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A demanding school: schooling strategies in Waldorf institutions[1]

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Abstract

This article discusses the schooling strategies of culturally privileged family groups based on analyzing school choice processes for their offspring. The field research was conducted in Florianópolis/State of Santa Catarina between 2017 and 2019. The material consisted of 14 interviews with parents who have their children enrolled in one of the seven schools investigated, eight interviews with teachers from the institutions, and the participant observation of a set of 15 school events. The main objective was to study the relationship between the social and cultural conditioning factors of families and the ways of schooling their children, using Waldorf institutions as empirical grounds. The main conclusions point to the importance of family social capital throughout the process of school choice, and of dispositions compatible with the prescriptions of Waldorf Pedagogy, emphasizing a very high investment of time and energy in the schooling of the children and interactions with the institution.

Keywords

Schooling strategies – School choice – Family mobilization – Family–school relationships – Waldorf school.

Introduction

This paper attempts to discuss the relationship between education and social class through the lens of school choice processes operated by culturally privileged family groups. The results presented here are the outcome of a study aimed at understanding the links between certain social and cultural conditioning factors and the forms of schooling adopted by families with children enrolled in Waldorf institutions.

The field research was carried out in Florianópolis, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, from 2017 to 2019. The main material mobilized consisted of a series of interviews with parents (n=14) who had their children enrolled in one of the seven schools examined. There were also interviews with teachers (n=8) from these institutions and participant observation of a series of school events (n=15), such as meetings, parties, and lectures.

One of the central assumptions of the approach adopted is based on the insight developed by Monique de Saint Martin (1999), Agnès Van Zanten (2007), and Élisabeth Flitner (2004), among others, that school choice depends to a large extent on parents' perceptions of "good education", "good schools", or "the school best suited to their child's needs". In this line, not only conscious and explicit criteria would influence the decision. Also, implicit criteria, such as those associated with the parents' "educational and social status, the social and cultural significance of school success in a given society, the structure of the educational system, and local conditions" (FLITNER, 2004, p. 33), would be determinants in the process.

The perspective adopted in this work therefore considers the choice of educational institution for children as part of a long-term investment embedded in a set of strategies of social reproduction (BOURDIEU, 1993; 2002). Like all other strategies, schooling and educational strategies can only be understood in relation to the available resources and the conditions of the transmission mechanisms. In this sense, families in advantaged positions have not only a greater relative amount of resources, but also more favorable conditions of information, perception, and control over the instruments of reproduction, such as the school market. Thus, they tend to engage in a higher degree of reflexivity in a process of planning, rationalization, and increasing individualization of children's cultural experiences (VAN ZANTEN, 2007; NOGUEIRA, 1998).

Unlike the social classes in Brazil that depend on the public school system for the education of their children, the privileged groups have increasingly diversified alternatives in private schools, in a school market that favors the segmentation not only between public and private[4], but also between the spaces of the private system itself[5].

It is worth mentioning that although some work has been done in Brazil on Waldorf education[6], few have discussed it from a sociological perspective. Building on the discussions

[4]- Data from the Inep/MEC school censuses showed an increase in enrollment in private primary schools in the country from 16.1% to 19.1% between 2009 and 2019. In terms of number of establishments, private schools grew from 15% to 22% of the total number of basic education schools in Brazil between 2013 and 2019 (BRASIL, 2014; 2020).

[5]- A very similar segmented situation is described by Veleda (2004) studying Argentina.

[6]- Waldorf education was developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) based on his philosophical doctrine, anthroposophy. In general, Waldorf schools are non-profit associations that follow the curriculum of the countries in which they are located, adding subjects such as German and eurythmy, and placing a strong emphasis on artistic and humanistic education.

of Maria Struchel (1988) - on the conservative aspects of this educational approach - and Juliana Pinto (2009) - on the adherence of middle-class families to lifestyles "in tune" with what the schools prescribe - this research seeks to explore important nuances of the conditions of family adherence to these schools.

In our fieldwork we found many similarities with Pinto's (2009) findings in Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais. However, her definition of "ideal Waldorf family" and "non-Waldorf family" urged us to deepen our understanding of the processes of adherence to this pedagogical approach, to analyze its social conditioning factors, and to strive for a more detailed capture of the elements that we considered relevant to understanding the phenomenon. Some of these points emerged during the fieldwork. Among them, we highlight: i) the importance of social networks and the importance of the circulation of information in the elaboration of educational projects; ii) the place of the child in the family and its protection; iii) the explanation of doubts and hesitations in the process of choosing a school; iiii) the value of mobilizing the family to educate their children and the admiration and assimilation of the prescriptions of Waldorf pedagogy in domestic spaces.

Seen as an alternative to what are considered traditional models of private schooling, Waldorf schools are characterized by offering services that, to a large extent, contradict or reject what other schools offer.[7] In particular, a massive and impersonal service in a standardized environment, the separation of school and family, and a pragmatic education aimed at preparing students for higher education. As we shall see, the expectations parents have of the schools surveyed relate to central notions of Waldorf pedagogy, such as the idea of "protection" of the child and the closeness and partnership between family and school.

The seven schools studied are of different sizes and were selected according to their visibility and relevance for understanding the expansion of this pedagogy in the city of Florianópolis. The oldest was founded in 1980 and the newest in 2017. The pioneer school is considered a reference for the other initiatives, and it is also the only one that offers classes up to high school level. Three schools offer both early childhood and primary education, and another three offer only early childhood education. Most of the schools are in a specific area of the city (east of the island), which is characterized by real estate expansion and the settlement of privileged social classes. According to the teachers interviewed, there is good communication among the institutions, there are efforts to synchronize calendars and cooperation in the distribution of available positions.

Some characteristics of the family groups

Located between the middle and upper social strata, closer to the culturally dominant pole than to the economic one, the couples studied are characterized by a significant amount of cultural capital. Both the mother and the father had completed or were completing higher education at the time of the research, with a strong predominance

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7- Waldorf schools can be thought of in terms of "denial", i.e., as schools that "do not look like schools". This is because there is a feeling, especially in kindergarten, that the buildings "look like houses" and the teachers "look like mothers". Another aspect of this "denial" is economic. The understanding that schools are "non-profit associations" (the fees collected are used to maintain the school) is based on the vision that education should not be a marketable good. This perspective is anchored in a collective denial of the commercial character and the economic interests and profits involved in the school market - as Pierre Bourdieu (2004) argues in relation to the market of symbolic goods.

of humanities and related fields. Many of them have continued their studies at the master's and doctoral levels. However, the relative variation in parents' occupations reveals the prevalence of activities whose relationship to knowledge and schooling is less applied or linked to the economic domain and the private sector. That is, there is a strong proximity to the universe of science, education, culture, and health, with emphasis on teaching and research activities linked to public service.[8]

The geographical origin of these people is remarkable. Most of them are not from Florianópolis, some come from the interior of the state of Santa Catarina and, above all, from other state capitals of the country. Four of them are foreigners, coming from the capitals of Argentina, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The family groups in question are made up of heterosexual couples, married or in a stable relationship, with an average of two children (only two had three children). The low number of children, the distance between the births of each child, and sometimes the "late" parenthood indicate a family planning that is in line with the parents' disposition to invest time and money in their offspring, thus gathering the resources to provide them with the desired type of schooling.

In this sense, investment in schooling is not dissociated from what is repeatedly classified as "devoting oneself to the children" or "taking care of the children". These terms are understood by parents as an offer to their children - education, studies, opportunities - from something outside the family, in the physical sense (an institution) and also subjectively (values, teaching). In the relationship established with Waldorf schools, "dedication" and "care" appear as tasks to be shared in an intense and balanced way between parents and the institution, with great demands on the time and energy of the former. Some would say that Waldorf schools are very demanding... for parents!

As it is known, the availability of time for children's education depends both on the material conditions of existence - economic and work activities - and on the perception of the meaning or value of education itself and the ways of its achievement. Thus, for example, parents with abundant economic resources and flexible time management, but without a "participatory" vision of the educational process, may choose to leave the school and other institutions responsible for their children's education, limiting their participation to formal events such as parents' meetings. More than having the time, one must be willing to have the time. It turns out that what would be an option for "outsourcing" the education of children, as a teacher in a Waldorf school told us, does not present itself, however, to the couples assisted in the institution where she works since 2017 - when she was called to collaborate with its foundation.

> [...] a lot of mothers who don't work, who can take care of their kids. So, they have an elite profile, you know? And they want to have that participation in their children's education. They don't want to outsource that education. They don't need to outsource that education. And so, in

a certain way, some mothers, it is not the case for everybody [...], they really want, it is important to be really present and to open a big space in life to do this. (Interview with teacher Vitória).[9]

Including the temporary or permanent abandonment of other professional activities or formation in other spheres of life[10], the experience of motherhood of intense "devotion to their children" predominates among the mothers interviewed. The prolongation of the care of the children is also seen in the choice of the Waldorf school and in the monitoring of the process over several years.[11] Despite the role of men being relatively minor, it is not absent from the decision-making process and the activities required by the institution.

Social networks and the searching for "similar"

As already mentioned, the couples' access to information about educational services in Florianopolis seems to be linked to the early establishment of bonds with other parents in the same situation. In almost all the cases studied, the family was to some extent integrated into a social network in which there were people known that have attended or were attending Waldorf schools. As a source of information and help, sometimes as a "bridge" (GRANOVETTER, 1973), offering elements of comparison and analysis to support decisions, the members of these networks are important parts of the process of adherence to institutions.

Van Zanten (2010) points to networks and groups of friends as "privileged informants" that play an important role in the construction of school choice strategies. Among the valuable information shared in these spaces is "certain 'hot' information that is not officially communicated or is difficult to obtain". The author refers to the enrollment criteria of private institutions, "which exercise an educational, social, and institutional selection that is often opaque to parents". This information, the author continues, "can also relate to the concrete procedure to be followed in order to gain access to the institutions" (VAN ZANTEN, 2010, p. 423).

Interested in enrolling her young daughter in a Waldorf school, Lara searched for information among friends and family. She then found out that she had to "put her name in the queue" in advance as there would only be a few places available. Throughout the research it seemed to us that there was a strong perception of the "lack of places" in the Waldorf schools in Florianópolis and we often heard that to get a place in the early childhood education it was necessary to apply "right from pregnancy" because the waiting time could be up to two years. Lara followed the advice she had received and made sure that her daughter was called to the school of her choice rather quickly:

9- All given names are fictitious.

10- We mobilize here the notion developed by Florence Passy and Marco Giugni (2000, p. 121) to address the phenomenon of individual political engagement. Life spheres can be defined as distinct but interrelated regions in an individual's life, each with its own boundaries, logic, and dynamics.

11- Individual and class meetings, working groups, and parties are common, as are invitations to participate in school committees. Work with fundraising campaigns for school trips and artistic activities (especially theatre) is required in the years when these activities take place. In general, a constant dialogue between parents and teachers is expected.

> I have many friends whose children study in Waldorf schools, many. In my network, many friends. They are people I like very much, people who fit into our lifestyle. And then, when my daughter was born, I started to do research. And then I started to get hints from my friends. [...] Then they told me: "If you want a Waldorf school, go and put your name in the queue, because it is a horror to find a place". (Interview with Lara, journalist, doctoral student in education).

Various groups - "of pregnant women", "on maternity" or simply "of friends" - stand out among the mothers' social networks, with characteristics of mutual help and an intense and informal flow of information that reflect a series of social and cultural affinities. These groups, whether face-to-face or virtual, appear to be one of the most privileged spaces for exchange, considered very useful by mothers, especially those experiencing a first pregnancy. Health information (maternal and child) and education constitute a strong point of interest of the groups, some of them led by health professionals such as obstetric nurses and/or doulas and doctors, gathering women around the theme of "motherhood".

In these groups there is an obvious sharing of certain values and lifestyles that have an affinity with Waldorf education, which we could call holistic conceptions of health and life. Topics such as natural childbirth and humanized childbirth, non-drug approaches, yoga, complementary therapies, some of them less conventional, and many other elements form a constellation of interests related to the care of the self and the child in the broadest sense. The enthusiasm of the participants for a particular service or theme, as well as the importance given to a recommendation by a health professional, are not irrelevant aspects in these circuits, where the sense of security of being among like-minded people and the deposit of trust in the people of the networks are central.

Many mothers claim that they first heard about Waldorf education in these groups and that their "interest in the institution" arose from the experiences of friends and other women in these networks.

> I have a group of friends, they even... it was from the circle of pregnant women that I attended, from this group of midwives and so on - which they started taking their children to [name of school]. So, they spoke very highly of Waldorf, I didn't know about it. I had no idea what it was. And from these conversations, from this group, I started to comment with Felipe, to say: "Oh, but I think Waldorf is interesting and so on. Let's see!" (Interview with Patrícia and Felipe, actress, "mother" and administrator).

> I have a group of mothers. We do studies on motherhood that are coordinated by my pediatrician. And one of these, actually two of these mothers [who have children in the same school as Lara] are part of the group. So, from time to time, we study some books and stuff. (Interview with Lara, journalist, doctoral student in education).

The groups initially indicated that women gathered around "natural" topics such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. However, the interest in discussing and studying child development and schooling indicates that it is women/mothers who are primarily

responsible for this work in the families interviewed. The prevalence of women as central actors in the organization of the children's home and school education - in some cases devoting themselves exclusively to it - points to moral values that are dear to the family groups approached and that correspond to what Waldorf education also values and prescribes, as also noted by Struchel (1988).

The importance of the child in the family and the protection of the childhood

Norbert Elias (2012), referring to what he calls the "civilization of parents", highlights the long-term process of transformation of the value given to children and childhood in the West. Underlying this process, which has entailed several changes in the way children are raised and, more broadly, in their relationship with parents and adults, is the recognition of "the right of [children] to be understood and valued in their own character", which would also constitute "a human right" (ELIAS, 2012, p. 470). The valorization of childhood as a specific period of development towards adulthood and the "social prescription for the recognition of a considerable autonomy" of children regarding parental power would largely redefine the role of parents. In this configuration, the importance of protection and general care of the offspring takes on another dimension.

The "juvenile island of society" to which the child is assigned for many years, as Elias says, includes the school. The search for schools that "protect children" is a strong finding in our research and is in fact at the core of the justifications for choosing Waldorf schools to educate the children. The terms used by parents refer to the fear of a "threat to childhood" or a distortion of what it means to be a child. It is not a fear of physical issues, public safety, or social violence, but of the "preservation of naivety" and the "right to be a child". The vision of a safe school would thus have more to do with the ability to guarantee children their rightful place in contemporary families (ARIÈS, 1986; SINGLY, 2007).

> I think the common thing was to look at your child and see it this way, this way, to want something so special and so... To really protect. That is what a Waldorf school does. It protects you in such a welcoming way that other schools don't. So, this question of protection, even in school, I think was the common point among all. Because none of the parents there wanted to go to another school. A different kind of school. [...] So, I think this is what unites these parents. This willingness to protect the child both in the school environment and at home. (Interview with Diana, photographer, "mother").

> Even because childhood has been so massacred, right? I think we also put her in this school hoping to protect childhood. So, a lot of things related to consumption, that was one of the things we put in the school, it's a school that you see... In public, everything is simpler, less focused on consumption [...] This digital issue as well. So, she doesn't have a cell phone, and several kids in her class don't have cell phones. Some of them have them in fifth grade. We know it's coming, but she doesn't have a cell phone. (Interview with Celeste, psychologist, researcher).

The association between the school establishment and the "protection" of children has broader meanings and refers to the adequacy of different spaces or worlds for children. There is the notorious concern with the "outside world", an idea that refers to "traditional" pedagogical approaches. In this sense, it is about trying to protect the child from "competitiveness", "the urgency of literacy", and "too much stimulation" in early childhood.

It should be emphasized that for anthroposophy education up to the age of seven (kindergarten) should aim to show the child that "the world is good", and from seven to 14 (primary school) that "the world is beautiful". Waldorf schools would thus seek to shield children from problems outside the school environment and prevent them from having to deal with strong, tragic, and stressful experiences. The school space is extremely protected so that students can feel "safe and happy" within it (ROCHA, 2006, p. 561).

Adicionally, the anxiety expressed by parents also concerns - and this is central - forms of domestic upbringing and consumption habits of children and parents that are considered reprehensible. It refers to the universe of "other families", which we may call "standard". Associated with characteristics of the contemporary world such as practicality, speed, attractiveness, these habits are the antipodes of what Waldorf education defends and it is from them that parents want to keep their children away. The care about nutrition and the choice of toys are of particular importance and are among the points most often mentioned by our interviewees. It is the relationship with the child who "eats candy", "has a cell phone", "watches TV" - which in the Waldorf perspective would be an unprotected and poorly cared for child - that these families want to avoid.

In contrast to the rigid school experience, a welcoming school is sought. Against "preparing for the university entrance exam," "protecting childhood" is sought. Against exposure to screens and electronic toys, "free play" is encouraged. Moreover, other school experiences can be seen as "cruel" to children. This extreme perception is verbalized by Diana as her motivation to lead the creation of a new Waldorf school in Florianópolis:

> I didn't build a school for my son. I built a school because I think everybody had to put the child in Waldorf education. I don't know, I want to protect children in a certain way, you know? Like, even the public-school children, especially, I want them to have... [...] I think they could at least have a similar pedagogy, one that is not so cruel to the children. (Interview with Diana, photographer, "mother").

The perception of Waldorf schools as spaces of "protection of childhood" suggests a search for an environment very similar to the home, which is understood and naturalized as a space of "care" and "protection" for children. The definition of the school as a "bubble", in terms of isolation from the "problems of the world" and a supposed uniformity between people and their values, was common in the speeches of the parents interviewed. In the "Waldorf environment", dealing with those who are different does not seem to be a central value. Rather, the "neighbor" is sought in the sense of social status, style, and values, which, to a large extent, is also reflected geographically.[12]

12- The question is often raised as to whether Waldorf students do not tend to experience a socialization that is more closed to the "real world" and therefore perhaps leave school less "prepared for life", with difficulties of integration. Note that among the strategies of dissemination of the pedagogy that we have found is the dissemination of information about alumni, including "famous" ones, in Brazil and around the world. Jonas

The valorization of social homogeneity, of being among equals - an experience that undoubtedly generates security - is quite indicative of the criteria of choice operated by parents. This search for a "different school" entails the production of social and cultural boundaries within which agents resemble and recognize each other, and whose principles of distinction tend to be assimilated by the students.

> I can't think of any other school to send my daughter to. [...] Because I didn't want my daughter to go to a school where the children weren't like her, where the children were very different from her. (Interview with Lara, journalist, doctoral student in education).

In summary, the logic found in the justifications of "Waldorf parents" confirms what Graziela Perosa (2009) points out about other types of schools. That is, Waldorf schools offer certain social groups an overlap between the social characteristics of families and the type of socialization offered by the institution in a market where there are schools "for all tastes". In an encounter experienced by families as a choice, relationships of extreme trust are established between families and the schools that aim to serve them (PEROSA, 2009).

Finding the right school: child-matching and frustrations

Parents' ways of understanding and expressing other pedagogical approaches and school spaces were analyzed through narratives in which the interviewees reconstructed the reflections and actions that would have led them to enroll their children in Waldorf schools. By reporting on their interests, decision criteria and effective experiences of visiting and/or enrolling in different schools, mothers and fathers indicated the space of possibilities in terms of types of schools, pedagogies, as well as neighborhoods and prices for the schooling of their children. A closer examination of the journey of the set of families in search of the right school for their children reveals many interesting points about mental investments, expectations and concrete experiences in the process of child-matching.[13]

When asked what they were looking for when visiting schools, parents often mentioned what they "didn't want" or "didn't like", thus expressing a difference in which tastes "are affirmed in a totally negative way by the opposite rejection of other tastes" (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 56). The expressions of rejection of certain institutions refer to the dislike of the architecture of the school, the aesthetics and organization of the environment, the presence of televisions, the attitude of the professionals and the food offered.

The perceptions about a particular school that emerge from more or less intensive direct contact, which partly reflect what Ball *et al.* (1996) call "the 'feel' of a school", are in some cases mentioned as decisive factors, especially for the exclusion of certain institutions.

Bach (2016), for example, elaborates a panorama of the professional destinies of Waldorf alumni, showing a great diversity of paths, although with a slight predominance of activities in the fields of education and arts.

13- The idea is to find a match between the characteristics of the school institution and the characteristics of the child, considering elements such as *ethos*, academic orientation, and size of the former and the personality, interests, and aspirations of the latter. In these cases, the quality of the institution is not given per se, and rankings or league tables in public evaluations are less relevant (BALL, BOWE & GEWIRTZ, 1996).

The two excerpts below are among the cases where the interviewees are more explicit and detailed about what they did not like about the environment of some of the schools visited. The dissatisfaction presented refers, first, to the organization of spaces and material elements, such as the presence of bars in the classrooms and carpets in the playgrounds.

> I wanted it to be an open space school. I didn't want them to be confined to schools. Because I visited several schools that were like this, oh [gestures with hands], they were a bunch of little rooms, you know? So, some little things like this, this little room here, changing room, this little room here for eating, this little room here is the room for I don't know what. I didn't like that. I don't like those things. [...] In the schools I went to, which were a lot of small rooms, some had playgrounds, but the children didn't stay in the playgrounds. Then you would come into a room, everything had a gate, you know? It was like the kids were in cages. All the classrooms had little gates so the children wouldn't go there. I thought: "But what's there? There is nothing on the other side. Do you understand? There is no problem for a child to go to the other side. Lots of little bars like that. So, I didn't like it. (Interview with Lara, journalist, doctoral student in education).

> Even though I wasn't familiar with [Waldorf] education, I didn't want a carpeted playground for my child. I already knew what I wanted. I wanted a real childhood, I wanted contact, and I wanted life for my child. (Interview with Teresa, engineer, entrepreneur).

These references indicate some of the criteria that the interviewees considered important when visiting some institutions and that they recalled when asked to explain their choices. What was mentioned as "negative" (cramped spaces, protective elements such as railings and carpets, television, processed food, among others) is not present in the schools in which the children were enrolled. In fact, these are elements that are frowned upon and discouraged by Waldorf education and its followers.

Other manifestations of dissatisfaction, difficulties and various emotions related to the schooling of their children emerged in the parents' reconstructions of the process as well as in the observation of events where there were parents interested in vacant places.[14] The existence of "long waiting lists" emerged as the main source of dissatisfaction and was mentioned several times regarding different schools and levels of education. However, this was not the only source of difficulty for parents who wanted to enroll their children in Waldorf schools or who already had them enrolled.

The need to reconcile different perspectives, plans and family desires - which are not necessarily clearly articulated and sometimes contradictory - in decisions whose impact on children tends to be intense and long-lasting can cause distress and doubt (BALL *et al.*, 1996). As highlighted in several studies (NOGUEIRA, 1998; VAN ZANTEN, 2007; VINCENT, 2017), the combination of the importance attached to the child and the

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14- We gave priority to events where the pedagogy was presented to people who were interested in enrolling their children or who were already on waiting lists. Thus, we observed events such as "Introductory lectures on Waldorf education", "What school do you dream of for your children?", "Open doors", and others.

pressure on parents concerning their children's educational success can make the decision to choose one or another institution very complex and difficult.

Celeste, for example, reported that the whole process of making decisions about her firstborn daughter's school choice was "very difficult" and made her "very anxious" and even "sick". Throughout the interview, she described in detail this process and the various ways the couple found to follow and try to control their daughters' schooling.

> I paid a visit. The two of us. My husband and I talked to the parents who had put her in [the Waldorf school], who were colleagues of ours, and how is it, right? What do they think? We talked to parents from the [non-Waldorf school], right? I did a process. It is very difficult [with emphasis]. When I went to enroll my daughter in the school here next door, on the day of enrollment I felt very bad [laughs]. I said: "Oh, my daughter, my daughter in school," with worry. I got dizzy. You know, like that? Then you go, you leave, and you stay... It's a whole process. Going to school... it's a process. And now, even deciding whether to go there or here, that was also a very difficult process for us, right? Go, don't go, go, don't go! Anyway, actually I did get to enroll there [non-Waldorf school] and also because there was the story of the vacancy, because she was not enrolled in a Waldorf school, there had to be a vacancy, if there was going to be a vacancy, there was not going to be a vacancy. (Interview with Celeste, psychologist, researcher).

In two schools we also observed open meetings for interested parents. At many of these events emotional people spoke, sometimes about difficulties and bad experiences with the schooling of their children in other institutions, sometimes about how Waldorf education had been responsible for "great changes in their lives" and how it had brought about "many positive things". Such situations are presented here in order to bring back the dimension of parental responsibility for the (successful) school experience of the offspring.

In this regard, Maria Alice Nogueira (2005) points out that the contemporary family is experiencing a sentimentalization of relationships to the detriment of its instrumental functions, such as reproduction and descent. It is seen as an extension of parental responsibility towards children, who can be considered as mirrors "in which parents see reflected the successes and failures of their conceptions and educational practices, usually accompanied by feelings of pride or, on the contrary, of guilt" (NOGUEIRA, 2005, p. 572).

It is well known that regret and guilt are potential elements in any decision. Also, school decisions were experienced as important decisions among privileged social classes. Doubt about the "rightness" of the choices made is present in most of the narratives. Similarly, it is not uncommon to speak of a feeling of "guilt" and initial " regret" that generates strong doubts, but which disappears after some time of experience, as described by Lara.

During the process of starting her daughter's schooling at the age of two, Lara reported that she changed her daughter's school and "immediately regretted it". She indicated that because of her daughter's individual characteristics (that she was "already talking while her classmates weren't"), she felt that maybe she had made a wrong choice:

> So, I was a little sorry. I thought I made a mistake. I said: "I think we made a mistake. She was doing very well in [School 1], we sent her to [School 2] and now she is bored. I thought she was bored.

> When we got home, I asked her what she had been doing and she didn't say anything. So, I was like that, right. [...] So it was a difficult thing for me. Then I felt bad. I thought I did it, I thought I made a mistake. But then it went on, it went on. She likes the teachers a lot. And then today I think I made the right choice. (Interview with Lara, journalist, doctoral student in education).

For authors such as Ball *et al.* (1996), this situation occurs during the task that certain families - defined by them as privileged/skilled choosers - set for themselves in seeking a "match" between the specificities of their children and a school that will welcome them.

We saw in the research that in the same family, this search for a child match has considered the "differences" between two sisters, indicating a great effort of analysis, reflexivity, and individualized monitoring of their daughters' school and, more broadly, educational experiences. For Celeste, a school may be ideal for her firstborn, but not for her youngest:

> But we thought a lot about which one it would be. So, we put her in [Waldorf School] because I thought [Waldorf School] would be a happier experience for my daughter. A warmer experience, right? And she likes the school very much. And I know it is the right school for her. I don't know if it will be the right school for the other [daughter]. But for this one, I know it's the right school. It will benefit [daughter's name]. It will favor the abilities that she has, the sensitivity that she has. (Interview with Celeste, psychologist, researcher).

Throughout the interview, Celeste explained why she felt her oldest daughter's school might not be ideal for her youngest daughter, who was three years old at the time. She pointed out that her youngest was "faster and more curious" and that the school would probably not give her the answers she wanted in the time she wanted. However, Celeste used the time of the interview to think about it without making a decision.

Dilution of boundaries: home and school, admiration and work

An important part of the teaching work in Waldorf schools is to explain to the parents the teaching practices and their pedagogical justification based on anthroposophy. Teachers also invest in getting to know each child deeply, which includes getting to know their parents. The schools create channels of communication (publications, lectures, meetings, parties) and want to involve the families in their spaces, making them co-responsible for the success of the pedagogical work. Behind this is what Waldorf pedagogy calls "the school as an extension of the home", an idea materialized in a collective effort to promote a "coherent and harmonious" experience for the children.

However, after hearing reports of great changes at the personal level and changes in the routine and domestic environment based on the school's prescriptions and the work of the agents involved in it, we could propose the idea of "the home as an extension of the school".[15] Throughout the research, we felt that in cases where there was a certain

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15- Some examples found in the research that indicate the "entry" of Waldorf education into the family routine: inclusion of rituals, songs, stories, and toys made of "natural" materials and exclusion of screens, electronic and plastic toys. Suggestion of "therapeutic" extracurricular activities and

mismatch, an effort of adaptation was expected from families in search of what Pinto called the "demand for congruence between family *habitus* and school *ethos*" (2009, p. 13).

In the excerpt below, a teacher talks about how the teacher's work is more "fluid" when families "work together. In other words, if the child's experience at home is very different from what is prescribed by the school, the work in the classroom would be more difficult. Nonetheless, the teacher emphasizes that it is necessary to know how to deal with these situations in which the family does not necessarily "adapt" or change its habits according to what the school requires.

> Of course the child will do better and develop more naturally. The other [student] will give you more attention, more work from the teacher, right? When the family works together, everything flows much better. If they don't, it's more work for us and more work for the family, because it's not easy. It's not easy to deal with, right? If the family realizes that the school can be a support and takes advantage of that support, then everybody grows, right? But it doesn't always happen, and we must have the serenity to know that we will deal with all these different situations. (Interview with teacher Bianca).

From this profound rapprochement and dilution of the boundaries between home and school, we saw teachers suggesting practices, indicating ideal routines, and proposing solutions to problems presented by parents. The latter establish relationships of admiration and great trust with their children's teachers, who provide them with detailed data and interpretations of the children's behavior and "development".

The prescriptions are validated by "higher meanings" related to the anthroposophical worldview. That is, the explanations of the stages of child development, the different needs of each age, and the "solutions" to certain problems are appropriated from the work of Rudolf Steiner or interpretations of his work by his followers.[16] Waldorf teacher training provides such a body of knowledge, which is the basis for classroom practices and recipes that are passed on to the home environment.

Patricia described some of the practices her son brought home from school and elaborated on the importance of both spaces "working together". In her testimony, she reproduced the idea of "harmony and coherence" in her child's experience and reflected favorably on the "partnership" that had developed between her and her son's teacher.

> A lot of things [have been incorporated into the routine]. For example, at mealtime we sing little songs that they sing here [at the school]. Then we give thanks for the food that is on the table. The little story that he tells here has a little candle after it goes out, so now we have a little candle at home. He tells us the story and then he blows out the candle. He brings everything, you know? It is very, very cute. And there are also some subjects that we... Because if home and school don't work together, it's very difficult. He learns one thing here and at home I apply something else. So, I always try to work together with the school. [...] So we work together like this. Whatever

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contraindication of activities such as ballet and soccer. Suggestion of anthroposophical medicine and strong indication that children sleep earlier.
16- One example is the book Pedagogia Waldorf: caminho para um ensino mais humano, by Rudolf Lanz, with more than ten editions.

she [the teacher] tells me, I tell her, and we go hand in hand, like this, very nice. (Interview with Patrícia and Felipe, actress, "mother" and administrator).

The idea of a "partnership" between family and school gains strength when we see the high demand for the participation and mobilization of parents in the "building of the school" of their offspring.[17] This happens in different ways in different institutions, nevertheless, what they have in common is a great openness to families entering the school space and making an effort to communicate their views through lectures, study groups, individual and class meetings, and other adult activities.

During the observation of an event in one of the schools studied, we noticed that when parents reported that they had "learned a lot", they expressed a feeling of gratitude for the learning that they felt the school had provided, resulting from the difficulties and joys of creating and maintaining the institution.[18] We noted a general sense of "aggrandizement" in the collective processes, with recognition of the importance of what was being done and mention of emotions such as "pride", "affection", "admiration", and "commitment". Distancing themselves from an instrumentalized relationship, these parents interpreted their children's schooling as the fruit of "collective work" and produced "with their own hands".

In this sense, one of the mothers stated that "it's really cool not to feel like a client" and emphasized the importance of being involved in the processes and "not buying ready-made".[19] Here there is a rejection of the idea of "consuming" a school, understanding the experience of "just paying monthly fees" as a (reprehensible) commercialization of education. Working to build the "best possible schooling" for one's offspring is thus established as something morally superior to "just buying". Likewise, it is an investment that families - especially mothers - are willing to make, given their commitment and concern for their children's lives in general.[20] Investments are conditioned by economic situations, cultural formations, and family arrangements that allow and encourage commitment, both in building and maintaining schools as well as in monitoring and controlling children's activities.

Conclusion

We have tried to show in this paper that the analysis of the processes of school choice for children cannot be separated from the study of the conditions of existence of family groups, especially the economic and cultural resources at their disposal, which determine the strategies of social reproduction that they put into practice. The objectivation of these elements, in turn, requires attention to the wider set of resources available to families - in

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17- This "building" has more than one meaning. Sometimes it is physical, in the joint effort to renovate the facilities; sometimes it is administrative or creative, in the work committees and in the organization of events.

18- Founded by a group of families a year and a half before the observed event.

19- The positivization of "making with your own hands", in counterpoint to the negativation of "buying ready-made", can also extend to food, toys, clothing, among other elements.

20- We emphasize that the high mobilization of middle-class family groups for the schooling of their offspring is far from being exclusive to Waldorf schools. Flávia Fialho (2012) and Diana Mandelert (2005) present similar situations in different types of private schools.

particular a mobilizable capital of social relations - and to the concrete contexts in which actions and negotiations take place.

The growing segmentation of the Brazilian school space in the last decades, characterized by a strong diversification of the supply at the private pole of the educational system, has increased the possibilities of choosing an educational institution for social groups that do not depend on public schools. This diversification of the educational market corresponds to a complexity in the decision-making processes of parents with school-age children, who are confronted with an increasing diversity of schools, "methods" and "educational approaches". Therefore, this situation can pose challenges to parents who, in certain contexts, are faced with the need to make choices that seek to reconcile certain educational aspirations with the available educational options.

In a relatively limited empirical space, our research has attempted to reconstruct part of the conditions of choice for a school space with peculiar characteristics experienced by couples in privileged social positions, especially culturally. The results are quite convincing, since they show that the process of choosing a school is far from being a "natural" decision, easy to make, or free of doubts and frustrations. Well-endowed with cultural resources and close to the universe of science and humanities, the couples studied are characterized by a high investment of time in the management of parental care. In these arrangements, maternal commitment, and the mother's central role in the acquisition of information and in the negotiation of her children's educational project stand out.

The investment in this process is directly related to the degree of investment that parents are disposed - in the sociological sense of the term - in what they consider to be, above all, an act of caring for their children in all dimensions of the individual. The intense mobilization of the family, which has been observed in families that have enrolled their children in Waldorf institutions, is in fact the most remarkable of the characteristics observed in the research.

Interested in institutions that eschewed standard school models or focused on the development of certain skills that are highly valued in Brazil among the higher social fractions (such as the early acquisition of foreign languages and a focus on achievement), these couples presented conceptions of education that were less related to those associated with notions of competence and competitiveness. By rejecting the less demanding and more comfortable relationships that traditional schools tend to require of parents of students, they have accepted - sometimes with some surprise and not without complaint - to bet on a school-family relationship model that demands a lot of them. A model that, as we have seen, is far from being viable for any family.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that what we could call the process of involvement in Waldorf schools should not be treated homogeneously. If the data of this study point to a parental involvement that seems to be gradual - generally led by the mother - with a tendency to intensify over time, it would be worthwhile to examine the cases of frustration, criticism and leaving the institutional model. In this sense, it would be possible for the analysis to look more closely at the success or failure of the identification process of the family groups with Waldorf education. We believe that this element of identification with the Waldorf approach is more decisive for the continuity of the schooling process than in other institutions.

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