really learn but they do not speak about content or achievement. They rather prefer to mention the fact they learn to be focused and use in the right manner their tools.

Concerning the approach towards learnings, Tina insists a lot on the importance of seeing the beauty of things and the respect we should have towards nature and others, human and non-human. She tries to foster this attitude, natural for the child but that can be altered in everyday often stressful and busy life. She says children are often in contact with a harsh reality outside of school and it can extinguish their natural enthusiasm and sense of beauty.

Each morning, she says she does her best to foster the presence of wonder in each child. She wants to keep this mood as much as possible to approach any work in class. We have seen the link she made with the world of elves and fairies. This is something that accompany learning activities. For example, the class recites in movement a poem about an elf and a group of elves goes for a quest in the world of numbers. Another mean to cultivate wonder is when a new detail mysteriously appears on the blackboard drawing. A drawing made by Tina with a theme related to the lesson and the season. Pupils of the class told me how they were fond of this trick.

The approach towards learnings - to apply oneself, to see the beauty, to cultivate wonder, to respect others- is seen through the angle of an encounter. The right attitude leads to the encounter of the world of geometrical forms, letters, numbers... Zita, at little river school tell how each letter is a friend to her.

So we learnt the letters, the As and then the Bs, well I liked the letters Mr.X did. His proposals, his stories, the games...In fact each letter has a story.(...) there are three that I prefer, they are the A the C and the D. I feel they are nice to me. I like to learn with them as if they were human beings. For me, it's like having a friend, a nice friend that will always stay my friend. (Zita)

For Zita each letter has its unique shape, its unique personality that speaks to her feelings. relates more to some of them because for her it is a real encounter, and she sees the letters as beings. Jack her teacher takes three days to introduce a sound and a letter. It is very important for him to offer a very rich experience to the pupils around the introduction of the letter. Each letter is extracted from a story and related to a picture.

The form drawing lesson, the first of the school year is an encounter with the forms of nature, geometry or architecture: mountain, waves, spirals... The encounter happens through the whole being including sensations, feelings and body, the wave can be walked on the ground before actual drawing in the notebook. Jack says that this lesson helps the child to work on his or her sense of space and inner balance. Tina explains how numbers can be introduced as an encounter of different qualities. She tells how each number's quality can resonate with the child's inner life. She does not tell the quality but rather ask the children.

Another example is given by Jack. He explains how he introduces the concept of equality. Jack has chosen a story with three types of characters. This story is the basis of a rope game with three teams. Two teams oppose themselves and try to pull in opposite directions. When the balance is going to be broken between the two first teams, a member of the third team quickly comes to redress the balance, equality between the two teams. At the end of the process the equality sign will appear, one line being the rope on pupils' notebook. Imagination, sensations, discussions bring a whole encounter with what could otherwise be only an abstract concept. Here notion of equality has become an experience and an encounter with a reality.

Learning as an encounter is a way to offer an experience to which one can relate with one's own personality. It is not something imposed but something the pupil can relate to. It implies an important activity from the pupil who is seen as an actor. The teacher is a go-between, not the one who decides how the encounter should happen. He or she wants to give the best conditions for it and introduce the right content.

We have seen how a rich experience including reflections, discussions, drawing, movements, games, stories is offered in order to introduce a content, a concept. The richness of experience allows each child to relate more with a part of the experience that corresponds to his own personality. An example is given by Stephany at oak tree school. She speaks about a favorite learning experience. Stephany is very agile and practices circus. At school she was the first to go beyond one hundred jumps when skipping... She told me about a story in which the characters did the wheel and the headstand. She was so happy and surprised when her teacher said that they were going to practice what the characters did in the story.

On the same day after the story, we made the wheels, we tried. She showed us and then everyone tried. I tried, uh, three times and then afterwards we did like the little boy. In fact, we were launching our feet and leaning them on the door and mistress, she would hold us. And it was good, because blood was flowing up to our heads. That was the little brother, it was a bit like in the story except from the fact that we were held against the door. (Stephany)

For Stephany the experience of the story clearly would not have been the same without the inclusion of this bodily exercise. She could relate to it in a much deeper way, and this is an important memory for her.

4.3.2. The emergence of unexpected contents through the teacher/pupil encounter

We have seen how Tina and Jack try to introduce learnings as encounters in which pupils' individuality is respected. Pupils are invited to relate as individual actors to learnings. In the examples given in the previous sub-chapter, the teacher chose the contents. Both Tina and Jack are clear about the fact they follow the Waldorf curriculum. They use books and a lot of contents from them. They say they must do this to have a structure for their lessons. Yet both told me that their most enriching teaching experiences were when they could create new, unexpected contents and activities in collaboration with the pupils.

Tina gives an example of this. She prepares the introduction of the number nine. In her book the example for it is the nine months of pregnancy. She tells herself it is quite abstract for the children, but she does not find a better example. The following day she is about to introduce this example during the lesson when she gets at last an inspiration. She remembers a game one must play with nine boxes. She instantly decides to take this example for the lesson, to practice it and draw it in the notebook.

And all of a sudden, it was during a lesson, I thought ah, there is for us, what we would call... » I had that game, I don't know how, it's in French, it is « knots and crosses », there are nine boxes. And that came to me because I suddenly thought « no », when watching at the example of my lesson, I thought « no, it's not going to be what makes them understand ». And so, on the blackboard, I started to draw the game and as we had just done form drawing with circles and crosses, we played that game, and they all drew it and we played with dice. So right away, drawing it we could see the square, we could see the nine, and really, they loved it. (Tina)

Tina takes here the chance to bring something surprising which emerges right during the lesson. She thinks it gave instantly another quality to the lesson and she explains that they practiced a lot because she let the pupil draw and play the game and discover by themselves why this game was about the nine.

Jack explains the most enriching moments as a teacher are when unexpected experiences are made during a lesson.

For me, the truly fulfilling moments are those when one can venture out of what was planned and succeeds in giving a real-life experience of things that were not initially part of the lesson plan. The children themselves often initiate such moments. Working with sounds and letters is open to this type of experiments. The children have many suggestions and one can play with such material (...) I find It extremely fulfilling. When the lesson is... when we manage to build the lesson together in a lively manner, without tension, which is not always the case, you saw it, yes for me it is... in such circumstances, they are fulfilled and so am I. (Jack)

Jack relates these unexpected experiences to a cooperation with the pupils. The lesson is not enacted only by the teacher, but he enacts it with the pupils. The lesson does not belong to the teacher, it is a co-creation.

Mary, pupil at oak tree school explains that her favorites moments were when the teacher includes a proposition when they make objects with their hands in class. She also tells that she

secretly added a form in her notebook during the form drawing lesson. She seems particularly proud of that and shows it to me. During form drawing lesson, she invented one spiral transforming from a triangle to a square spiral.

With Rose we had drawn a spiral a little magical as in fact we were drawing a triangle spiral that would change into a square spiral. With Rose, we had done it but we hadn't said it, it was our secret. Then we did otherwise, we drew a square and afterwards a triangle. We did it in our form drawing book, it was a secret between us two. It's only in Rose's book and my own, not in the others' as it was our secret.(Mary)

Children can add little details and suggestions that could seem unimportant and could again pass unnoticed. But for them these are essential participations and can be seen as first important steps contributing to the content of the lesson and to the co-creation of the lesson together with the teacher.

Jack gives me his point of view on this situation. For him if a lesson is too structured with too much authority, the lesson can be efficient but allows less the child to learn by himself or herself. For example, Jack prefers to let the children learn to regulate themselves concerning their attitude during a lesson and is very attentive to listen to children's suggestions. Thus, during a math lesson, he will for example follow a child's suggestion to give examples of the sound 'é' present in the word 'égalité', equality.

4.3.3. A unique approach for each class

I would like to close my findings presentation with a last theme: the unicity of a class group and how the teacher may relate his or her educational aims and learning methods to it. This is a theme mainly developed by Tina and not much by Jack, but I think it is an important part of my findings and should find its place within the presentation.

We have seen in the first part of this chapter how the class group experiences key moments that allow the group to perceive itself as unified. Unique individualities give shape in turn to a unique group with its own dynamic. One of my questions was to explore to what extent a teacher would adapt his/her methods and educational goals to a particular group of pupils.

Jack recognizes the unicity of each class group but he explains he does not have any overall educational goal for the class. He says he is just open to the unique events that will happen.

On her side Tina has more conscious overall educational aims for the group. One of her aspirations is to find some keys to contribute to gender equality among pupils. I would like to present it as an example which shows how the approach towards first learnings can emerge from an encounter with the class as a group.

Tina explains why and how she wants to work on the aspect of gender equality with the class. This is not a lesson about it but a way to approach the social relations within the group and an attitude towards learnings. The theme as emerged from an encounter with her future pupils before the summer vacations. She realized that she would have a class with a majority of girls. She also discovered that most girls had a very pronounced girlish quality, and most boys very pronounced boyish quality.

Tina explains that she finds back boyish and girlish quality in the way pupils work in class and how they approach learnings. Her girl pupils have the tendency to picture themselves as good serious and obedient students. She feels that a lot of girls act in order to answer external expectations. They have the tendency to compare themselves, and to judge their work and the work of others. Regarding boys, she observes more freedom but also a restlessness, an inability to focus and a rudeness. It raises a lot of questions.

Basically, how can one work on this matter for the children to start on an equal footing. How to help the girls relax a little as they seem to put so much pressure on themselves when it comes to learning whereas the boys go bam, bam, bam and Bob's your uncle, it's over and done with. How could one, uh, redress the balance, no that sounds too pretentious, but how could one change this image that... Yes, it is a real question... I don't think nowadays, we teach our daughters, yes you have to work well in school blablabla, more so than the boys. It's almost as if it were passed on genetically through years of conditioning... Is it the same for the boys? they really have this need for movement and to see them seated trying to hold themselves is almost a torture... well it raises a lot questions for me at this moment in time (Tina)

Tina thinks one of her first tasks as a teacher is thus to integrate this factor because it has an impact on the way pupils learn and envision themselves as pupils. She says that she does not pretend to solve fully this problem but that it is a concern she keeps in mind during her every-

day life with the group. She also knows that she will have to work on herself because since her childhood she has always ran away from girlish atmospheres.

I told myself, well really! I take a group with a majority of girls, is it not again ... Is it purely coincidental or do I have something to work on and probably the girls also? (...) This competitive aspect, little stories, little secrets and so on and so forth the very thing that was heavy for me as a child. On the other hand, with boys things seem more straightforward, bim bam take that and it's over... thus I thought I had something to do, I had something to work on, that's the message I hearing, and I also have something to work with the girls..

She sees the fact she took in charge a group with a strong girlish atmosphere not as a simple coincidence but believes this is a sign of something she must work within herself and together with the girls.

Tina integrated this theme right at the start of school. She designed a symbolic little trail each child had to cross during the welcoming ceremony. The entrance was a portal covered with flowers. It opened to a path made of blue sheets and wooden circles symbolizing a stream with stones. In order to reach the opposite side, the children had to walk on the stones and to cross a board balanced on a log. Tina explains that the portal with flowers symbolises the princess-like girls whereas the stream reflects the tendency towards wild movement of the boys. The trail unifies two qualities.

The way Tina designed the trail is a good illustration of her approach. For her it is a question of balance. Girls should feel free to let go, and boys should also be open to more contemplative qualities and to the joy of applying themselves. Tina doesn't want to impose any behavior on girls and boys but would like to give them the chance not to enclose themselves in a role or a cliché that will have a negative impact on their learning.

She thinks one way to foster the balance between boys and girls is to engage the whole class in movement. One of her favorite activities with the group and which helps particularly the girls to find self-confidence is rope skipping... She turns a long rope in the classroom with the help of someone and a pupil enters and jumps. Everyone counts the number of jumps. It gives the opportunity to the girls to engage without reflections. At first pupil manage very few jumps but after some days a pupil among the group reach one hundred. Tina loves to see the

progress pupils make and how they slowly gain confidence and joy doing it. This activity is also good for the boys because they must focus and control their movements.

We have already seen that a common key event for Tina's class was partly related to the fact girls and boys could harmoniously play together and form a group. Tina's concern about gender equality seems to be, in another way a concern for the pupils as well. They also seem to suffer from the wide gap between boys and girls. Tina explains that after some months the girls still tend to watch over the boys and judge them. This is a tendency they also have amongst themselves. That is why Tina insists a lot in class on the fact it is perfectly right to make mistakes and that there are no perfect works, but different qualities expressed by each pupil. She tries to teach pupils not to judge one's work and the work of others.

This general attitude helps the boys to feel more worthy when they work on their notebook, which is often more difficult for them. They have more difficulties to sit and work and tend to do their tasks quickly. They need trust from their classmates and to be reassured they can manage to focus. Tina insists also on the effort they should make to respects the working atmosphere but also give them the chance to fail and try again.

Tina thus starts from where the pupils are, she values both what the girls and the boys bring but without keeping it in separate categories. This is included in the way she introduces first learnings.

4.4. Summary

In this chapter I tried to illustrate what it could mean for a child to enter school, become a pupil and start first learnings in a Waldorf context through the voice of both teachers and pupils. I presented how teachers perceived their role during this particular time and in relation to their long term duty with the class.

In the first part I focused on what I call the transition, which correspond to the first months of pupils' and teachers' adaptation to their class and new status. The findings show that this transition is a crucial event for the pupil. It seems important that it should be accompanied by the teacher's own work on himself or herself. To put this transition in a long-term perspective and to let each individual experience the process at his or her own rhythm seems essential. Some

examples of key moments have been presented and analyzed. It shows how important steps during the time of adaptation are made. They are significant progress made towards the goal of being integrated in a class, becoming a pupil, feeling oneself in the right posture as a main teacher. Important steps are experienced both on a common or more individual level.

In the second part I focused on the first learnings. I reported how they seem to determine the way pupils conceive what it means to learn. I illustrated how teachers give a great importance to the quality of the approach towards learnings and how an encounter can be fostered and experienced with the lesson's contents. I reported how rich experiences are valued both by teacher and pupils and how pupils can be acknowledged as actors during a lesson. It can lead to the emergence of unexpected contents and experiences through the teacher/pupils relationship. Finally, I chose to close the presentation with an example illustrating how a teacher could adapt learnings and pedagogical aims to the particular individuals and class dynamic he or she discovers.

5. Discussion

5.1. Introduction

My study focuses on the entry into school and the first months of the first grade within the context of Waldorf education. It explores the pupils and teachers as key actors during this period of transition and adaptation, as well as their relationship. The introduction of early learning experiences and how these are experienced by the pupils is also central to my study, as they mark the beginning of school life. I have defined two research questions, which I will reiterate here, at the introduction of this chapter:

- How do first-grade pupils experience their transition and adaptation period into school within a Waldorf education setting? In what ways do their primary teachers understand and facilitate this process using Waldorf pedagogical methods?
- What are the experiences of pupils during their initial stages of learning at school? How do teachers perceive, introduce, and implement these early learning experiences?

In the conceptual framework, I explain how, in this study, I base my approach on the assumption that an education oriented towards *Bildung* necessarily manifests and is embodied in the educational relationship between teacher and pupil. The concepts of learner agency and educational authority help to conceptualize the dynamics of this relationship, which has both symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects. First grade, as a period of building the teacher-pupil relationship in connection with learning, is a privileged field of study for understanding the processes that establish an educational relationship. A deeper understanding of this relational dynamic between authority and agency, teaching and learning, emerges from my findings and is the focus of discussion in this chapter.

In the Findings chapter, I recounted the experiences of students and teachers regarding entry into school and the first months of first grade. The sensitivity of the students, both as children and within the context of their initial encounter with school, was emphasized. This childlike sensitivity was characterized by both an openness to the world and an enthusiasm for discovery, as well as by a certain fragility and vulnerability. On the other side, the inner experience of teachers, faced with the delicate task of welcoming young students and guiding them through this crucial period of their lives, was described as a process of “rediscovering oneself as a teacher”. This illuminated a process of mutual adaptation. Key moments of this adaptation period were highlighted, marking milestones in students’ journey to feeling fully like students and teachers’ journey to feeling fully established in their role.

The findings then explored the experiences of both students and teachers in relation to the introduction of formal learning. A qualitative, creative, and collaborative approach, framing learning as an encounter with both oneself and the world, was presented. The possibility of experiencing a co-constructive approach to the curriculum was emphasized as the most enriching experience for both students and teachers alike.

The embodiment of educational ideals and values—values that can be linked to the notion of *Bildung*—through the dynamics of the teacher-pupil relationship will be the guiding thread of this discussion. Therefore, the stakes of this discussion are to examine how educational values related to *Bildung*, which are inherently non-quantifiable, can become tangible for teachers and pupils in the context of entering school and early learning experiences. This involves dis-

cussing the process by which the pupil becomes an active agent and the teacher (re)claims their role as an author, or in other words, establishes their authority with a new class.

In this chapter, I will start by examining the elements that can be foundational at school entry. In the second part, the question of how an educational relationship can be built during the first month of schooling will be discussed. The third part will explore how the relationship to knowledge can be established

5.2. Establish the relationship with the school

Conclusions from Empirical Studies on the Transition

As presented in the literature review, empirical studies on the transition to primary school all emphasize the crucial nature of this period, highlighting the fact that it is decisive for the rest of the child's schooling (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Ogay, 2017, Zhao, 2017). Indeed, during this time, the child learns their "role" as a student. These studies underline two key aspects for a successful transition.

The first is that the cognitive dimension should not be the sole determining factor in this transition; the student's person must be considered more holistically, including factors such as motivation and emotions. It implies that the child is considered as an agent in their own transition (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019)

The second important point revealed by the studies (Ogay, 2017, Zhao, 2017) is the systemic aspect of the transition. The transition to school does not concern only the child—their individual abilities, maturity, or motivation—but involves various actors who all bear responsibility for the success of this phase, and whose collaboration is essential.

On a theoretical level, Waldorf pedagogy also places great importance on this transition to school, aligned with its view of child development, which corresponds to the beginning of the second developmental stage, briefly presented in the literature review (Loebell, 2019, Barkved, 2022, Dahlin 2017). In the Waldorf curriculum, the first year of school is also considered crucial for the student's future path, as it lays the foundation for all subsequent learning (Avison & Rawson, 2014, Steiner, 2020). This period is considered important because it al-

lows the child to undergo a transformation through the passage of an important stage (Greubel, 2014).

However, there is no specific empirical study on the transition in the context of Waldorf education, except for Yotov's (2018) study. This case study demonstrates the importance of the welcoming ceremony for first-grade students as a rite of passage in a school in Bulgaria. According to Yotov, this ceremony, by "negotiating social and personal identities (p. 121)," introduces the child as a student in a new institution. In his view, it is one of the most important ceremonies in Waldorf schools.

In this section, I would like to discuss my findings in relation to concepts associated with the transition from kindergarten to primary school. I will show how educational values concerning the passage into first grade and the significance of this stage can be made apparent to the child and those accompanying them, and how this transition can become visible, understandable, and explicit for the child. I will primarily focus on interpreting the first-grade welcoming ceremony as a foundational moment, establishing the educational values linked to the transition. I will also explore the introductory speech as a way to establish the meaning of learning, as suggested by Steiner.

The Welcoming Ceremony as Establishing the Relationship to School

Well, so we were arriving with Mom, and we sat in the front with Félicia and my other friends from first grade. On my other side, there was Lucie, who I didn't know yet. Then she (the teacher) called the others first, and after that, it was my turn. I think she went from the tallest to the smallest. There was this big gate, and it had flowers on it, and there was water (a blue fabric). There were these big round stepping stones we could walk on, and at the end, there was a big log placed there with a plank on top of it. When you stepped on it, it wobbled. And then our partner (from ninth grade) gave us a rose. After that, we went into the first-grade classroom. (Lily)

The welcoming ceremony for first-year students has been described and explained in both the Literature Review and the Findings chapters. It is a celebration marking the entrance to school for new first-grade students at the beginning of the school year. This event typically involves a large community, including parents, the students' former kindergarten teachers, the entire student body, and the school's teaching staff. During this ceremony, the class teacher individually welcomes each student.

The findings suggest that this ceremony embodies educational values related to transition and helps establish a certain relationship with the school, and consequently, the teacher-student relationship. To interpret its significance, I use the metaphor of a play. This ceremony is a performance that involves different actors, each with a specific role.

The first highlighted value is that of community. The child does not start school alone; many people are present to witness this important transition. I interpret this as a manifestation of the systemic quality of the transition, with various participants gathering around the child. The "play" is not performed solo. Both the child and those around them experience firsthand that starting school is an important event involving more than just the student.

The roles are distributed to clarify each person's role in the transition. For instance, when the child is called, parents accompany them to the teacher, symbolizing mutual trust. Older students form an arch to welcome the newcomers or offer a flower, symbolizing their inclusion in a new social group. Overall, the community provides an image of support around the child and teacher.

The main roles, of course, are given to these two actors. Within the larger system, their relationship is the most crucial. The ceremony also provides a concrete image of this relationship.

The teacher, in the metaphor of a play, is both director and actor. They design and organize the ceremony, including the setup and decorations. As an actor, they stand at the center, in front of the assembly, calling and gathering the students around them, telling a story. The teacher is thus established in their role as a guide. They are not just an executor but also an author and actor in this celebration.

Tina and Jack, the two teachers I interviewed, both shared with me how they conceived and organized this ceremony. Jack emphasized his desire to hold the event outdoors, aiming for a more natural atmosphere compared to the traditional stage setting in an auditorium at his school. Tina designed a trail for the students, symbolizing a balance between qualities of contemplation and action.

I interpret the role of the teacher in the welcoming ceremony as a way to embody the idea of educational authority. Indeed, Robbes (2017) emphasizes that this authority is the ability to be autonomous and responsible, the subject of one's own existence. The fact that the teacher is

both the director and actor of the ceremony aligns with this idea. The teacher does not simply follow external instructions; they rely on their skills and experience, being the author of this event.

Another aspect of educational authority is respect for the student's personhood, which is evident during the ceremony. The teacher welcomes each student with a handshake and a warm look. The story told during the ceremony is seen as a gift. In the findings, Tina explains how she designed her ceremony with the students she met the previous year in mind. The entire event is crafted for the student, considering them, and marks their transition from kindergarten to school. It is their celebration.

At Oak Tree School, one element of the celebration seemed important to me. In the findings, I describe how each student passes through a specially built symbolic gate and completes an individual trail. This element seems essential because at that moment, the child takes center stage, makes their own choices, and plays their role. The student interviews show that they remember and particularly appreciate this moment. They enjoy recounting how each student navigated the trail in their own way.

This element of the path, described by Oak Tree School participants and designed by Tina, seems crucial. I interpret it as a way to highlight the pupil as an active agent in their transition and academic journey. Indeed, the students can make this moment of the ceremony their own; no one is there to tell them how they should walk their path.

Additionally, the idea of the path seemed meaningful to me as a way to symbolically represent the concept of *Bildung*. The path can symbolize the idea of developmental journey. Furthermore, this notion of a path (evoking the notion of *Bildung*) is reflected in the story told by the teacher, most often a tale. The hero of the story embarks on an adventure with its challenges, traveling a unique path, using their own resources but also benefiting from welcome assistance along the way toward their goal.

To conclude, the ceremony highlights various aspects of the transition through a performance: (i) Its crucial and exceptional nature is emphasized by the organization of a dedicated celebration that brings together a large community. (ii) Its systemic aspect is demonstrated by the

gathering of different participants, with their roles and interdependence emphasized. (iii) The importance of the pupil is marked by recognizing each one, giving them a flower and greeting them individually. (iv) The teacher's role as a benevolent authority is reinforced through their central, unifying, and creative role. (v) The student as an active agent is emphasized through the symbolic path they complete. (vi) Its connection to the notion of a developmental journey, or *Bildung*, is underscored.

I have highlighted various elements that can be present in the ceremony, but this does not represent a single, uniform reality. As Yotov (2018) suggests, each school, in its own context, and even year to year within the same school, presents a different ceremony. However, it seems important to question its alignment with educational objectives and in acknowledging actual studies about transition.

It seems particularly important to me not to make the welcoming ceremony an immutable ritual anchored in tradition, but rather an educational tool concerning the transition to school. The ceremony can especially be an opportunity for the teacher to be creative and can allow the child to express themselves during this crucial moment of entering school. Interviews with students show that they place great importance on this ceremony. It emerges as a significant event in their lives; they remember many details. Acknowledging this event as crucial for the child can lead us to further reflect on this practice.

Establishing the Relationship to School through an Introductory Speech

While the opening ceremony can stage the issues of transition and the teacher-student relationship, Steiner (2020) advises addressing students directly to reveal the meaning of their presence at school. As mentioned in the Literature Review, he considers this an essential foundation for all future learning.

In the Literature Review, I discussed how this speech, suggested by Steiner, can be interpreted as placing the teacher-student relationship within a dynamic of learner agency and educational authority. This speech encourages students to look with reverence at the accomplishments of previous generations in the presence of the teacher, but also to engage as active participants. It treats the student seriously, ensuring they understand why they are learning, which ties to the concept of learning to learn, central to learner agency.

Interviews reveal that teachers chose not to use this direct address tool with students, which surprised me because it stood out in the literature as an important element in helping students become aware of their transition to first grade. The findings related to the first days of class show that teachers are indeed aware of the meaning of learning and intergenerational transmission, but that they conveyed it tacitly through encounters and activities and by short direct speech to the students.

Therefore, the question of clear, conscious, explicit communication about the student's role when entering school warrants further exploration. Is Steiner's advice still practiced? How has it evolved? Can it be adapted to today's context? The welcoming ceremony tacitly convey the values of transition through an embodied experience. This seems to align with the mindset of children, whose awareness is not focused on abstraction. However, directly addressing the children would also seem important in the aim of making the learning their own and regarding the notion of learning to learn.

5.3. Building an educative relationship

The interpretation of the first day of school, primarily through analyzing the significance of the welcoming ceremony, highlighted the importance of the teacher-student relationship, balancing authority and student agency, in connection with a developmental journey. We observed how the teacher must take an active role, as the “author” of this ceremony, while also making space for the student at the appropriate time. This balance between authority and learner agency is played out symbolically.

The second section of this chapter will discuss how this educational relationship now unfolds daily during the initial months of school, presented in the literature review as the second phase of the transition from kindergarten to school for the student (Zhao, 2017). In the Waldorf curriculum, the entire first year of schooling is seen as a foundational period of adaptation to school and learning, laying the groundwork for the subsequent educational cycle (Avison and Rawson, 2014).

In the literature, Zhao (2017) noted that “adaptation” is the key word during the first months of school. He argues that this capacity for adaptation should be a central criterion for evalua-

ting first-year students' success, with a focus on "the inner emotions, the will, and the attitude of the children" (p. 444). For teachers, the emphasis now shifts toward their understanding the student as an individual in long-term development, rather than assessing present behavior and capacities by predetermined norms (Zhao).

While studies on transition aim to provide insights into how schools as institutions and educational policies can better adapt to the developing child upon entering school (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Ogay, 2017, Zhao, 2017), little is said about the teacher's own adaptation efforts to new students and a new class. This aspect emerges strongly in the findings, in which I showed that, just like the students, the interviewed teachers also feel that they are experiencing a transition, where their own individuality undergoes a transformative experience.

The teacher's transition is far more significant in Waldorf schools than in other contexts, as the teacher is not specialized as a first-grade teacher (Avison and Rawson, 2014). The findings exemplify this: both interviewed teachers, Tina and Jack, are moving from an eighth-grade class to a first-grade class. They are thus transitioning from working with 14-year-old students to six- or seven-year-olds.

While the child's transition was presented in the findings as "becoming a pupil", the teacher's transition was presented as "rediscovering oneself as a teacher". In this section, this re-adaptation to a new class will be discussed in connection with the concept of authority. Indeed, this study reveals that establishing authority is essential during the first months of school, an aspect that, in my view, is not sufficiently emphasized in studies on transition.

Adapting and re-establishing their role as a teacher and their authority in relation to new students seems to me just as fundamental to study as the student's role as an agent. In fact, how the teacher's personality succeeds in establishing an educational relationship with the students, both individually and as a class group, appears crucial during this delicate transition period. This issue seems significant in encounters with any new class, regardless of age, but older students generally already understand their "role" as students and have familiar reference points.

In the case of the adaptation period to school, however, the foundation of authority is being established from the start. This is especially relevant in the Waldorf educational model, which introduces the concepts of “student,” “class,” and “authority” only when students enter primary school (Avison and Rawson, 2014; Barkved, 2022).

To conclude, the dynamics of the educational relationship during the first months of school will be interpreted as a process of mutual adaptation between teacher and student; both parties experiencing a transition, each at their own level, but also in a reflective way. This section will also discuss the possible consequences of this mutual adaptation

5.3.1. Seeking a Relationship with the Pupil as a Child, the transition from the teacher's perspective

That's what I'm trying to do, to be worthy of that in the morning, especially in the morning when arriving before them, to be worthy of the fact that they are this way, I mean, I don't know how to express it but that very candor, that openness, in fact we must be there, present to perceive it. (Jack)

As discussed in the literature review, authority in an educational context, if it is not to be confused with power, must be exercised based on respect for the student and a desire to guide them toward autonomy (Robbes, 2017). Additionally, as Gehaus (2017) notes, for authority exercised over children to be legitimate, it must acknowledge the inherent qualities of childhood and seek to foster their flourishing.

The findings suggest that the question of the legitimacy of authority and the process of building a relationship with the student on a shared basis (a symmetrical relationship) is essential during the period of adaptation to school. In this sub-section, I aim to explore the processes by which teachers can establish a relationship with the child based on legitimate authority. In other words, how can legitimate authority be embodied in practice?

The Three Stages of Building a Relationship with the Student: Foundations of Renewed Legitimate Authority

According to the interviewed teachers, perceiving the unique qualities of children is crucial for establishing a relationship with each student and supporting them on their educational journey. The interviews indicate that this requires significant self-transformation from the teachers, which I have interpreted as a process consisting of three stages: (i) questioning one-

self as an adult and as a knower, (ii) being open to what the child expresses, and (iii) showing tact in interactions with the student. These three stages will be discussed in this sub-section.

Self-Questioning: Am I Legitimate?

The findings suggest that the process of connecting with the student as a child begins with self-deconstruction, a questioning of oneself as an adult, a professional, and a knowledgeable expert. Tina, class teacher at Oak Tree School, explained that she feared she had become too focused on intellectual and adult reasoning to be able to take on a first-grade class again.

I wasn't picturing myself... class 1?! I was telling myself no, everything separates me from class 1 in fact and I couldn't see how I could relate because I had become more « head » after having taught the middle class (...) I was telling myself: « no that's too much ... it's too big a challenge for me now to go back to » (Tina)

Jack at Little Stream School similarly notes that one must not be overly specialized but maintain a certain inner flexibility to be able to teach to first graders. To connect with students, one must adopt an open attitude and deconstruct one's certainties.

The teachers' interviews reveal that this self-questioning occurs through existential reflection and internal self-evaluation. Both Tina and Jack question, despite their experience, whether they are capable of leading a first-grade class. This questioning does not pertain to their ability to deliver content but rather their ability to meet the students where they are and to interact with young children in a meaningful way.

The teachers look inward and evaluate if their approach to students is legitimate. For example Jack's expressed reflection, "Am I worthy of the task?" can be translated as: "Am I legitimate as a teacher?" In the findings, I showed that this question is linked, for the teachers, to being able to connect with the world of six- or seven-year-old children and their state of mind.

This line of inquiry parallels Gheaus's (2017) consideration of the legitimacy of authority presented in the literature review. Indeed, according to Gheaus, authority can only be legitimate if its purpose is to protect the "special goods of childhood." Following Tina and Jack's approach, questioning the legitimacy of one's role as a teacher—and therefore of one's authority—is an essential prerequisite for supporting students in their transition.

As presented in the findings, this self questioning is not only a prerequisite but also a daily practice. While it arises with particular intensity when a teacher decides to take on a new first-grade class, it also requires ongoing effort. For example Jack expresses that he tries to be connected to this reflexion and questioning each morning before encountering the pupils.

The findings thus highlight a crucial aspect of legitimacy: it cannot be taken for granted but must be rooted in a regular practice of self-questioning and internal reflection—what can be considered an "inner work" of the teacher (Schmelzer, 2019).

Schmelzer (2019) connects the teacher's inner work to the ability to develop deep attention, describing it as a "fundamental attitude that the teacher must strive for as an ideal that permeates their entire being" (p.233). Tina and Jack place their questioning of their role as teachers at this level of awareness. This inner work can be seen as an effort to embody authority within oneself.

Tina and Jack exemplify well the idea advanced by Robbes (2017) that authority must be embodied in the person of the teacher. Robbes states that "authority therefore refers a person to their ability to bring not only rules and structures to life but also to embody and represent a subjective position through constant adaptation to the situation and relationships with others..." (p.70). One might add that embodying authority in a just and appropriate way requires deep self-reflection and personal work.

Openness to What the Child Expresses

This initial stage of self-evaluation and deconstruction, leads, in my view to a second phase: approaching the child with humility and non-judgment, enabling a recognition of the child's sensitivity and uniqueness. The findings provide numerous examples of teachers admiring what children express: their innocence, fragility, enthusiasm, wonder, imagination, and unique ways of doing things and moving. Both Tina and Jack recall easily and with wonder each child's unique quality.

It is important to note that perceiving the child, like self-questioning, is an ongoing daily effort. Jack explains how, as adults, we can very quickly lose the ability to perceive what a child expresses through their sensitivity.

Teachers often exercise great caution when describing children, avoiding overly defined terms because the openness of childhood does not easily fit into adult language. The interviews highlight their hesitance in choosing specific words, but they also emphasize how simple terms or gestures can reveal a rich world of emotions that hold deep meaning for the child. They try to understand the existential meaning of what the child expresses without projecting their own values.

In the findings, I have shown how admiration for childhood qualities and their rich emotional world leads to a kind of reversal. Regarding these qualities, the teacher assumes the position of a learner, as the students re-teach the teacher about the openness to the world that belongs to childhood. The teacher adopts a posture of learning, listening, and perceiving, in effect making the child their master.

This reversal is understandable within the framework of legitimate authority, as Gehaus (2017) argues that children possess certain capabilities related to the "special goods of childhood" that surpass those of adults. It therefore seems coherent that, in this area, teachers adopt the attitude of a student in relation to the child.

Tact in the Relationship

The process of connecting with the child may culminate, in my view, in a third phase that I term pedagogical tact. The humility with which teachers approach children—and that may even lead to the child becoming the teacher's guide regarding the "special goods of childhood"—leads to a tactfulness in the relationship. The teacher does not assume a superior, all-knowing stance but instead marvels at the "special goods of childhood" and seeks to perceive them. This humility manifests itself in action.

Acts of tact are those not guided by an abstract, adult logic but rather attuned to the world of the child. The findings suggest that having a certain distance or sense of humor about the teacher's role is essential. It seems important for children to be able to laugh gently at and with their teacher, thus alleviating any sense of intimidation. In the findings, I provided the example of the carnival, where Jack humorously distanced himself from his role as a teacher. I can also mention Stephany at Oak Tree School who found it amusing when their teacher got

"red with anger", manifesting that their teacher expresses her discontentment about a situation in an enacted way.

These examples show that what might be experienced as pressure by students regarding classroom behavior or learning can be mitigated when the teacher is able to engage playfully. In the children's accounts, this tact often translates into the perception of their teacher as "kind". They always associate this kindness with specific actions or attitudes displayed by their teacher.

Conclusions about legitimate authority related to inner work concerning the transition

Thus, the teacher's work in building a relationship with the child can be understood as part of their role during the period of adaptation to school. As part of the system, the teacher also undergoes a transition, preparing to welcome the child. This is what I have termed in the findings as "rediscovering oneself as a teacher." By questioning their legitimacy, the teacher approaches students with a fresh perspective, coming toward them rather than expecting the child to adapt solely to them. The concept of legitimate authority, therefore, seems essential to understanding the transition into school from the teacher's perspective.

This study reveals that a contribution of Waldorf education regarding the transition process could be its emphasis on the teacher's inner work in relation to the authority they exercise. It demonstrates how legitimate authority and adaptation to the child can be grounded in a practice of introspection and biographical work.

While the findings illustrate how legitimate authority can be embodied, some challenges in this process were raised during the interviews. The most significant is the lack of time and availability for each student. Perceiving the qualities of childhood requires availability. The numerous tasks associated with teaching, as well as responsibilities outside of school, were described as the primary obstacles by the interviewed teachers.

Additionally, teachers emphasized that spending significant time with the class, including informal moments such as walks, recess, or free play, is essential for building relationships with the children, but they do not always have enough time for this. Supporting each student through their transition demands considerable time and attention from the teacher.

These difficulties lead to the recommendation that schools, as institutions, be particularly attentive to supporting teachers who welcome a new class, allowing them the necessary time and availability to fully embrace new students.

5.3.2. Creating a Class Identity in Dialogue with Students

You see it is a big puzzle in the beginning and there are many little pieces that are put together and that keep being put together step by step during all the years to come. And to know what shape it will take? that's still very blurred, even if you have a direction you...(Tina)

Becoming a cohesive group, Becoming a Student: Two Interconnected Processes

Rawson, Masters, and Avison (2013) describe the class teacher's role in the Waldorf curriculum as being responsible for fostering the class's identity and ethos. They hold “the biography of the class in mind” (p.21) through the years. In the first grade, their mission is to establish this group identity with the aim of “leading the children into becoming a socially cohesive group who care for and listen to each other” (Avison and Rawson, 2014, p.57).

The theme of class identity emerged prominently in the findings. It became evident that for children, feeling a sense of belonging to a group and finding their place within it is critical for their adaptation and their ability to become active pupils. Key moments of the transition were identified, where both students and teachers forged a connection to the class through meaningful shared experiences. These moments were analyzed to show how differences among students, as well as between teachers and students, were set aside, giving way to a sense of unity. These events were presented as milestones essential for fully embracing one's role as both a student and a teacher.

A crucial aspect of creating a class identity is that it is built through the individual efforts of each participant but, more importantly, through interactions between students and between the teacher and their students. Class identity emerges from a dialogical relationship with the group. Tina symbolized this process using the metaphor of a puzzle, which encapsulates the dialogical nature of the class's development as a cohesive group.

For Tina, the events of the first grade represent the first pieces of a puzzle, which over the years will gradually form an image. This image aligns with Rawson, Masters, and Avison's (2013) idea of the “biography of the class.” Tina shared her educational intentions for her time

with the class—particularly fostering students’ confidence to see themselves as active participants in the world—but emphasized that she “does not hold the keys” to solve everything by herself or to foresee the final image of the puzzle.

This puzzle metaphor also resonates with Edgoose’s (2008) advocacy for a dialogical relationship with the future in the teacher-student dynamic. Edgoose critiques the common monological approach in education, where predetermined outcomes are sought. In Tina’s case, it is clear that the biography and future of the class and its students emerge through interactions and unforeseen events. The final image of the puzzle is unknown at the outset.

The puzzle, with its many pieces, also symbolizes the diversity of the students. The image forms through multiple contributions. While class identity is vital, it does not come at the expense of the individual student’s agency. Rather, this group identity aligns with the idea of forming a classroom system that supports each student’s development. This process can also work in reverse, as each student’s growth can enhance the life of the class. Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) emphasize that agency is the capacity to act within a cultural and social context.

The findings reveal that the formation of a child’s identity as a student happens concurrently with the development of class identity. The process of “becoming a pupil” is also dialogical. The teacher provides direction and oversight but does not complete the journey for the student or impose a predetermined image of what they should become. Tina recognizes the challenges each student must overcome to become an active learner, but each does so in their own way and at their own pace. For some, this might mean learning to concentrate, while for others, it involves building the confidence to participate. However, the path to improvement is ultimately determined by the student.

Key moments of individual adaptation, presented in the findings, are often unpredictable because, at a certain point, it is solely up to the student as an agent to take action. Jack explained that when students are forced or constrained by rigid rules, they do not learn independently. For example, Jack avoids enforcing silence at the start of an activity through compulsion. Instead, he rings a bell to signal the beginning and waits for the students to create silence on their own. While this approach takes more time, it allows students to develop a habit rooted in their own desire to grow rather than merely obeying external commands. Students should be able

to understand the purpose and value of working in silence. In this way, children become students by internalizing rules and values rather than conforming to the teacher's authority.

Finding a Balance Between Symmetry and Asymmetry in the Educational Relationship

This dialogical relationship between teacher and student(s), which helps both to construct their identities and allows class identity to emerge, represents a significant challenge for teachers. They must simultaneously serve as a reassuring guide and connect with students as children. The findings revealed how students, in their vulnerability, have a strong need for a reassuring figure. Teachers are aware that providing a sense of security is essential. They set goals, evaluate progress, establish milestones, and make decisions. At the same time, as discussed in the previous section, teachers reflect on their practices and strive to learn from their students.

These dual roles correspond to the two aspects of educational authority as understood by Robbes (2017): symmetry and asymmetry. This duality places the teacher in a paradoxical position, requiring them to strike a balance. Teachers interviewed expressed that maintaining this balance between structure and freedom is challenging. For example, Jack noted that too much structure ensures order but stifles students' expression and agency, while too little structure allows for great freedom but can lead to chaotic situations that hinder learning and well-being. Jack shared with me the distress he sometimes felt when he couldn't find the right balance, having to get angry or deal with overly chaotic situations.

In the findings, embodying educational authority with its symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects is linked to two polar inner attitudes: self-questioning and confidence in the progression of students and the class. As discussed in the previous sub-section, self-questioning enables the teacher to perceive each child and act with tact and respect for their individuality, allowing the student to take initiative. Confidence allows the teacher to guide students through their vulnerabilities, adopting a long-term perspective. These inner attitudes, which support the symmetrical and asymmetrical dimensions of authority, complement Robbes' (2017) research adding the dimension of the teacher's relationship with themselves. Achieving balance in the teacher-student relationship can be seen as tied to achieving inner balance, as the teacher's personality must adapt to these two polar aspects of the relationship.

The challenge of balancing the teacher's authority and the student's agency is found in several empirical studies. Hopkins (2008) conducted a study about students' perception of ideal classroom conditions. It indicates concerning the role of the teacher that students require both reference points and security, alongside guidance, while also needing the freedom to act and take initiatives during lessons. Research on agency and pupil voice demonstrates that recognizing students as active participants in school enhances their well-being and the meaning they derive from learning, and that taking their voices into account can improve teaching practices (Hopkins, 2008; Hubert and Braud, 2017).

While acknowledging the student as an agent seems essential, the literature highlights the dangers associated with a loss of teacher credibility, which, according to Meirieu (2018) and Robbes (2017), may create a climate of insecurity for students. Biesta (2013) illustrates that an education solely focused on valuing learning deprives the student of a true educational experience. According to Schmelzer (2019), John Hattie's meta-analysis brought the teacher's personality back to the forefront of educational processes.

Studies on Waldorf education reported by Randoll and Peters (2015) and Dahlin (2017) also emphasize the need for guidance while allowing for significant student agency. They reveal that students value their relationship with school in feeling supported while also having opportunities to be creative and experience learning in a personalized manner.

A critical issue arises from a study conducted with students regarding the classroom teacher model (Randoll and Peters, 2015). While students appreciate this stable and secure relationship, a negative aspect that emerges is a teaching approach perceived as overly centered on the teacher, especially starting from sixth grade. Despite the fact that the class teacher principle is generally favored among students this study indicates that finding a balance between guiding students and allowing sufficient space for them to express themselves is a challenge for teachers within Waldorf education.

5.4. Establishing a Relationship with Learning

In Waldorf education, students are introduced to formal learning when they enter primary school (Avison and Rawson, 2014; Greubel). This marks the establishment of their relation-

ship with learning itself. In other educational contexts, formal learning begins in kindergarten, but the first year of primary school is still widely considered a foundational year for building a connection to learning (Zhao, 2017).

Studies on the transition to primary school consistently emphasize that the foundations laid during this period are critical for students' future academic journey (Correia and Marques-Pinto, 2016; Kokkalia et al., 2019; Ogay, 2017, Zhao, 2017). As we have seen, the connection between academic success and broader well-being is also highlighted. Zhao (2017) suggests viewing the first-grade curriculum for academic learning as a "study preparation period."

While the issue of a student's adaptation to learning is addressed in existing studies, the question of the "meaning" of learning is, in my view, overlooked. This aligns with Biesta's (2013) observation that the dominant trend in education today is to focus on methods rather than purposes. Yet, if the first-grade year is a foundational or preparatory year, it is reasonable to consider that students' perception of the purpose of school and learning is also being shaped during this time. Are the aims of learning to acquire skills useful to society, or to grow and transform as individuals?

In the literature, Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) raise this question about the goals of the curriculum. They argue that child-centered curricula—those aimed at fostering personal development—are more conducive to student agency, whereas models focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills are more closely tied to conforming to societal expectations.

As presented in the literature review, empirical studies on Waldorf pedagogy generally highlight that students form a positive relationship with learning and develop a strong sense of having "learned to learn" (Dahlin, 2017; Randol and Peters, 2015). The findings exemplify how learning is approached in a way that makes sense to the child and positions them as an active participant. In this section, I will discuss students' experiences and teachers' approaches to learning in this context.

Knowledge as Discovery (Enigma, Journey through Experience, Valuing Inventiveness)

The introduction of early learning raises the question of how these concepts can be presented in a manner that transcends merely transmitting pre-established knowledge as static objects.

How can one learn to write and count without merely replicating an existing culture but rather engaging in creative expression?

Steiner (2020) proposed the idea of returning to the creative processes that contributed to the genesis of letters as a means of introducing them. Letters were originally pictograms inspired by forms found in nature. He encourages students to assume the roles of those who created the first pictograms. This approach aims to prevent the knowledge of letters from being transmitted as a mere convention, instead inviting students to experience them as inventions. Similarly, all concepts can be rediscovered and reinvented through a creative process rather than being taught as fixed conventions (Avison and Rawson, 2014).

The findings illustrate this rediscovery, fully engaging students in their being. For instance, I presented Jack's introduction of the equal sign. It was particularly significant for me to discover that Jack was not merely reproducing a method; he was engaged in exploration, embodying the mindset of an inventor. He was especially pleased to have implemented a game with a rope and three teams and based on a story he had invented that allowed students to physically and emotionally experience equality.

We have seen that Tina also valued this creative experience during her introduction of the number nine. She set aside the example provided in a Waldorf textbook focused on teaching numbers and instead related it to a personal experience.

Children also particularly value it when their suggestions are acknowledged or when they can invent based on the lesson. The findings highlight instances where students invent or make suggestion such as Mary who secretly create new forms in their notebooks. Each learning opportunity, in addition to acquiring a skill, serves as a chance to experiment together and create.

The words "enigma" and "mystery" frequently resonate in the voices of children. They particularly appreciate this quality of mystery, such as when a new element secretly appears on the drawing on the board or when they have to guess something. This seems essential, as positioning oneself in a relationship of discovery and mystery engages them as active participants. They are invited to explore the unknown, the mysterious, the enigmatic.

Thus, the teacher does not present the concept to be studied in a definitive manner. Instead, they retain an element of the unknown, as this concept must be discovered collaboratively. Teachers invite children to explore the concept through play within the experiential context. The concept to be uncovered together.

This presentation of knowledge as an enigma or mystery reflects the principle of guiding without imposing constraints on learning. The teacher indeed has truths to convey and teachings to provide. However, these are presented as something yet to be discovered. The teacher makes space for learning and for the unique contributions of students. They provide direction, but the path toward the concept is traversed together and may yield surprises.

Consequently, the lesson can evolve into a co-creation. Interviews reveal that what is most enriching for teachers is when students personally engage with the lesson material. They can then add their own touch. The fact that teachers identify the most enriching moments in their profession as those when they witness their students appropriating content and playing with it evokes Biesta's (2013) notion of the gift of teaching. The teacher can be fulfilled when they see that their gift is accepted. Moreover, as a gift, teaching can be utilized by students in their own unique ways.

All these learning activities are tied to an overarching approach. While teachers ensure that foundational concepts are progressively integrated, their primary objective is not the outcome but the process. Students must be able to internalize the learning experiences.

Knowledge Oriented Towards Being Rather Than Having

The findings also reveal that the creative aspect of learning hinges on the notion that knowledge is not regarded as an object or possession, but is linked to the concept of being. This has been presented in the literature as learning as a transformation (Schieren, 2019). Knowledge thus resides in a personal relationship as an attribute of being. In this context, the interview with Zita is particularly striking.

So we learnt the letters, the As and then the Bs, well I liked the letters Mr.X did. His proposals, his stories, the games...In fact each letter has a story.(...) there are three that I prefer, they are the A the C and the D. I feel they are nice to me. I like to learn with them as if they were human beings. For me, it's like having a friend, a nice friend that will always stay my friend. (Zita)

She refers to letters as benevolent friends, illustrating how letters can evoke characters within the consciousness of the student.

The findings further show that the most significant moments of learning for children resonate with their biographies. For example, Stephany who practices circus and enjoys physical exercises was touched by the fact that during a story in which characters performed acrobatics, they later practiced reproducing them themselves in class.

5.5. Lessons Regarding the Transition and Introduction of Learning

This section delves into the essence of learning the role of a student and the embodiment of the teacher's role in the classroom. These two processes occur in tandem. I have demonstrated in the findings how key moments are significant for both students and teachers. The progress students achieve independently legitimizes the teacher's role as a guide, marking a shared success.

Regarding the transition period within the school, which can be described as preparatory or adaptive, it becomes evident that not exerting pressure on cognitive outcomes but instead focusing, as recommended by Zhao (2017) on the quality of approach to learning and the development of holistic faculties can be beneficial.

This study underscores the importance of the concepts of student agency and authority in relation to the adaptation period. The first class can be an opportunity to facilitate a fruitful relationship between agency and authority, learning and teaching, serving as a vital foundation for the student's future journey, where they learn that their role is dual. They need to refer to a figure who can oversee their development while also feeling like an active participant.

This fruitful relationship must be embodied in the approach to knowledge and learning. Guiding and conveying truths should not occur without involving the student in exploration; conversely, learning cannot occur without intergenerational transmission.

The Waldorf pedagogical method concerning early learning seems to offer a means for students to experience their relationship with knowledge as agents and creators. It encourages students to embark on discoveries, connecting knowledge to enigma and mystery while emphasizing being rather than having.

However, it appears essential that this method, to be truly effective, should be revisited and reinvented by each teacher. It cannot replicate a singular path to knowledge without risking losing its very essence. The teacher must allow for uncertainty and the emergence of new pathways to knowledge through their encounters with students.

This approach during the initial months of school is demanding and presents numerous challenges for both teachers and students, but as a transformative experience, it leads to significant satisfaction in learning. Learning becomes an adventure that strengthens those who embark on it, enabling both teachers and students to mutually empower one another through this journey.

6. Conclusions

6.1 findings overview

The purpose of my research is to understand the adaptation period at school, focusing on the initial encounter between teacher and students. This study considers both educational aspects and the relationship to learning. This approach aligns with my two research questions: the first addresses the adaptation period from an educational perspective, while the second explores the introduction of formal learning experiences. I address these questions here by providing an overview of my findings.

This study shows that the adaptation period is a delicate yet potentially rich time for the child, offering new opportunities for self-discovery and for seeing the world in fresh ways. The child is depicted as particularly open during this period, thanks to their childlike sensitivity and enthusiastic desire to explore school and learn. This openness, described by the interviewed teachers as candor or innocence, also makes the child vulnerable and fragile.

The child's relationship to their life as a student within a group takes root during these first months of school. During this period, they acquire important foundations that can foster self-confidence and shape their future school journey. The child needs warmth and attention from the teacher, as well as guidance to find their place within the group and in relation to learning,

in order to actively participate and take initiative. The first-grade welcoming ceremony is a fundamental step in this regard, as it formally introduces the child into the school institution, signals their role, and demonstrates a supportive community around them.

The class teacher also finds themselves in a delicate position. They must reach out to the child as an individual, question their own legitimacy as a teacher, and seek to "rediscover themselves as a teacher" through interactions with new students who are just beginning their school journey. At the same time, the teacher must embody a guiding presence, capable of leading young children safely through their early experiences in school. Taking on a first-grade class thus presents a significant challenge: the teacher strives to balance allowing the child to actively engage in their life at school and in learning while also providing a secure framework for each child's development.

This balance is established through relationships and shared experiences, creating a connection that is both asymmetrical and symmetrical. This educational relationship, grounded in mutual respect without dismissing the teacher's authority, can become a source of co-constructing the class's future—captured metaphorically as a puzzle. Indeed, the full picture emerges over time, shaped by events and interactions in a dialogical process, rather than solely by the teacher's expectations.

A similar dynamic exists in the interaction between the teacher as "author" and the student as an active participant regarding learning. Lessons are introduced as discoveries. New knowledge is explored together through shared experiences; although the teacher knows the goal, they journey with the students, rediscovering alongside them. This path is not predetermined and holds surprises, allowing teacher and students to be creative, to invent along the way, and to co-create the lesson. Learning, therefore, becomes an opportunity to encounter oneself and the world while acquiring foundational skills across all academic domains.

6.2. Contributions

Empirical Level

This study uses concrete examples to illustrate how the adaptation period to school can be experienced and conceptualized within the context of Waldorf pedagogy. It highlights several unique aspects of this approach during the critical entry period:

- **Establishing Connection with School:** Creating a sense of belonging to the school environment through a welcoming ceremony that involves key participants in the transition process.
- **Recognizing the Student Individually:** Seeing each student as a unique child on their personal journey, allowing them to take steps at their own pace.
- **Teacher's Inner Development:** Emphasizing the teacher's self-development as essential for establishing a foundation of trust with the student.
- **Implementing Beloved Authority:** Building a warm, supportive authority that connects with each student, supports a mutually supportive group dynamic, and fosters constructive educational experiences.
- **Introducing Learning as Discovery:** Presenting learning as a process of discovery through experiential activities and peer interaction.
- **Long-Term Developmental Perspective:** Framing the events of the first year in the context of a long-term developmental journey, which is facilitated by the model of the class teacher who stays with the same group of students for up to eight years, planning their development over time.

The results broadly align with recent research recommendations on school transitions, as discussed in the literature review. These include focusing on mutual respect and group cohesion, ensuring students' emotional security, and introducing learning progressively through playful and artistic activities. The student evaluation will be discussed further in the limitations section.

Methodological Level

This study does not contribute new methodologies but confirms:

- The importance of integrating both teacher and student perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of school life.
- The value of narrative methods to explore practical teaching and learning aspects, using examples that highlight the biographical nature of the teaching profession and the student experience within the framework of *Bildung* (educational and personal development).

Theoretical Level

The study underscores the importance of ecological theories in understanding transition to school, emphasizing their relevance for deepening the understanding of adaptation in Waldorf schools. Additionally, it demonstrates the value of incorporating the concepts of *Bildung* and educational authority as conceptual tools to better understand the transition and first year of primary school.

- **Bildung:** This concept allows for viewing the transition as part of a long-term journey tied to life-long learning objectives. A long-term perspective on transitional events helps reduce immediate pressure for results. *Bildung* also frames the student-teacher relationship in a distinct relational quality.
- **Authority:** This concept facilitates understanding the transition from the teacher's perspective, emphasizing their efforts during the adaptation period. Authority, as defined by Robbes (2017), Gehaus (2018), and Steiner (2020), is not automatically conferred by position but requires the teacher to embody it personally in specific situations (Robbes), recognize students as children (Gehaus, 2017), and engage in self-work (Steiner).

The study shows that these various perspectives on authority complement each other and share a common feature: authority is relational and exercised for the child's benefit. Like authority, teaching itself can be viewed as relational from the outset of school. Foundational learning can thus be approached in a creative, engaging way.

6.3. Limitations

As I conclude the research process for this master's thesis, I find it illuminating to reflect not only on the valuable insights I've gained but also on the aspects left unexplored.

The first limitation of this study is its scale. With a small participant group—two teachers and seven students—focused on the initial months of schooling, the findings cannot be easily generalized. Additionally, limiting the study to this brief period narrows the scope of investigation into the transition process. While this smaller scale restricts generalization, it also allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and specific events.

Another limitation lies in the exclusive focus on the teacher-student relationship. Although this focus enables a detailed analysis of one key aspect, it leaves out the broader context of systemic relationships essential to the transition. Important figures such as parents were not included in this study, and the connection between kindergarten and primary school was addressed only in the literature review for context.

A third significant limitation concerns the notion of assessment. Evaluation can be a valuable tool for supporting students during their transition. Zhao has shown that assessment can even focus on students' adaptation itself. While assessment is present in this context—albeit in a less formalized way than in other settings—it was not a central focus of this study, and teachers were not specifically questioned on this topic. However, some aspects of assessment emerged through the findings. Moments identified as key adaptation milestones were interpreted as indicators of progress and as informal ways for teachers to acknowledge and support individual student development.

Another limitation pertains to difficult situations or cases of unsuccessful adaptation, which this study did not investigate. During the research, including the pilot phase, teachers mentioned two students who struggled significantly with adapting to school. One of these students left the group after a few weeks, while the other remained in the class but continued to present challenges for the teacher. I received no further information other than that these were painful situations for those involved.

These limitations were deliberate choices, yet they naturally restrict the study's scope and warrant acknowledgment. Lastly, I would like to mention one limitation that I consider a mis-

take: the interview design for the students. After data collection, I realized there were no questions about the students' experiences before entering first grade. The interview questions were not sufficiently oriented to capture how they may have prepared for or considered their entry into school. This omission felt like a gap, especially since I had collected extensive data on the teachers' experiences before the school year began.

6.4. Recommendations

Future Research

The limitations of this study highlight areas for further empirical exploration around school transition. A study focusing on the final year of kindergarten could provide insights into the other key year in this transition period in a Waldorf context. Additionally, the systemic aspects of the Waldorf transition process would benefit from empirical studies examining connections with parents, teacher training centers, kindergarten and primary school teachers...

Two specific areas—evaluation and challenging situations—could be further integrated into a research study. If every effort is made to support a student's progress, how can we assess when a student is struggling and may need special assistance? Similarly, how are challenging situations, especially those involving teachers who bear significant responsibility, addressed? Examining these difficult scenarios could open up new perspectives on the transition process within the Waldorf context. Beyond individual challenges, it would also be valuable to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers assess their students during the transition period, the intent behind their assessments, and the tools they use.

In the broader educational landscape, future research could usefully explore teachers' inner work in relation to authority. Teacher self-development appears essential for fostering a balanced educational relationship in which *Bildung* is significant for both teacher and student.

Reflections on Waldorf Schools

Rather than offering concrete recommendations, I hope this study can serve as a reflective tool for teachers, trainers, and parents within the Waldorf community. Each school must make

decisions based on its unique context and strengths, but I would like to share a general thought.

This study demonstrates the benefits of allowing children the time to experience childhood while gradually learning and growing. My recommendation, therefore, is to preserve this distinctive element of Waldorf education and to maintain a stance that protects children's harmonious development, counteracting the pressures of accelerated achievement and performance metrics. This stance should not be conservative; rather, it should engage in a continual re-evaluation of practices and theoretical foundations, in open dialogue with other voices in education.

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