

Shadow play: mindfulness and reflection in Waldorf education

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A relational approach to practice and inquiry requires us to be intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and bodily engaged, with receptivity, openness, sensitivity, flexibility and a true willingness to listen, see and understand.
(Finlay & Evans, 2009, p109)

You must have shadow and light source both.
Rumi in Barks (2010, p109)

ABSTRACT. This paper reports on research conducted with 25 teachers and leaders from eight Waldorf schools in Australia that explored their experience of mindfulness and reflection in relation to a self-identified relational dilemma with a student, colleague or parent that was causing them concern at work. The aim was to see if the practices assisted in shining a light on difficult encounters and create more positive school communities. The study found that the participants experienced mindfulness practice and journaling as personally and professionally empowering and in some cases, liberating. In the majority of cases by the end of the six-week project the dilemma was no longer experienced as a dilemma or their relationship to it had altered. Analysis of the dilemmas showed that their root causes were a blend of personal, interpersonal and structural/institutional factors. It is suggested that more research is needed to explore the potential of mindfulness and reflection to contribute to more sustained personal, professional and institutional renewal in Waldorf education.

Keywords: Steiner/Waldorf education, relationships, school communities, teachers, adult learning.

Introduction

In 2009 I dreamt that the paint pots left behind in my Waldorf classroom some years before were still bubbling away alchemically. A few months later I dreamt that I was standing next to a white rose, which was planted in the grounds of a Waldorf school, and beside an anthroposophical bookshop. I had experienced a significant emotional episode while Waldorf teaching in 1997, something that deeply affected my emotional wellbeing and I wondered if the dreams might be suggesting there was some emotional alchemy from that time that if explored and processed may be part of a healing process for both myself and for others going through similar experiences in Waldorf schools around the country.

Like Schaefer (1995), I had long been concerned about the state of relationships in Waldorf schools and had often wondered what could be done to address what Miller (2012) has recently described as their 'dysfunctional dynamics amongst adults - faculty, staff, administrators and parents'. It has been suggested that the relational difficulties seen in Waldorf communities may be due to their 'deeply rooted' shadow side

because they seek to live in the bright light of the spirit (Miller, 2012). This explanation has never seemed entirely satisfactory to me given my experience and research with students, teachers and parents in relation to the darker side of relationships with students, colleagues and parents in mainstream education (Burrows, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2010; 2009; 2008; 2004).

Through my professional development and consultancy work with Waldorf schools nationally in 2012 I had however become acutely aware that teachers and leaders appeared to be under significant additional pressure due to: changes to governance and leadership structures; funding; accountability; performance management; legislation; teacher qualifications; workload; national testing; performance management; new national curriculum requirements; class sizes; changes in age of children when beginning school; subject offerings, sustainability; inclusion of students with special needs and behavioural and emotional difficulties and dealing with parent expectations. Teachers and leaders seemed emotionally and physically stretched and many would use my presence in the schools as an opportunity to share their feelings of unease and frustration about a student, colleague, leader or parent.

I was aware that I needed to be careful not to get myself drawn into the very dynamic that led to being invited to work with them in the first place as Neville (2008) has shown often happens to consultants but for my own healing and those of others I wanted to explore and address why as Schaefer (2012, p108) has observed:

Waldorf schools are profound learning communities for children, but rarely conscious learning communities for adults.

When the opportunity arose to conduct research in mindfulness and reflection in Waldorf schools I decided to respond to the call by Rawson (2011) in this journal for new research that is based on a discourse between practitioners and educationalists and contributes to an emerging strengths-based yet critical dialogue on relationships in Waldorf education. While this paper is predisposed towards an agenda that is hope-full, care-full and grounded (Giles, Bell & Palmer, 2012) it does not avoid problematic contexts and situations. As Schaefer (2011) has noted, issues that repeatedly block a school's development can be difficult and even impossible at times to talk about openly. Yet as Rudolf Steiner himself observed:

We cannot have the attitude that we do not want to discuss (the question of discipline) in our meetings simply because it is unpleasant. That is exactly why we do need to discuss it Steiner (1923/1998, p546).

This view is supported by Woods, Ashley and Woods (2005) who argue that Waldorf school leaders and teachers need to be more critically reflective and self-questioning about the practical impact of what is otherwise somewhat taken for granted in their schools' ethos. As Rawson (2011, p27) has noted:

Without criticality the Waldorf body of knowledge and practice may remain at the level of transmission rather than at the level of transformation.

According to Schaefer (2012, p121):

There are a number of critical issues in Waldorf schools, which often trigger crises and which, if met consciously, lead to renewal and transformation.

If they are not met consciously however, he notes, they have:

a way of spilling over into the broader community, leading to unhappy children and parents, and they tend to pollute the soul space of the school... they have profound effects on the attitudes, feelings and behavior of all school members.

As a ex- Waldorf teacher and parent and current Waldorf grandparent and sometime consultant I share with Schaefer (2011) and Rawson (2011) a deep commitment to Waldorf education, which is matched by a passion to improve it and it is in this spirit that I offer this paper exploring the role of mindfulness and reflection in contributing to the creation of more conscious Waldorf learning communities for adults.

Mindfulness

In its most common form mindfulness has come to be associated with awareness and acceptance of present moment experience with the aim of reducing an individual's stress and suffering (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness can assist in providing a space from which to observe our habitual automatic emotionally charged reactions, by bringing awareness to the present moment and helping us see that certain powerful reactions have the capacity to take hold of us and drive our behavior (Wolstenholme, 2002).

While mindfulness practice is generally aimed at calming the mind by abstaining from emotional and circumstantial intensity (Chogyam & Dechen, 2002) it can however also be understood as 'a spiritual awareness that is embodied and feelingful' (Stanley, 2012). This relates to the North American medicine wheel teachings (Bopp, Bopp & Lane, 1984) where emotions are seen to include being passionately involved in the world, compassion, anger at injustice, the refinement of feelings and the ability to set strong emotions aside to serve others. For Langer (1989) mindfulness also involves an enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving and increased openness to new information. For Hick and Furlotte (2009) and Stanley (2012) there is also a critical element in mindfulness which can assist us to understand ourselves, and how we react to others and social structures and organizations.

These combined wellbeing, cognitive, affective and sociological definitions reflect the personal, interpersonal and structural dimensions of mindfulness for Hick and Furlotte (2010, p286) who found that the mindfulness training they offered to both social workers and social work clients under stress helped build their capacity to:

- Notice, pause and breathe
- Accept themselves but not the situation
- Clarify with clarity
- Think creatively
- Open to fear
- Take action
- Smile
- Work in solidarity
- Be persistent.

A number of researchers have shown that mindfulness can be a valuable resource for teachers to assist them to calmly respond rather than over-react to unsettling and provocative student behavior (Brown, (2002; Burrows, 2008, 2010, 2011b; Day, 2004; Franco, 2010, Korthagen, 2009; Jennings and Greenburg, 2009; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings 2010). A smaller number have discovered mindfulness can also assist teachers to cope with feelings of frustration, anger, stress, emotional imbalance, anxiety and professional ineffectiveness in relation to difficult encounters with colleagues (Brown, 2002, Burrows 2011a, 2011b; Thomas, 2010) and parents (Burrows, 2004; Cunningham, ND).

In the main, research has focused on the use of breath and sensing meditations to assist in disengaging from powerful emotions in order to reduce stress and decrease reactivity. This approach can lead according to Chogyam and Dechen (2002, p5) to a belief that we should 'rise above' our emotions, 'as if human feelings were some sort of spiritual disability.' Some mindfulness teachings may indeed encourage people to reject their emotional personality in favour of a 'spiritual calm' – 'a state in which the pause button has been depressed, where there is little chance of feeling anything at all (Allione, 2008).

Kornfield (in Allione, 2008,px) has suggested however that through accepting and welcoming our emotions we can learn to 'transform their energy and find freedom in their midst.' According to Allione (2008) through experiencing our emotional energies we are able to access the energy that is tied up in our conflicts and difficulties for our own liberation. The aim of this particular approach to mindfulness is

principally concerned with transforming our experience of everyday being, rather than achieving an esoteric or spiritualized mode of existence. For Chogyam and Dechen (2002, p62) the aim in this approach to mindfulness is to:

engender cheerful courage, perceptive consideration, sincere determination, natural gallantry, graciousness, creativity, and spaciousness.

Emotions in education

Teachers and leaders both government and independent schools appear to be emotionally and physically stretched. According to Franco (2010, p655) 'teachers constitute one of the professional collectives most affected by psychological problems'. Emotions tend to be commonly viewed as experienced by individuals and relating to their own capacity for self-management and self-regulation (Goleman, 1989). While this likely to be the case to some extent, there is also an interpersonal or intersubjective dimension of emotions in which we may be able to draw on our own emotional understanding to feel empathy for others (Denzin, 1984). For as Orbach (2008, p33) puts it:

We affect one another. We cannot, not.

Hargreaves (2001) argues that looking at emotions through a broader viewpoint:

takes the discussion of emotions in education beyond honourable and sacred ideals of love, care, trust and support towards a more profane realm of unsettling and darker emotions and teaching such as guilt, shame, anger, jealousy, frustration and fear.

Hargreaves (2001) calls this the 'emotional underlife' of teaching which he suggests has been intensified due to the adverse emotional effects on teachers of inspection processes, curriculum reform, testing, work load and complex relationships with colleagues, students and parents.

Teaching and learning are also 'emotional practices' for Hargreaves (2001) that need to be understood in terms of context. People express and experience emotions differently in different cultures, occupations and workplaces (Gallego, Hollingsworth & Whitenack, 2001). In the light of this difference I was pleased when the opportunity arose to conduct similar research with Waldorf teachers and leaders to that which I had already conducted with mainstream teachers and leaders.

The study

For this research with Waldorf school leaders and teachers a similar model was used as for two previous face-to face studies conducted with mainstream school leaders and teachers in metropolitan and country South Australia (Burrows; 2011b; 2011c) which had supported teachers to use mindfulness-based inquiry methods to find a grounded place inside to more clearly see their reactions and responses to a relational dilemma at work with a student, colleague or parent and choose the most appropriate way of responding. The approach taken for all the studies was to combine sensing meditations and reflective journaling to assist participants to turn more consciously towards the challenges of professional life and its emotional intensity with compassion for self and other.

Waldorf teachers and leaders from eight schools in Australia participating in professional development workshops were invited to participate in an integrated online (email) mindfulness-based inquiry over a six week period exploring the potential of mindfulness practice and journaling to assist in responding rather than reacting to a relational dilemma in the form of a student, colleague or parent at work. 36 people began the study and 25 remained at the end of the six-week period. Nine people withdrew due to work commitments.

Participants were asked to:

- Identify a relational dilemma at work
- Give themselves and anyone involved in their dilemma a pseudonym

- Email the dilemma/case before beginning the mindfulness practices
- Engage regularly in the 'soles of the feet' meditation* (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Adkins, Singh & Singh, 2007) as formal practice at home
- Engage in the 'soles of the feet' meditation as informal practice at work whenever they knew they would shortly be seeing the person related to their dilemma
- Take regular 'mindful' walks which involved tuning into the inner sensations of the body as they walked, gently bringing their mind back to the present moment when it wandered
- Read and digest short articles on mindfulness and emotions emailed through weekly
- Reflect in their journals on the emotions engendered through experiencing their dilemma consciously
- Email weekly reflections

All the activities were designed to be easily integrated into participants' working and personal lives without excessive demands on time. Guidance in how to conduct the activities was provided but was not rigidly prescriptive in the sense of needing to learn a technique. The following instructions were given to participants:

- Sit comfortably with the soles of your feet on the floor
- Lean forward just slightly
- Close your eyes if you wish or focus on a spot in front of you
- Tune in to your feet, feel the texture of your socks, or stockings or the sole of your shoe, the curve of your arch and the heels of your feet against the back of your shoes.
- Keep breathing naturally and keep focusing on the soles of your feet – what does the sensation feel like?
- Continue to breathe naturally whilst being aware of the soles of your feet
- Also become aware of what you can hear around you
- Now when you are ready open your eyes and become aware of what you can see around you

(See the following link for an insight into the meditation in action: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzoerv42KDw&list=UUhAumjy26uts_hvywCSdgvQ&index=2).

The aim of both the soles of the feet meditation and the mindful walking was simply to intentionally shift the focus of attention through tuning in to the sensations of the soles of the feet and the body. In this way it becomes possible to detach from troubling thoughts and emotions without trying to control them

Participants received weekly email replies to their journal reflection, in which I communicated responses to their reflections in order to build a bridge of understanding, trust, empathy and support.

Methodology

While the majority of mindfulness studies have adopted quantitative approaches using a range of mindfulness scales (Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009), according to Kabat-Zinn (2003, p149), the 'radical, transformative essence' in mindfulness can be lost if there is too great a focus on the measurement of clinical change. Grossman has made a significant contribution to the discussion of the limitations inherent in the use of mindfulness scales, arguing that there is a need for researchers to develop new approaches for studying mindfulness since conventional, linear scientific methods are not subtle, refined or nuanced enough (see Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

For Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is a phenomenological description of simple and effective ways of cultivating various aspects of mind and heart through mindful attention. Childs (2007) similarly sees mindfulness

as an actual phenomenological reality that presents itself to our immediate awareness as a whole way of experiencing or feeling.

Research into teacher professional learning in mindfulness is still new and therefore requires:

great sensitivity and a range of theoretical and methodological lens to illuminate the richness and complexity of this phenomenon (Greenberg, 2012, p162).

For this reason according to Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings (2012, p171):

Phenomena finding investigations that use rich descriptions, case studies of exemplars, and other forms of qualitative assessment of mindfulness in education seem particularly important.

Given the focus on experiencing the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of mindfulness in this study a qualitative relational phenomenological research approach seemed appropriate. Case study research can help to connect the worlds of the researcher and practitioner through the cultivation of dialogue as a legitimate way of building knowledge according to Poulter (2009). This understanding can form the basis of a genuine partnership that has the capacity to produce a type of scholarship that bridges the gap between theory and practice and insight-building case studies since:

practitioners and participants may be sources of knowledge, consumers of knowledge and producers of knowledge. (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p419)

Given the sensitive nature of this research, and my desire to conduct research 'with' people rather than 'on' them I decided to use relational-centred inquiry methodology for this study. Finlay and Evans (2009) suggest that it is likely that relational researchers choose subjects to study that they have already have a deep interest in and commitment to. In relational research the co-created relationship between researcher and participant is foregrounded in which the researcher seeks to build a bridge to the other, 'using our special awareness, experience, skills and knowledge' (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p3). In relational research data is seen to emerge out of an evolving, dynamic and interactional process 'as the joint product of researchers and participants (and readers) and the relationships they build' (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p6).

A significant aspect of relational research is for the researcher to ensure participants have a voice. This was a necessary element in this research since: 'How else are researchers and readers to know what a teacher knows or feels?' (James, 2007, p966). The on-line component of this study which included email conversations as a source of data collection and use of pseudonyms provided an opportunity for open-ended confidential conversations to occur to allow participants to express their views freely. The use of email as communication medium was chosen due to findings in previous research (Burrows, 2011a) that the freedom offered by virtual communication in terms of time and space appears to facilitate a greater disclosure of personal information (Meho, 2006).

Data analysis

For this study qualitative data were made up of weekly journal entries emailed to the researcher. This elicited rich descriptions that highlighted participants' professionalism depth, sensitivity and commitment to education. For example one teacher wrote in her journal that:

My work on the whole is the place where I feel confident and in my element. I love my work passionately and I am extremely excited and stimulated intellectually and spiritually by Anthroposophy. I feel that I am good at what I do and that the curriculum as I teach is nourishing me as well as my class. I have found my life's destiny.

She also wrote however:

I experience a wave of seemingly out of control emotional reactions concerning work. These are when I have been feeling unsupported in my position and doubting the motives of others.

As I read and re-read the journal entries and my replies I found that over time I began to be able to 'feel' into their observation, looking for nuances and subtleties of perception, experience, reflection and expression often seeing something in later readings that I had previously missed. These deeper readings

seemed to draw out and evoke their “felt” qualities to enhance phenomenological apprehension. Over period of months as I continued to read in the field of mindfulness I found a way of clustering the entries into personal, interpersonal and structural categories.

The following selected extracts from participants’ first journals which contained a description of a dilemma at work may be difficult to read but I have chosen to include them so the reader may gain a sense of what participants were dealing with at work, in their own words.

Feelings about a chosen dilemma

Dilemma relating to a student

I feel guilty and my whole professional ethos is being challenged. This child has really rattled my cage.

I was emotionally lost and got into thinking ‘I’m not a good teacher’.

I dreamt there was an education inspector in my classroom. Whilst I was working with a student he went to the corner of the classroom and said there is dust in the corner.

The situation makes me feel exhausted, frustrated and angry. It brings up my lack of experience and my weaknesses in classroom management, which creates feelings of disappointment and failure

A few weeks ago I had a bit of a breakdown and had to have leave for almost 3 weeks.

I am personally exhausted by him and last week got a headache and stress in neck and shoulders that last 4 days due to him speaking in his dominating loud voice.

A situation has been ‘brewing’ for a while and every now and then exploding

The extracts above all relate to working with children with students with special needs including a mix of mental health, learning difficulties and underlying trauma. In most cases while the child was at the centre, complex and intense relationships around the child often involved class teacher, special needs teacher, leader and parents and in some cases there was also involvement of a representative from a teacher’s union and private psychologist and general practitioner. Two of the teachers were diagnosed with vicarious post-traumatic stress disorder due to working with traumatised children and other children with special needs without enough support. This was missed by leaders and colleagues, who had told them that they were ‘too emotional’, ‘not coping’ and not able ‘to hold their class’.

Dilemma relating to a colleague

For years I have struggled with my personal feelings while working at this school.

The levels of mistrust I have with certain people are interesting. Is it a form of paranoia, or a legitimate sense of caution...?

I feel overwhelmed and intimidated. This is something that greatly affects my sense of wellbeing and self-esteem in my workplace I am feeling hurt, self-conscious and unsupported.

The situation has been weighing on me heavily. I feel like an outsider who doesn’t really have a place. A sense of uneasiness accompanies me all day everyday.

I feel unfairly judged for not being ‘Steiner trained’. I feel like going back to the state system where you are appreciated for all your efforts. I have never before felt so exposed to personal attacks.

The situation is quite depressing for me and has affected my summer.

I have presented at conferences and given lectures but for some reason my colleagues here make me feel judged and inadequate.

The extracts above relate to difficult encounters with colleagues including: complex disagreements with a colleague who taught and was critical of her own child; sensing bullying behaviours of colleagues in relation

to leadership, disagreeing about the way students with special needs should be supported and included; feeling judged for not having Waldorf teacher training; feeling unskilled in classroom management, working closely with someone with a dogmatic and inflexible approach to Waldorf early years teaching.

Teachers felt in competition with colleagues and leaders felt at times as if they were not respected, and feeling judged by other teachers. Issues identified in the journals related to the lack of professional development support, training, awareness of different teaching philosophies and pedagogies, a lack of openness to new ways of thinking, lack of knowledge about disability discrimination, difficulties relating to leadership, leadership without sufficient experience, rigidity with curriculum and pedagogy, fear of taking risks and fear of innovation.

Dilemma relating to a parent

I am beginning to feel the strain on my relationship with these parents who are seeming to be losing faith in me and having unhelpful conversations with other parents in the class.

Dealing with this situation brings up a strange mix of envy regret and distaste for me.

I was met with a screaming outburst in front of the children. I felt manipulated and a little threatened.

She is a trouble-maker, white-ant and manipulator of people. She has been agitating in the community for some time and has some followers who believe her half-truths and lies. She is very forceful and passionate.

I also discovered that hearing his mother's voice creates a physical reaction within myself. I met a woman on the weekend that had a similar tone, and for want of a better word, accent and I felt clammy... a feeling of insignificance, inability and lowliness came upon me like a physical blow. It is my intrinsic belief that I am not worthy that I am afraid of; of being found out that I am a fraud. The situation makes me feel exhausted, frustrated and angry. I don't want to let my own history and baggage skew or interfere with this relationship.

Tonight (Friday night at midnight) I am left train smashed and upset. For years I have struggled with my personal feelings whilst working at this school. These things are so interwoven with people's own stuff and school stuff... I need to go back to bed.

The extracts above relate to: a parent perceived as bullying a teacher and the school not being supportive; a parent visiting the class and speaking publicly in a loud voice about her concerns; parents of a child with significant special needs who are making unrealistic demands; a parent who has power in the community and wishes to 'infiltrate' management; a parent of a child with special needs who is constantly emailing the teacher and wanting to have meetings; a parent who came into the classroom on a Friday afternoon and told the teacher she had not been happy with her for years and had major concerns about her.

Journal reflections overall showed that teachers were dealing with the complexity of teaching colleagues' children, coping with feeling they were not Waldorf trained or anthroposophical enough, trying to manage with numbers of children with special needs in their classes without enough support, trying to cope with classroom management and dealing with parents with demands and behaviours that at times appeared unreasonable. There were concerned that students were admitted to the school without enough consultation, enough assessment information, or documentation from previous schools. Leaders were dealing with the complexity of their roles, feeling unsupported by teachers and other members of the leadership team, overworked and overwhelmed.

Perceived benefits of mindfulness and journaling practices

As participants worked with their formal and informal practices: the soles of the feet meditation, mindful walking, journaling and reading about mindfulness and emotions, they did begin however, to notice changes in themselves, other people and in a small number of cases, their environment.

Extracts from participants' journals have been included as before to convey their growing awareness, in their own voices. They have been clustered in themes (adapted from the work of Hicks and Furlotte, 2009,

p286) to reflect the personal, interpersonal and structural/Institutional aspects of the dilemmas chosen by the participants and to allow an unfolding story to emerge.

Pausing, sensing, tuning in

Participants were all able to varying degrees to notice, pause and tune into the soles of their feet and witness their thoughts, senses and in particular, emotions as part of both formal and informal practice.

I noticed that I felt guilty and very stressed. I felt tight in my chest and tummy and completely wired.

At times I became conscious of holding in tension in the stomach region & shoulders, which I endeavoured to relax.

Being mindful has made me realize how much of a roller coaster ride teaching can be. When I focus on the soles of my feet I gain an almost immediate sense of calm.

The soles of my feet meditation and sensing into my limbs is becoming much easier to remember, and has become very pleasant. It is still amazing to me how easy these exercises are, as I have tried over many years to find my way to an 'inner space' that is calm and centred.

The soles of the feet exercise seems such a simple thing to do throughout the day and certainly creates a more positive 'feel' to my day.

I was MC for the event. There were six primary classes and many parents. The way I grounded my nerves was to stand centre stage and wait for the audience to settle. While they quietened I tuned into the souls (sic) of my feet. Only me speaking and 200 people listening. I look forward to the next time I can experience that oneness with the audience.

Opening to fear

Some participants in the study showed an awareness that having courage does not necessarily mean we do not experience fear. Some began to connect with the sensations of fear and separate these from their thoughts and action.

I have realised I need to learn courage to face my fears...to face these people who, quite frankly scare me ... as you said 'Feel the fear but do it anyway.'

Observing my emotional responses and where they resided in my body was centred very much on anxiety and fear. When I scanned my body it was very much around my breathing or lack of it, where the fear resided. What I noticed was that when I felt the fear in my body my breathing deepened. I did the exercise 3 times through the day on Monday when I was feeling most tensel fearful of the new situation I found myself in.

Lightening up

During the course of the project many participants became lighter, holding their dilemma less tightly, beginning to see how that affected their wellbeing and how others responded to them.

I realised today how free and happy I feel. I can put a lot of it down to the mindfulness. I do not feel like I am being restricted or hemmed in as I have for such a long time. It is wonderful!

I found I had a lighter feeling as soon as I sent off my journals.

I feel more calm and peaceful within myself. What ever whichever way it has come I like the feeling and I hope it stays with in within me.

I feel that something subtle has shifted into my management of the class that has given me authority in a calm and purposeful way.

Seeing clearly

During the course of the project many participants began to demonstrate the capacity to ask questions to

clarify the dilemma without blaming themselves and beginning to illuminate the root causes of the problem although this could have gone deeper.

I have developed the idea of a 'anthroposophical cupboard. If you separated out yourself from these inner parts in an untrue way (abstention) they would sit in the cupboard and ferment.

Now I have a different way of observing myself. Whereas one I would observe myself at difficult times I now find that I can observe myself from within myself.

I did have an aha moment because as I looked within myself I realized I did have negative feelings towards this particular child.

Things have completely changed, or have they simply gone away? I'm not sure. This woman is not in my orbit any more.

The moments of realization were many.

Thinking creatively

Many participants began to trust their instincts and creativity, pausing and thus avoiding reacting on autopilot and opening possibilities for new options

I am becoming more aware with my challenge and am able to think 'outside the box'. I have come up with the possibility that it may be my interactions with the other little boy that triggers Matt's responses to me, mum and other children.

One thing came in loud and clear I could 'beat myself up' or use it as a learning experience (I was doing the soles of my feet) I went with the latter.

I am becoming clearer in myself and I'd I feel when I am about to launch into my old Pattern (sic) I step back and try a new tact (sic). I'm not sure whether that is intuition stepping in there but the space I give myself to respond helps calm my response some what and gives me a chance to consciously respond not out of habit but giving a space for a new thought to come in (or intuition).

She has also been more approachable, more understanding of my perspectives. I'm calmer, and better prepared for our conversations.

The contact with the researcher = has been absolutely inspiring. The readings and little emails have filled my thoughts and all my spare time. I have really loved it.

This project has been fantastic! It has brought focus to my work and home life. I feel more within myself, calm and peaceful when I have used the souls (sic) of my feet to respond rather than react to a situation.

Accept yourself but necessarily not the situation

A small number of participants were able to consciously separate themselves from the situation and through staying in the moment whilst acknowledging their own feelings become empowered to take action.

I experience again that by taking more of a back seat, I am actually able to be a more positive influence than when I'm in my usual 'in your face' way of being.

My dilemma is something that is with me every day. It scares me, frustrates me, follows me but over the past 5 weeks of this project I am now aware that I thought was my dilemma is actually a school-wide dilemma, which is deeply entrenched into the culture of the school. I am no longer 'buying in' to the situation as much as I have in the past though and am putting energy into writing a draft policy document so I can propose some changes.

Working in solidarity

A number of participants began to realize there was no need to do it alone and they were able to see that others were experiencing similar events.

We heard that one of the teachers is on stress leave and that made me feel frustrated and upset. I wanted us to gather forces to help her. The school is not supporting her and she has too many high needs children and this issue was raised in

a meeting. After trying to get a bit of solidarity going among the staff, I came home and wrote a letter to management asking what was going to be done.

I think my progress in my dilemma is through asking for help.

Jade's behavior has improved out of sight. I am able to ask him for kind behavior and he has been able to change course.

I have now discovered several people who can give me a slightly arm's length perspective on my difficulties... I guess in the past I have felt more constrained in terms of who I can share issues with, what to share and how to do it. I'm getting better at discernment in this arena and also at trusting that by leaving some space and allowing others to form their own judgments, a picture will emerge that enables others to engage with my questions and concerns in a clearer way.

I get the sense that 'the universe' is supporting me, and I'm grateful. I have realised that my perspectives in relation to a particular matter are in fact widely held.

At first when I thought of my dilemma I could feel a big hollow under my lungs full of an acidy liquid that gets churned with every breath but now its just there as a reminder to stay focused on what step to take next and identify what can be done to cultivate mutual interest amongst staff.

Taking action

Some participants were able, with calmness and clarity to determine what action could be taken and do it. A very small number were able to think about how the system could change to prevent this in the future.

I notice the difference between meetings that are 'sprung' on me and those I've prepared for with the meditation. With preparatory grounding, I'm able to express myself more clearly, respond more openly/ less defensively.

To reflect on the week I found my initial anger very strong but when I put the mindfulness exercise into practice I was able to separate my feeling and set them aside and do something practical about the problem. It took some courage to face my colleague in light of past events and I was weighing up the long-term consequences of this move. She was pleasant and understanding so was it my mindful approach, her opinion about this issue or good timing. All I know is that I have had a very successful time and see that even with no power I was able to make some valuable things happen.

As with previous studies (Burrows, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c) this study found that simple practices such as meditating on the soles of the feet and mindful walking practiced regularly at work and home assisted participants to be more present and self aware without reactivity even when they were faced with an aspect of their dilemma in the form of a person or situation. In this study participants also found through the mindfulness and journaling practice they were able gain new insights into their emotional reactions to their dilemma, feeling more compassionate towards themselves and others and beginning to see them from a more nuanced and multi-dimensional perspective. At the end of the project many participants they reported either that the dilemma was no longer present or that their relationship to it had changed.

Discussion

This study has highlighted that many Waldorf teachers and leaders like teachers in mainstream education (Burrows, 2011a & b) and professionals such as nurses face difficult emotional challenges at work (Finlay, 2005). Although many of the research studies reviewed for this study (Ogletree, 1998; Neilson, 2002; Petrash, 2004; Stehlik, 2003) suggest that Waldorf schools tend to create positive and mutually supportive relationships, Woods, Ashley and Woods (2005) found in their study of Steiner schools in the United Kingdom that there are relational issues that need to be addressed. This study supports their findings that internal power differences, dominance by certain individuals/groups, personality clashes and power plays, stressful relationships with parents, classroom management difficulties and issues to do with accountability and governance are intensifying as the schools face new challenges (Woods, Ashley and Woods, 2005). It also reinforces House's (2001, p40) findings that:

There are significant levels of stress in Waldorf schools stemming from difficulties with parental expectations, the collegiate type of management structure, in-school human relations and low pay levels.

This study demonstrates that at times teachers and leaders face situations that are so emotionally demanding they feel drained or threatened. Journals from this project indicated that many participants were dealing with situations of extreme complexity leading in two cases to burnout. Three main issues with intertwining personal, interpersonal and structural dimensions have emerged: students with special needs, collegial relationships including those with leadership and parent-teacher relationships. Space does not permit an in-depth discussion of the issues themselves. It is important to touch on them here however and to highlight that depending on whether they are personal, interpersonal or structural, they require an individual, group or institutional response, and ownership if the situation is to change.

Personal factors in mindfulness

Lakota shaman Lame Deer has taught that it is necessary in our lives to:

Experience and feel all the ups and downs, the courage and fear... being right in the midst of the turmoil not shielding yourself from it

(in Burrows 2011a, p115).

The mindfulness project appears to have assisted participants to 'sit in the fire' (Mindell, 1995) to begin to process and transform some of the emotions that were belonged to the past but were charged by the experience of their dilemma. Mindfulness appears to offer a way to process powerful emotions individually without having to act on them. As participants practiced waiting receptively for a response to arise from within they became less enmeshed with thinking, feeling and sensing and able to pause long enough to allow themselves find the most appropriate response to the situation, thus acting from within in the midst of complexity (Shotter, 2005).

In two cases teachers' choice to focus on children with underlying trauma issues for their dilemma (Cairns, 2002) led to them eventually receiving diagnoses of vicarious post traumatic stress disorder. It was of concern to they felt so judged, inadequate, lacking in knowledge and skills, unsupported and that their level of stress and distress was not picked up by colleagues or leaders but by the researcher.

It would appear that participants in the study and parents as well, do not ordinarily have the opportunity to adequately express their concerns openly without fear that it would be seen as a personal deficit. I observed that teachers and leaders were much more comfortable to express themselves in their journals than in group settings. I believe that the stakes may simply be too high for many teachers and leaders to speak openly about their concerns. Schaefer (2012) focuses on the importance of group conversations amongst Waldorf teachers this but this does not take sufficient account of the fact that it may not necessarily be safe to speak in a group setting.

Interpersonal factors in mindfulness

Participants in this study gradually became aware that emotions could be an important source of information about themselves and how others are feeling (Wolstenholme, 2002). As they observed how they reacted to other people's emotional energy they could more easily understand why they acted they way they did. They were then more able to separate out whose emotions were 'in the driver's seat' and accept them with presence without feeling so overwhelmed.

Teachers in the study were generally unaware that the experience of psychological and emotional stress and trauma can lead to obsessiveness, being excessively judgmental and perfectionism which can mean professionals and parents become critical of each other leading to breakdowns in communication, misunderstanding and defensiveness (Cairns, 2002). There is a need for teachers and leaders to access professional development in the effects of trauma on learning, behavior and wellbeing available to all teachers and leaders such as that provided by the Australian Childhood Foundation SMART training (<http://www.childhood.org.au>).

While it is important for teachers to be able to provide a container for their students' emotions so they do not build up to reach boiling point, they in turn need to have their powerful emotions contained by their leaders and the school as a whole (Hanko, 2006).

As Beaudoin (2011) discovered in her research negativity tends to creep into staff room conversations especially when the discussion turns to policy or leadership changes, colleagues, parents or students with challenging behaviours. According to Achinstein (2002) when teachers enact reforms in the name of community conflict often arises. There is therefore a need to reframe conflict as constructive in building education communities that learn (Achinstein, 2002). There is a need to embrace diverse rather than singular views of teaching quality so that shared discussions of classroom practice do not run the risk of treating differences between teachers as deficits.

Structural / institutional factors

Hargreaves (1998) has stressed that it is important to appreciate that the emotional lives of teachers do not only relate to individual psychological or dispositional qualities, but are also phenomena that are shaped by how the work of teaching is organised, structured and led. While there is always a personal and interpersonal aspect to relational difficulties that many issues were found occurring across all the schools indicates there was a significant presenting structural element.

Since collegial and parental relationships have already been identified in the literature (Achinstein 2011, Beadouin, 2002; Burrows, 2011a, 2011b, 2004; Hargreaves, 2001,1989; Rawson 2010, Schaefer, 2012,1998; Woods et al, 2005) as being factors affecting mainstream and Waldorf teacher effectiveness it appears unlikely they can be reduced to individual teacher and leader fallibility. Like Hargreaves (1998) I believe that personal sources and subjective elements for relational dilemmas tended to be overplayed by teachers and leaders including Waldorf researcher, Peters (2013) who recently put teacher burnout down to 'badly functioning self management'. While Peter (2013) found in his study exploring the wellbeing of Waldorf teachers taking responsibility and personal action was influenced by teachers' levels of personal or self efficacy he did however acknowledge there is a need for greater responsibility to be taken at a whole school level.

The teachers and leaders in this study usually bottled up their work-related frustrations emotions as they did not appear to have the time, space, skills, support or environment needed to help them transform them. While it is important for teachers to be able to provide a container for their students' emotions so they do not build up to reach boiling point, they in turn need to have their powerful emotions contained by their leaders and the school as a whole (Hanko, 2006). I am not sure who supports the leaders however when the schools are not part of a schooling system as such with access to principal coaches and mentors.

Overall there appeared to be little understanding of the importance of supporting colleagues through stressful times as a preventative and proactive human resources strategy. While a situation may originally arise in relation to one person, student or parent it can rapidly become more complex with ripple effects right through the school. If teachers and leaders are to be able to deal with high levels of stress and relational complexity they may need support from their organization in the form of adjustments to timetabling, workload, curriculum, policy development, numbers of students with special needs and behavioural difficulties, more access to professional development and at times, mediation support to deal with conflicts with colleagues and parents.

When things become more settled it is then important that the learning from this experience is drawn upon to inform policy and practice changes wherever needed- in human resources, behaviour management, special needs, professional development, curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and parent communication. Teachers and leaders can be like canaries down a mineshaft, signalling to us where there is a need to take action. It is important that people are able act to transform existing structures where critical reflection reveals that these structures serve as impediments according to Lessem and Schieffer (2010, p221).

Teachers whether mainstream or Waldorf clearly need a high degree of social and emotional competence if they are to successfully address the obstacles, challenges and conflicts of their professional lives (Burrows, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Jennings, 2011). There is a need for responsive and sensitive professional learning to help teachers and leaders begin to process and transform the powerful emotions charged by challenging situations in classrooms, staffrooms and meeting rooms. There is increasing evidence that professional learning is most effective when it is ongoing, addresses issues identified by teachers, and is situated in relationships and contexts that support teacher learning (Day, 2004, Kitchen, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2009). There is therefore a need for new forms of in-service teacher education to shift from a paradigm focused on knowledge dissemination and training (Webster-Wright, 2009) to one that is more tailored to teachers' needs and context.

Limitations of the study

Although the results are promising the project involved a relatively small number of participants. Those who chose to participate may have done so because they were already experiencing difficulties and were seeking help. Equally possible is that participants could have been at a turning point in their lives, and in this way as Hick and Furlotte (2009) suggest, the mindfulness work may have 'fed into a dynamic that was already occurring in their lives'.

While the practice of mindfulness and journaling has been shown to have positive outcomes for the participants of the study it needs to be acknowledged this study also had the advantage of having a researcher who had her personal mindfulness practice and was a trained counsellor. For McCown, Reibel and Micotti (2010) it is essential to have a mindfulness guide who authentically embodied the spirit or essence of the practices being taught.

It is most likely that a longer project would be needed for structural/institutional aspects (Hick and Furlotte, 2010) to be able to be satisfactorily addressed.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the value of mindfulness practice as a form of tailored professional development for Waldorf teachers, leading to increased self-knowledge and understanding of a relational dilemma at work. Hargreaves called in 2001 for more research to be conducted to assist us to understand more about teachers' emotions in relation to the changing and varying organizational life in schools. Some of this work is presently being conducted in relation to mindfulness (Ekman, ND; Jennings, 2011; Roeser et al, 2012). There is an urgent need however for this element to be addressed in relation to Waldorf schools if we are to build capacity in its teachers and leaders for enhanced self efficacy, wellbeing, responsiveness and transformative action. There is a need to conduct research into practical and pragmatic policies and practices including special needs support provision, behavior management, leadership and in particular whether having one main teacher for the class teacher period has proven benefits for teachers, leaders, parents, and of course students or whether it contributes to the arising of unacceptable levels of stress and conflict.

In the introduction to this paper I expressed my concern that if we put the relational difficulties in Waldorf schools down to the spiritually embedded nature of the communities people may feel there is not much that can be done since there were higher forces at play. Conducting this qualitative study has given me the opportunity to test my hypothesis that there may be other more mundane factors in operation such as difficulties with funding, staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, special needs and classroom management knowledge and support and advice and professional development as are also occurring in mainstream schools in Australia which have a much greater infrastructure of support yet still have a dark side in relation to student, collegial and parent communication and collaboration.

This exploratory study has clearly shown how mindfulness practice can assist teachers and leaders to shine the light of clarity on their own emotions and feel more empathy towards the emotions of others. It has

certainly been of benefit to me and I now view my own experience with a great deal more clarity. I am able to see that what happened to me has personal, interpersonal and structural/institutional aspects and that it was not all about my own personal deficits which was how I felt at the time so much so that I even questioned my teaching vocation which was something I had been aware of since I was three years old.

The study has demonstrated that there is much more work to do in terms of sharing responsibility and taking action in relation to personal, interpersonal and structural issues at work in Waldorf communities. I am pleased to have conducted this study and hope it inspires more investigation. I think those paint jars are now set to rest and no longer bubbling.

I would like now to conclude by acknowledging the contribution the participants have made to this research in terms of their involvement, friendship, guidance and responses to a draft of this paper. After reading a draft, a teacher- participant wrote:

I experienced a building acknowledgement and recognition that it's not just me that does it hard, that my judgments of myself and others - unvoiced or not - play into the whole thing.

This research also has the possibility of a big wakeup call to Steiner schools, that it's way past time to implement processes that lead to social hygiene and more healthy professional relationships. I reckon your data could easily be the basis for a bit of a look into the need for renewed professional practice in Steiner schools. Thanks for having the courage to go where you've been.

While a leader- participant wrote:

Just as when I was teaching, many of my dreams were about the children I taught, since I have been a Waldorf school leader many of my dreams are about groups of children and individual teachers. I see the teachers as my "class" to whom I am responsible and serving. Then your email and article arrived. It is as if your respondents in the study were your "class". I felt that you were taking responsibility for and serving us. It felt very nice and then you quoted 'we affect one another. We cannot, not'. Even in our thoughts, we affect one another. Does that make sense?

Thank you, again, for your very valuable work.

There is certainly a need to conduct further research with a longer time frame to explore the potential of mindfulness and reflection to contribute to sustained personal, professional *and* institutional renewal in Waldorf education. For as Mistleberger (ND) has suggested: 'to work with mindfulness is to transform both the work we do, and ourselves, as we work.

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