Where Are the Families of Diversity?
A Canadian Perspective

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The study presented here is based on my master's thesis and its leading question: Why do families of diverse backgrounds choose to enroll their children in a Waldorf school despite viewing it as a homogeneous environment lacking in diversity? Dimensions of diversity specifically explored in this research include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, creed, religion, and sexual orientation (as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Commission or OHRC, 2017). To explore the issue, I will focus on a philosophy-based school located in the heart of one of the largest multicultural cities in Ontario; the school is real, but I will be referring to it here with the fictitious name "Waldorf Heights"; similarly, all personal names have been changed in this article to protect the privacy of all community members. The school is facing socioeconomic challenges due to its dependence on tuition revenue, high student attrition, and low enrollment. Despite attempts to increase enrollment to build a more multiracial student population, it has remained a predominantly white, heteronormative community. While the educational philosophy is based on the principle of social renewal, the reality of running a sustainable business is pulling the school in a very different direction (see also AWSNA, 2015-2019).

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. Why is an independent school based on social justice and democracy and located in the heart of one of Ontario's most multicultural cities not attracting and retaining families of diversity?

2. Why do families of diversity choose Waldorf education despite the school's lack of diversity?

Guided by Fullan's (2014) Professional Capital framework for implementing deep change in a school, and informed by Otto Scharmer's Theory U, an action research methodology that focuses on developing knowledge for societal transformation (Scharmer, 2016), I leveraged discourse analysis, a literature review, and interview methods to explore why the school was struggling to shift its demographics. The different levels of my study included examining the interdependent factors of the school's messaging on its website, an evaluation of the biases and assumptions of the practitioner as researcher (i.e., myself), and an analysis of the stories of the school's families and faculty of various races, ethnicities, creeds, religions, and sexual orientations. These examinations allowed me to uncover patterns of relationships at a systemic level that appear to be working to *disconnect* rather than connect the school with marginalized families.

Background

The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America describes the aims of a Waldorf education as developing young people who are independent thinkers, problem-solvers, and capable of creatively meeting the challenges of their time (AWSNA, 2015-2019). An inclusive and forward-thinking spirit of idealism, commitment, and engagement with the world, writes one researcher, underlies Waldorf education at every level (Zepeda, 2018). On the surface, the Waldorf messaging aligns with many 21st century models of education focused on social justice. However, Waldorf's spiritual relationship to knowledge and to the way humans learn is fundamentally different from most other educational models. In addition, Waldorf education is set up as an *action research framework*, wherein educators keep on learning their trade through practice. As one Waldorf educator and scholar explains:

> In this holistic model, knowledge evolves according to how the child develops spiritually and perceives the world. In mainstream education the formulation of curriculum knowledge is based on a linear view of the child's intellectual development. In this view of knowledge, the child is de-centered and marginalized in the knowledge process effectively undermining the most personal element of knowledge production – imagination.
>
> (Wright, 2013, p. 57)

In this context, social justice is viewed from a different paradigm that begins with what Wright describes as the child's personal relationship to knowledge and his or her role as an epistemic agent (p. 56). While working within the philosophical framework of the Waldorf curriculum, many Waldorf educators agree there is a need to consider the incorporation of new methods of learning to better reflect the complexity of change in the world that surrounds children today and the one

that will surround them in the future (Rawson, 2011 & Wright, 2013).

Change Theory

Waldorf schools have been operating on a self-administrative model for decades, but they often seem to struggle with finding the right balance of freedom and accountability (Schaefer, 2015). Collaboration can be an exhausting endeavor unless there is a strategy that connects to a vision that ties it all together purposefully and transparently. Fullan's (2014) Professional Capital framework, summarized below, supports learning organizations by helping the leadership of a school identify their human, social, and decisional capital and by developing the levers that will build a collaborative culture to ensure that the pedagogy is connected to the school's vision:

> **Human Capital:** The human resources or personnel dimension of the quality of the teachers in the school—their basic teaching talents.
>
> **Social Capital:** The quality and quantity of interactions and relationships among people. In a school, such interactions affect teachers' access to knowledge and information; their sense of expectation, obligation, and trust; and their commitment to work together for a common cause.
>
> **Decisional Capital:** The resources of knowledge, intelligence, and energy that are required to put human and social capital to effective use. The capacity to choose well and make good decisions.
>
> **Professional Capital:** Cultivating human and social capital over time, deliberating, identifying, and spreading instructional practices that are the most effective for meeting the learning goals of the school.
>
> (Fullan, 2014)

While many individual Waldorf teachers do cultivate culturally-responsive teaching practices, this kind of fragmented strategies and individualistic solutions will never change established patterns of oppression (Fullan, 2014). Building the professional capital of a school can ensure that diversity issues are a school-wide priority and not relegated to a marketing campaign, to the isolated efforts of individual teachers, or to the model of a one time-project such as a field trip. In this context, the school studied in this research has many strengths. The school prioritizes human capital with strong mentoring and professional development resources, and because the faculty is committed to work for a common cause, the social capital has been strong. If there is a missing link in the organizational structure, it could be the absence of a strategic plan centered on student learning and ensuring that all stakeholders are working together towards the same goals.

It is common for many educational institutions to focus on what Fullan calls the "wrong levers" for transformative changes: accountability, individualistic solutions, and fragmented strategies, rather than on the "right levers": capacity-building, collaborative effort, pedagogy and systemness (2014). School capacity, Fullan writes, refers to a school's efforts to build professional capital by its members continuously learning and working together to raise the whole and not just individuals within the whole. A key challenge in my own study involved acknowledging the different voices within the school community and understanding the organization's blind spots, including my own individual blind spots, as I was pursuing the research questions. The methodology of Theory U provided me with a variety of tools to detect such blind spots and explore their root causes.

Methodology

Otto Scharmer, the author of Theory U, describes the methodology as the Iceberg Model (Presencing Institute, n.d.-a). He writes, "Under the landscape of social pathology lies a structure that supports existing patterns. If we want to transform how our society responds to challenges, we need to understand the deeper structures that we continue to collectively reenact" (Presencing, nd.-a). A structure, according to Scharmer, is a pattern of relationships. The structures of a school include a division of labour, the student-teacher relationship, the admin-teacher relationship, the parent-teacher relationship, and so on. The first step to understand a pattern of relationships is to begin with oneself through critical reflection (Hattie, 2013). Such processes, in the form of meditation and teacher evaluations, are built into the expectations of all Waldorf teachers, although methods of self-reflection vary greatly and often might end in mere reflection without the next step of exploration, specifically the exploration of how knowledge shapes the experience of being human (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2017; Rawson, 2011). The pedagogical scholar Stephen Brookfield (1995) writes that critical reflection in teaching "must always be linked to how the world can be changed, otherwise it is contained within the one room schoolhouse, remaining hidden and analysis fixated. Moral, ethical and political issues that may be cause for alarm

often remain invisible" (p. 217). Theory U works out of two guiding questions for critical reflection to develop transformational leadership: What is my self? and What is my work? (Scharmer, 2016).

Following these leading questions, I utilized document collection for critical discourse analysis, interviews, and reflective journaling as methods to critically evaluate my own position in studying this topic while also working as the school's admissions director. This role places me in a position of power and privilege, so it was essential to incorporate a critical self-reflection methodology into my research and to employ diverse methods to acquire varying perspectives to bypass my plausible biases as a member of the school community. By doing so, this research also provided me an opportunity at personal exploration of my own biases and privilege. In addition, the framework of action research provided me with the flexibility to adjust and work with what emerged from the participants when their voices were heard and to reflect on how their subjectivities may have impacted my research (McNiff, 2019).

Journaling. As a researcher practitioner, I engaged in a self-reflective journaling practice using the Theory U model of triple looping, so that I would develop skills to *listen, observe,* and *communicate* in a manner that is informed by the higher ideals of the school (Scharmer, 2016). Triple looping is transformational learning results from critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow describes the process as "subjective reframing," referring to "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning making perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets etc.) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they can generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8). Developing a mindful practice is an important process of action research and is a part of the daily teaching routines at the Waldorf school, but it is not an administrative requirement.

My journal entries were guided by a series of Theory U questions such as: What are the deeper systemic forces that keep you, and the stakeholders in this system, re-enacting results that ultimately nobody wants? (Presencing Institute, n.d.-b) Theory U also provides a guide to exploring how individuals download habitual ways of thinking from the past rather than keeping themselves open to something new during the process of research and data interpretation (Brookfield, 1995; Schaefer, 2016). Diversity is a complex and sensitive topic for practitioner action research, because it is impossible to be objective. Disadvantages of my positionality as a research practitioner included the limitations of being able to see outside of my own assumptions, groupthink, social identity, and conflicts of interest. "An outsider 'expert' may not have the 'right' answer," Denscombe (2014) warns, "but can possibly offer an alternative perspective which can help the practitioner to gain new insights into the nature of the practical problem" (p. 128). The inclusion of diverse parent and faculty participant interviews and the recording of their experiences and insights offered a validity measure to challenge my subjectivity in a way that a clinical, academic study would not have allowed for.

Interviews. Based on the overview provided by Theory U, eight semi-structured interviews were held with four currently enrolled families and four faculty. Parent interviews were framed by first stating the problem the research was seeking to understand more deeply: Why are so few diverse families enrolled in the school?

1. Is this a problem? If so, why is it a problem?
2. Why do you think more families of diversity are not enrolling?
3. When and why did you enroll when you did?
4. Do you think diversity and inclusion are a priority at the school?
5. Are your families reflected in the learning material?
6. Is it a safe place to discuss diversity?
7. What could the school be doing to attract more diverse families?

The faculty interviews were framed by the Waldorf principle of fostering social renewal followed by the following questions:

1. Do you think our family population is diverse?
2. Is diversity important to the Waldorf mission of social renewal?
3. Is it the role of the school to educate students on diversity and inclusivity?
4. What in the practice of working and teaching in a tuition-based school supports and/or obstructs achieving diversity?

5. What are some examples of ways that you have incorporated diverse or underrepresented populations into your lesson planning?

6. Why are there few diverse families in the school and how can we change that?

The Theory U interview method and tools are designed to encourage deep listening practices that include: suspending one's voice of judgment, appreciative listening, generative listening, openness, and learning to be fully present, leveraging the power of presence and silence (Presencing Institute, n.d.-a). Semi-structured interviews were selected because they build the organization's capacity for co-creating solutions and ensure community members are the primary beneficiaries of the research (MacDonald, 2012; Presencing Institute, n.d.-a).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). School websites are a source of information for current students, parents, and teachers and are also a recruitment tool for schools. Comparing the results of the interviews with the language found on the website provided another layer to understanding the social constructs from which I was potentially operating unconsciously. CDA analyses are meant to transcend the interpretation of language with the understanding that the researcher's biases are embedded and are never neutral (Breeze, 2011).

Analysis. The interviews, journaling, and documents collected were coded, categorized, and classified into themes and attributes for statistical analysis supported by a software called NVivo that stores and organizes data in one platform. After reviewing the transcripts, journals, and documents, I identified preliminary codes that I subsequently distilled into themes across the three data sources (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). The codes were arranged to find patterns, and as a result, two separate charts were developed to better reflect the voices of the parents and the faculty, thereby aiming to limit my own subconscious bias and subjectivity as a practitioner researcher. McNiff (2019) wrote that the aim in creating spaces for the voices of the research participants is to allow for their voices to emerge freely and on their own terms.

Background and Context

In the following section I offer the research background informing my own study of diversity in the Waldorf school in which I work. It is presented according to the topics and issues that guided my observations and analysis.

Diversity as an organizational strategy

From an organizational perspective, Johns and Saks (2017) write that valuing diversity – rather than *tolerating* diversity – could yield strategic and competitive advantages beyond increased enrollment. Managing diversity extends to the entire organization and can include diversity metrics, recruitment strategies, creating and communicating anti-discriminatory policies, and raising awareness externally, internally, and within the curriculum (Johns & Saks, 2017). Research has shown that getting in the door can be a problem for marginalized families when the admissions person is white and can be equally challenging for multiracial and LGBT teachers (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Simply hiring teachers on the basis of their ethnicity, however, is a fragmented strategy without an overall strategic plan. An LGBT-identified teacher will be more aware of the gender segregation in schools that can escape notice; but if there is no framework for collaboration, that teacher may end up working in isolation and may eventually leave the organization, draining the decisional capital of the school and further deterring the recruitment of multiracial faculty (Fullan, 2014). The research provided a lens for understanding the limitations of a strategy focused only on the human capital, and particularly within the context of solving the diversity problem.

Canadian Identity and the Role of Data

Transformative changes within organizations commonly fail; one of the obstacles to deep change, writes Keene (2000), is the belief in a collective mythology. The scholarship I reviewed focuses on an aspect of Canadian identity that may also be having an impact on the school's position: as Canadians, we believe that we are colour blind (Sykes, 2015). All of the participants interviewed felt that Canada did not share the same intensity of discussions around issues of diversity as Americans do. Research on Canadian elite schools revealed that students of colour strive to achieve "the somatic norm of Whiteness (e.g., being white in a black body) rather than developing their voice to disrupt entrenched privilege" (Angod, 2015a, p. 112). Angod's interviews with students of colour also revealed that far from moving freely within the dominant group's social sphere, assimilating was a source of anxiety for them, and a tension existed between the dominant group of the institution and the rhetoric of its "global citizen" mission. Angod (2015b) writes, "Paradoxically, the elite schools depend on students of colour to secure the moral distinction of multicultural status, revealing that the leveraging of white supremacy works in both directions" (p. 430). Angod (2015a) also connects the rise in social justice education with the Canadian national

identity of "humanitarianism abroad," as an essential aspect of how Canadians of European descent come to see themselves as racially superior. Angod suggests that multiculturalism and humanitarianism, as practiced in social pedagogy through student volunteer trips at elite schools, were linked to a racial logic of white dominance.

A colour-blind Canadian identity also impacts the curriculum content of schools, including Waldorf schools. Generally, there is a lack of content highlighting Canada's history of slavery and segregation and the positive history of black institutions and black resilience (Maynard, 2017). Not only are black students not seeing themselves reflected and celebrated in the curriculum, but the lack of racial representation in school staff and leadership roles also impacts students (Maynard, 2017).

Why is an independent school based on social justice and democracy and located in the heart of one of Ontario's most multicultural cities not attracting and retaining families of diversity?

While parents at my school complained about the request for demographic and identity information in anonymous school satisfaction surveys, we should note Allan Johnson's observation in his important book, *Power, Privilege, and Difference* (2018). Johnson notes that data helps raise awareness around patterns of oppression that may otherwise go undetected or silenced by those in power, and that by not collecting identity data schools are circumventing the issue of diversity. On a macro level, the Ontario Human Rights Code (2017) has stated that it will continue to call for the collection of race-based data, as well as data on other Code grounds, to better understand whether racial disparities exist in sectors such as policing, child welfare, and education. This research helped me to understand how data plays a key role in naming race issues and other issues of marginalization and the systemic challenge in Ontario as noted by the OHRC (2017).

Social Justice Education in Elite Schools

In his doctoral research project, Brian Hermann studied private schools' offering of social justice education in the context of two trends: (a) increased price/exclusivity of tuition, on one side, and (b) an increased egalitarianism and a focus on social values, on the other (Herrmann, 2015). As most elite schools promise to form the leaders of tomorrow and to attract a growing number of diverse students, Herrmann's research explores to what extent a social justice pedagogy in an elite school is acting out of "a sociocultural consciousness to develop a student's critical consciousness so they can see the world not as a static reality but a reality in transformation" (p. 43). Applying CDA to the literature and public documents of three elite schools that advance social justice in their curriculum, Herrmann demonstrates how the sample schools combined social justice theory (i.e., developing skills for democratic participation and social action) with individual learning theory (i.e., increasing knowledge and leadership skills). Herrmann's research suggests that high tuition fees and an increased focus on egalitarianism and social issues did not provide marginalized students with a voice, nor did it help develop an ally within the dominant group; instead it ensured compliance with the concepts of the elite in society. Many elite schools in Canada, including Waldorf schools, claim they offer a social justice pedagogy, deploying such phrases as "global citizens," but Herrmann's research links this kind of rhetoric to a form of neoliberalism rather than to an ethical pursuit geared towards disrupting oppression.

The Growing Diversity in Elite Schools

It was important to explore two common but polarizing myths around diversity in Waldorf schools: (1) that diverse families can't afford an independent education, and (2) that there is a growing number of diverse students attending elite schools. In research regarding the globalization of the education market, Ayling (2015) explored the phenomenon of Nigerian parents sending their children to British boarding schools and found that the parents wanted to achieve two things for their children: first, to have them belong to the global elite even if it meant shedding part of their black identity in order to move with ease among the wealthy, and, second, that their children would return to become elites within their own society. In the case of the Nigerian families, they have to adapt to white culture since whites control jobs, schools, and other sources of power; at the same time, whites do not appear to pay much attention to the needs, history, and perspectives of Nigerians, African Americans, the LGBT, or class differences (Johnson, 2018). Chances are that if the school is in a predominantly white community, the school is unaware of its lack of attention to marginalized families (Brookfield, 1995). This research demonstrates that some diverse families can afford and desire an independent education, but that they could be motivated by a subconscious bias that may be directing the solution to the problem down the wrong path.

It also demonstrates that a strategy focused simply on increasing the number of diverse students will not address oppression but, in fact, can ensure compliance with entrenched concepts of privilege.

The Waldorf Body of Knowledge

Chris Schaefer (2015) identifies the challenge of moving from the theory of a holistic democratic society to the practice in a Waldorf school and the evolving adaptations that have taken place over the past 100 years. Rawson's (2011) and Wright's (2013) research on Waldorf education offers a rigorous academic analysis of the education's blind spots. According to Martyn Rawson, Waldorf practitioners draw on what he names *the Waldorf body of knowledge* and, as a result, they relinquish their professional autonomy with regard to the educational needs of their students (Rawson, 2011). Recent research has identified that when white teachers are working with a diverse student population, they cannot assume to know what is best for individual children or how they experience microaggressions, but, as Johnson (2018) suggests, they could learn more from their students. Multiracial teachers are said to be uniquely situated to reflect the experiences of and to support mixed race students (Sykes, 2015). This presents a unique challenge for Waldorf schools, as there is a shortage of trained teachers across the continent (Soule & Stewart, 2016). Recruiting Waldorf teachers of various backgrounds was cited by one faculty participant as the single most important step to achieving the social mission and attracting a greater range of students that better reflect society. Kanya, a faculty participant that identified as East Indian, wrote, "When I attended a conference in Sacramento for a class intensive, there were all these people from North America, and one Indian, one Asian, and one Black out of 200 people taking the course – the rest were all Caucasian."

Two areas of inquiry that arose in Wright's research (2013) is the role of the class teacher as a knowledge authority and the historical yearly themes that marginalize the socio-political dimensions of knowledge. Wright observes:

> The position of the class teacher as knowledge authority determines the way knowledge is constructed, transmitted and developed. In the domain of teacher narrative and classroom talk, with nuances of voice, emotion and meaning[,] a subject such as geography poorly handled can carry racial overtones of natural determinism and evolutionism.
>
> (Wright, 2013, p. 63)

Similarly, Wright describes how the Waldorf historical yearly themes can lead to a form of knowledge that is out of sync with the students' emerging faculties of comprehension, self-reflection, and world awareness (p. 63).

Clearly, there is a need to learn more about the experiences of marginalized students as well as to identify the right levers for change outlined in the Professional Capital framework, such as a pedagogical audit that could empower marginalized groups. To rely solely on the wisdom of a curriculum that has been passed down without engaging in a process of action research can result in a lack of discourse on very important issues impacting student learning (Johnson, 2018; Rawson, 2011). It is hard for members of dominant groups to realize how mistrusted they are by subordinate groups; it might even be harder not to see such mistrust, when identified in the classroom, as a personal criticism directed at the teacher (Johnson, 2013).

Analysis of Data and Findings

The Critical Discourse Analysis of the school website showed its language as conveying a child-focused and inclusive approach to learning: "Walk into 'Waldorf Heights', or any Waldorf school, and you will find yourself in a world of art-visual, musical, theatrical, you name it. Making art unleashes the imagination, lets creativity take over and frees a child to learn the most 'un-art like' subjects in a powerful and lasting way" (School Website, 2019).

The most significant finding of the analysis, however, was the absence of language addressing directly or indirectly the issues of diversity and of anti-discrimination policies. The website did not include a diversity statement, nor did the word 'diversity' show up in the full text query. On the school Mission and Values webpage, there was no mention of social justice, equality, or democracy. In the context of transformation to bring change, diversity, as a value, is not mentioned.

Experts state that anti-discriminatory statements and policies need to be a part of an integrated or systemic strategy (Fullan, 2014) and recommend that organizations create and enforce anti-discriminatory policies publicly and internally to build awareness (Johns and Saks, 2017).

In developing a comprehensive strategy to address the lack of diversity information, it will be important for the school leadership not to simply add a statement or diversity policy, but to include the greater community in a conversation and form a diversity committee. This will

serve to build the professional capital of the school and to have a greater impact on student outcomes aligned with the school's mission.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In Figure 1, "Reasons for enrolling: Decision-making path of parent-participants," the boxed themes located above 'Entry Point' and 'Retention' offer positive reasons for parents to enroll their children at the school and keep them at the school. The lower boxes in black describe barriers to enrolling at the school or to attrition factors that would cause families to leave the school. The experience of a diverse child is placed here at the centre because it can change the path from a negative school experience to a positive one, or from a positive path to a negative outcome regardless of the parents' experience. Kanya, a male faculty participant said, "When you watch the whole journey of a family coming here, anthroposophy can attract or repel. If they practice a non-religious existence, it is not what they want but what they see as a good fit for their child. They want their child to be healthy, loved, curious and imaginative. The repulsion then becomes not acceptance but tolerance. Many are coming polarized but if the child keeps hitting all the milestones of development in a healthy way, we will see the family engage with the philosophy."

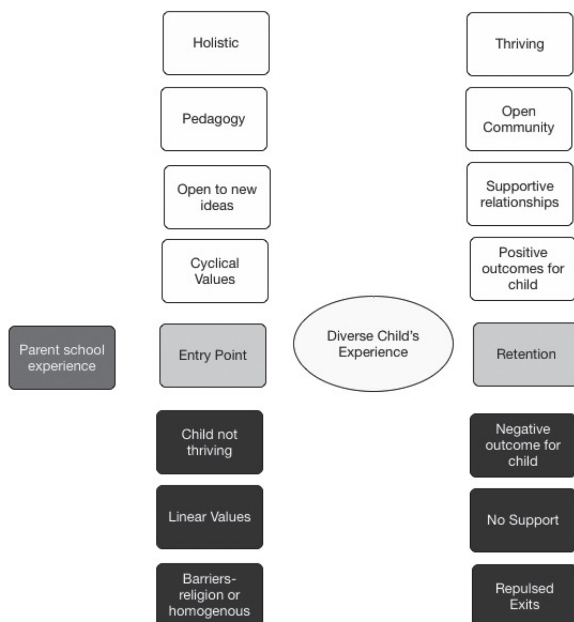

Figure 1. Reasons for enrolling: Decision-making path of parent-participants in interviews

The Waldorf developmental approach to learning and the focus on relationships with the teachers and within the community emerged as essential factors in diverse student enrollment and retention. Both factors took priority over the lack of diversity in the school. Lily, a black parent of a bi-racial child, explained,

> I was a touch hesitant. I wanted [my child] to identify with black and in an all-white school environment that was less likely to happen. Even though I loved the Waldorf philosophy – the faces he would see every day – that was concerning. There would not be many friends of colour whereas a public school setting [would be] more diverse. For me, the issue was his identity. So I decided I will supplement his education on issues of race and diversity – what the school may not be able to provide. The school gets all these other things right, so I will have to work extra hard to provide that missing piece. His class actually turned out to be quite diverse so that really helped.

All four parents interviewed admitted to supplementing the school's curriculum with their own to support a positive identity of diversity for their child. Two parents said they brought this issue to their child's teacher who empathized, but they also felt that at no point did the school, as an institution, reach out to discuss the content of the curriculum or provide a clear and enforced diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy.

Interviewed parents said that an open and progressive community was preferable over a diverse community that may not be open. In addition, these parents suggested that there was a greater chance of bullying and racism in the public-school system. Lily recalls,

> When I first read about Waldorf I was in California, pregnant, and had this book that had all of the alternative philosophies for school. I was already looking for alternative school rather than public school. I grew up in a New York public school with 40 kids in a class and it was survival of the fittest—it's a jungle and teachers don't have resources.

The fact that Lily was pregnant and already looking for a fitting school is also an important factor in outreach and marketing strategies. She continued:

> I was looking at all the alternatives. Reggio Emilia and Waldorf was what I wanted. They were a fit for me. Some see Waldorf as kooky and airy fairy but I found all that other stuff outweighed by the emphasis on cooperation, nature, and the kind of back to basics, such as

> the setting aside of technology and to really get back in touch with the earth.

The internet, although a source of outreach, can also act as a barrier in determining whether a parent will even come to see the school. Without skipping a beat, Mary, a white parent of a bi-racial child, stated, "The barrier to join Waldorf is the digging people are doing on the internet–into the religion/cult side. When you are here, in the school, you don't experience that or think that they are secretly teaching a moral code."

A hidden religious agenda can also be a major obstacle for LGBT parents. Rita, an LGBT parent, learned about Waldorf through a 'queer spawn' group, but in doing her internet research was not comfortable with the spiritual esoteric nature of Waldorf education and pursued a local Montessori school. But she found the environment at that school cold and her child was not happy, so she hesitantly tried Waldorf. When the family did finally enter the building, the parents fell instantly in love with the school, as did their child, who did not want to leave. Through the child's experience, particularly with the teacher relationships and the warmth of a progressive community, the parents overcame their discomfort with the so-perceived religious aspect of Waldorf:

> I have five friends who won't come here because they are atheist or agnostic. They don't want to come here because [they say] it is too Christian. It is not Christian, but it reads that way. Trust me, it's not! My daughter believes in Mother Earth as a Goddess. We had an argument two years ago, because what does she mean she does not believe in God? And she said she believes in Mother Earth. [It was] a deep, great conversation because of what they're being taught here and [what they] open [up], but people don't really see that on the outside.

All eight participants in these interviews perceived a need for better marketing to and recruitment of diverse communities from birth to preschool that also focused on the philosophical ideas in Waldorf education. Mary said, "I am an educator, so I knew the realities. Public school kindergarten was horrifying. I studied and learned about alternative options and took a parent and tot program at this Waldorf school. I felt a sigh of relief. I had found a nurturing and safe place for my child."

For David, a parent participant who is Asian, the first encounter offered a very different experience. Through an event listing describing nature crafts, he came to the school with his wife and daughter:

> I recall our first experience at the Winter Fair; our child was 3 years old and we felt like 'should we be here?' Going into the café, I felt like I was in high school again. The environment was new and we didn't see anyone similar to us. I remember someone collecting tickets who was Asian and thought we should be fine. Although Asian is a lot of different cultures: having the same skin colour does not mean you have the same background. We are from Japan, a unique and distinct culture with 1,000-years of a proper etiquette for everything including walking in the door.

The Winter Fair was a tipping point for them:

> We were floored and awed by the experience [and by] the transformation of the school. We asked ourselves if every day is like this? It was full of kids and they were so nice and polite. Age differences didn't seem to matter. Everyone is so well accepted and that's what we want, and what we want is for our child to feel accepted.

It shocks him that he grew up close to 'Waldorf Heights' and "no one knew about the school, no one!" Since then, David and his wife have brought in other families who also joined a Waldorf school. Despite the financial stress on the family, the positive impact on their daughter has been the key factor in the decision to remain in the school.

The participants were also concerned that there was a lack of discussion within the school on issues of diversity. Parent participant Mary felt there was a silence around issue of diversity because of Waldorf's Germanic roots. "When you sign on, you accept it is white-centred and don't question the curriculum. I assume there is diversity but because we don't talk about it, I am not sure." Rita said that she compensates for the lack of LGBT content in the curriculum with her own purchases of books and connections with the LGBT community network. Lily felt that although she was ensuring her son was reading books about race, disabilities, and children that are gay, "it would be much better if the school did it, because they can deconstruct it, contextualize it, and that is important for non-mainstream classics." Mary noted that:

> The older my daughter gets, the more she can express her lack of inclusion at the Waldorf [community]. My daughter clearly sees her identity represented in other schools that she visits, with posters on the bulletin boards and the walls and through the diversity of the teachers. She feels seen there. I understand the Waldorf aesthetic, it attracted me in the first place, but I also see my daughter's reaction. We rely on the teacher, but it is her experience that I have to listen to and wonder—she is the one that is of colour.

Eventually, Mary and her daughter did leave the school.

The reaction of the participants indicates that the school's unconscious silence on diversity ultimately weakened the integrity of the school's mission for social renewal and transformation, further supporting the need to address diversity as a social issue. It also provides a very important window into the values that attracts parents to Waldorf education, a theme that also emerged with faculty participants and that could be helpful for outreach. Parent participant Rita stated, "I did not choose a private school for the academic challenge, [or] to get into the best university but from a place of child development that was holistic and [that guides the child] to become a good human being." David, who admits that he does not understand the creative arts aspects of the education, said, "I am very much on the other train – academics and science," and he found himself wondering,

> Who's Steiner? That was my question. We went to an open house to learn more after the Winter Fair. What is the idea? The process? It appealed to me as I hire 60 university students to help with my workload and I have to explore the process of their thinking because they are all incredibly smart. I didn't think there was a school for that young of an age that was interested in the process of thinking: putting it in front of you and not telling you what the answer is. It made sense to me.

Faculty participants were specifically asked to reflect on social justice pedagogy within the Waldorf context and on the value of a diverse student population. Faculty participants also shared their own biographies and how they discovered Waldorf education. Their responses showed that there was a shared belief among the faculty that diversity is intrinsically important to the social mission of the school. Predominant themes emerging from these conversations include: recruitment of diverse teachers, building capacities for questioning the body of knowledge (e.g., Waldorf curriculum content) given to teachers, a cohesive exploration of diversity with the community, and improving outreach to spread the ideas of Waldorf education and the fundamental differences from other educational models.

"Most Europeans believe life is linear and then you die and are at the gate of heaven or hell. I grew up in a cyclical view of life," says Kanya, a male faculty member who is of East Indian descent and who immigrated to Canada as a young boy.

> I found Steiner when I was 26 years old; I was looking. When I read up on Waldorf, the ideas were similar to what I grew up with in India, even with the religious ideas. We need to go to those new immigrant communities. They are looking, trying to stay as a collective but also want to bond with Western culture. Waldorf is a wonderful way to bridge the gap to their culture and to Western society. I actually found that it helps you maintain your cultural identity.

For another faculty participant, Cindy, it was not until she left her native country that she could reflect on the impact of her education and her attraction to Waldorf:

> In Taiwan, I grew up in a system where since kindergarten I was in school from 8am until 5pm, a one-hour break and then more study until 9pm, and on Saturdays too. I never liked it, there was so much pressure and study. All memorization. After University I travelled to Australia. It was there that I realized I had to leave my country to escape the pressure. Eventually I made my way to Canada and I went to college to earn my degree in Early Childhood Education. We spent one class talking about different pedagogies and I heard about Waldorf, but before that I never heard of it growing up. My teacher had visited a Waldorf school and was showing us photos. And what got me was the connection to nature, back to nature. That is how I got interested. I never grew up with nature.

Two of the faculty shared a similar image of Waldorf as a caravan traveling from Eastern culture to the West. Faculty member Ruth offers:

> When a parent begins to look outside their catchment area and consider paying out for

their education, what they really are looking for is what is this school about and how will my child be most advantaged by going to this school? Parents choose a private school because they are perpetuating a status quo and everybody wants a piece of that pie. We are selling a very different pie and we don't have the same version of success. This is a holistic education and we want well-rounded students. They are not looking for good citizenship or a well-rounded education. They want to know that their children are going to get high scores on the SSAT's. We don't compete in that world. It's really like how the Eastern philosophy slowly insinuates itself into the Western world. It is a shift in values.

Her efforts, however, demonstrate an individual's solution rather than a collaborative effort orchestrated by the school. Barriers to addressing diversity ranged from a fear of tokenism to a need for a larger discussion regarding the framework of Waldorf pedagogy and its epistemological differences with mainstream approaches. Faculty member Ruth reflected:

They're really, really big questions, and I think that one can't jump too soon to how one speaks to the students until one has resolved in themselves and then also in the collective what we think, what practices we'll adopt, what is our positionality, because you can't but take a certain position on these issues because they are loaded.

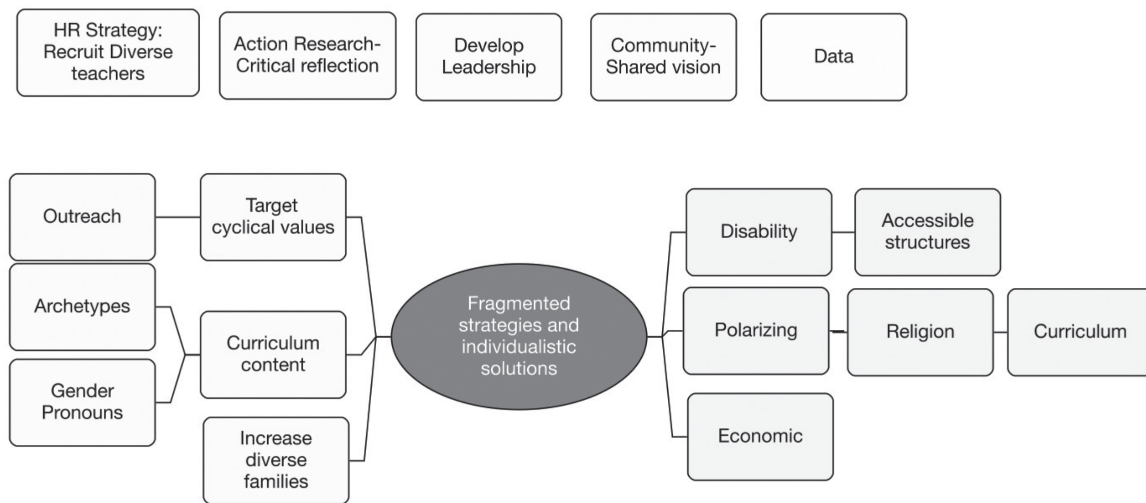

Figure 2. Faculty participant themes: Identifying multiple barriers and solutions

Seeking Strategies and Solutions

In Figure 2, the flow chart from left to right represents the varied issues associated with diversity raised by faculty participants. These demonstrate that the human capital of the organization is currently operating at a level of fragmented strategies and individual solutions. Some faculty were ready for action, while others were more contemplative. Elizabeth, a faculty participant, provided examples of how she incorporates diversity in her lesson planning: multicultural stories (being mindful of cultural appropriation), non-binary nature stories and created tales (no specific gender assignment), puppet shows representing different family constellations (one parent, same-sex couples, extended family, older parents). Elizabeth has actively sought out methods of teaching to be more inclusive.

The top row of Figure 2 offers strategic drivers based on the Professional Capital Framework to implement deep and sustainable change, including, most importantly, a shared vision with the community. Funneling each of the themes that emerged into the appropriate driver could act as a starting point for developing an overall strategic plan. Kanya believes that the best way to improve diversity is to hire and attract teachers who come from diverse backgrounds, who bring various perspectives. If faculty are diverse, what it is going to do is attract families and create a very diverse community. But it has to start at the front line with teachers. I am fortunate to have a different background from a European because it is evident that the teacher's material is Eurocentric. I would say to students: I am East Indian, and this is what the Europeans thought but not what I grew up with. The most intriguing aspect is

to have a teacher give them a relationship to what is taught and be open.

Linking a diversity statement to hiring practices is a strategic plan that directly impacts the students by increasing student exposure to diverse teachers. On a higher level, Waldorf teacher-training institutions also need to support the school by addressing the lack of diversity among those interested in Waldorf training and by developing a recruitment strategy for such candidates. If there is no comprehensive diversity strategy, the school will continue to operate from the traditional model of professional learning, in which individual teachers learn in isolation from the greater school community and attend external conferences whose impact is not expected to contribute to the professional learning of other colleagues or affect all students and teachers. Policy drivers that are based on old practices can end up impeding change. Including as many stakeholders and partners as possible, such as Waldorf teacher training centres, will help to achieve the goals of diversity and ensure the inclusion of traditionally marginalized voices.

Conclusion

My study was guided by practitioner research, which offered a transformative approach to deepening my understanding of the challenging and subjective problem of diversity within the school. Theory U methods and the Professional Capital Framework ensured that moral, ethical, and sensitive political issues did not remain invisible or hidden within my own limited fixed analysis. Both faculty and parent participants offered invaluable insights that will help create targeted marketing and retention strategies aiming to attract and retain diverse families. An unexpected and exciting insight gained during the interview process came through the different faculty stories about their journeys to become a Waldorf teacher. Further research in this area could support a comprehensive outreach and recruitment strategy for attracting and retaining diverse faculty. A major conclusion of this study is that although there have been many wonderful teacher innovations to support students of diversity, it will take *a collaborative effort* to ensure that children learn about racism, social identity, and microaggressions, so that these topics are not left to the parents to supplement their children's education. The Waldorf commitment to lifelong learning means that every aspect of Waldorf education must be open to continual reflection and to building the capacity to challenge biases within the Waldorf body of knowledge, within the field of social justice education in an elite school environment, and within one's own society (in my case, Canadian society). When an initiative or project becomes institutionalized, it can lose control of its original purpose and become standardized. It is, however, the words of action researcher, Jean McNiff, that I feel offer the most value of this process: "action research should be a process of helping other people to think for themselves and to realize their humanity in doing so" (McNiff, 2019).

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