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## Chapter 4

# COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

In my research of the committee structure of many Waldorf schools around the country, I have found that most schools have organizational charts and outlines of the functions carried out by their committees. I was left with the question: "Once the skeletal structures of our organizations are in place, what are the next steps in forming healthy, working communities within our schools?"

The framework of this chapter is best stated in the following:

"The spiritual life forces of a Waldorf School are twofold, or we could say, there are two motives for its existence. On the one hand, it is the starting point for a renewal of education based on a spiritual knowledge of the whole man (the teachers' vocation as such). On the other hand, and at the same time, it is the working model for a social community, it is an institution of the free life of spirit."<sup>1</sup>

It is this working model for social community which is the basis on which committees should be structured. In this model we find an opportunity to develop an understanding of and a forum for active participation into the ideas and realities of social interaction. In this age of the consciousness soul our challenge is to

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<sup>1</sup>. Manfred Leist, **Parent Participation in A Waldorf School**, AWSNA, Great Barrington, 1987, page 13.

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transform our relational life from the individual to the group. I will be sharing from my own experience as an administrator and hope to spark some ideas for others to experiment with in their own unique schools.

### **Purpose of Committees:**

In order to create a network of support for the educational philosophy, it becomes important to understand the concepts of spirit (identity), soul (relationship), and body (structure) in relation to the committees. In the dialogue with the spirit we encounter the thinking life of the school and this involves clarity of mission and goals. Does the activity of the committee reflect the educational philosophy and shared goals of the organization? When a person serves on a committee, he or she should find personal fulfillment. At the level of committee work, one can find expression for his or her own individual inner growth and an opportunity to create a living reality as a group. In the dialogue with the soul life of the school, we experience how we relate to each other within committees, how our committees relate to other committees, and how the committees relate to the community at large. Is space provided to get to know each other, perhaps through sharing of biographies? Is there an awareness and mutual recognition of our relationship to other committees and is our work being communicated? In dialogue with the body, we find the actual structure and organizational charts where the material we work with is visible. Does the budget accurately reflect the needs of the committee? Are reporting procedures clearly outlined?

The scope of work being carried out by Waldorf schools today is greater than can be accomplished by the faculties alone and requires the assistance and cooperation of the whole community in order to address the many areas of concern needing attention in the school environment. A committee serves to fulfill the needs of the community to participate in the life of the school. Parents want interaction with the faculty, and a healthy working relationship can increase understanding for both in serving the needs of the children.

Committees serve to identify and expand the cultural life around the school. When we bring people together behind a common purpose, the creative potential is increased from the individual to the group. We begin to experience the building of a living reality as a group. Karmic connections force us to confront

each other and awaken to our mutual destinies. We must bring to consciousness the question, "Why are we together?" and "What do we bring each other?"

Committees function to share in the burden of responsibility. Rudolf Steiner's motto (as expressed in **Republican, Not Democratic**) for spiritually responsible human collaboration is, "*To sacrifice freedom for the sake of higher freedom.*" Once a committee has been charged with an assignment, it must be allowed to give its best to the task, and the freedom to work out of a group consciousness.

### **Committee Organization:**

When bringing together a group of individuals to carry out specific tasks as mandated by Faculty and/or Board of Trustees, questions of size and talent must be addressed. Determination of the scope of work will suggest an efficient working number. A group larger than eight people begins to necessitate the formation of sub-committees. Sub-committees serve to focus attention on specific areas of the tasks carried by the committee. An example is a Safety sub-committee as an active part of a larger Buildings and Grounds Committee. Sub-committee work encourages active participation, a closer working relationship and the possibility of greater personal fulfillment. Finding activities in which all can find fulfillment requires periodic evaluation of efficient working size.

I imagine a healthy organization resembling a tree in nature. In the root system, we find many off-shoots searching for nourishment in the earth. Sub-committees are like the roots. The roots then support the trunk and branches above. The trunk is the funnelling of activity through the committees, working to link the growth of the branches with the life-giving work of the roots. The upper part of the tree has two main branches which reach out to the world beyond. The health of the whole is accomplished when all systems feed each other and their activities are in harmony.

Individuals entrusted with carrying out specific tasks must be assigned those activities which best suit their talents. Having tried to bring a person onto a committee to enable them to change their perspective, or to feel included has resulted in energy being spent on the person, often at the expense of the work at hand. Conscious thought must be given to selection by talent, rather than the personal growth of individuals. A well balanced committee includes individuals

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with varied life experience. One might seek a professional viewpoint or an understanding of the pedagogy. A parent of a graduated student might have a different perspective from a parent new to the community. It becomes the responsibility of the Faculty and Board to guide the process of selection to committee, bringing an awareness of temperament, male/female, and a balance of community, faculty, parents, and friends.

### **Forming Committees and Establishing a Mandate System:**

The Faculty and Board of Trustees are entrusted with the task of determining the needs of the organization. Through the classroom experience, Faculty meetings and pedagogical committees, the Faculty deepens its understanding of the core needs. The Board of Trustees works to financially and legally build an organ which reflects these ideals. A mandate is the clear articulation of a task and its purpose.

Once the needs of the organization are determined, questions to address are:

1. Does a committee already exist which can expand to include this task?
2. Is a standing committee of committed individuals functioning for ongoing work needed?
3. Would a time limited, ad hoc, committee serve the need?

Each committee should have a charter or mission statement which is endorsed by both Faculty and Board, to be reviewed and revised yearly. A three year term of office enables new talent and initiative to develop. Staggering the rotation of committee membership allows for better continuity. Clearly defined areas of responsibility, with delegation of duties, will promote the individual's freedom to act in his or her area of interest. The committees are encouraged to make decisions on behalf of the whole when the leadership of the organization clearly shares the vision and purpose of the work. An understanding and mutual listening between committees and Board or Faculty is of primary importance in maintaining trust in the organization. Committees should take specific decisions

to the Board or Faculty in cases of uncertainty. Many schools have well developed committee structures which can be transformed into a mandate system with more conscious articulation. The governing bodies of the organization work toward clearly defining policies and procedures for the committees. When understanding and a common definition are reached, the mandate will be apparent. Work in areas of policies and procedures can be followed by the building of common definitions of mandated tasks.

### **Guidelines for Proposed Mandate**

1. Each committee needs to write up a **proposed** mandate, including definitions of duties, limitations and accountability such as:
  - a. The \_\_\_\_\_ Committee is empowered to make decisions and follow through to implementation and review in the following areas of responsibility:
  - b. The \_\_\_\_\_ Committee would act in an advisory capacity and make recommendations to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. From whom would committee members expect to seek advice before making a decision and implementing it?
  - d. To whom is the committee accountable?
  - e. What tasks are presently within the committee's domain that you recommend be shifted to another group or individual?
  - f. What tasks currently carried by another group ought to be within the committee's domain?
2. Faculty and/or Board will review and refine these proposed mandates. Conversations between committees regarding the proposal may be needed.
3. Approval from governing bodies to the mandate will be the result of this work.

### **The Meeting:**

The social/relational work takes place at the point of meeting in committee. Three elements important to group work are:

Study	Thought Life
Social	Feeling Life
Work	Will Life

When all three areas of interaction are exercised, individuals find fulfillment and energy for their work. Each meeting can provide an opportunity for inner development as well as outer activity when a living consciousness of content, relationship and procedure are carried. A well planned meeting with agenda preparation and distribution in advance is essential. Are the aims clearly defined for discussion? Is there time allocated for discussion and analysis? Was a decision reached? Who needs to be communicated to? At the conclusion of each meeting, a period of review and reflection on the experience helps to foster group loyalty. In the review process we develop a sense of balance between procedural consciousness and lively engagement.

### **Policy:**

Each committee should set a definite day and time to meet regularly. The frequency of meetings is determined by the scope of work. Meetings should not be cancelled. Even when there appears to be no pending business, just getting like minds together can sometimes produce a spark of creative energy. Each meeting needs set times to begin and finish, too long a meeting can be wearing. Clarity, precision and punctuality honor the commitment to the freely given time of volunteers.

Membership on a committee means responsibility and commitment. If a person cannot attend meetings regularly, the whole group is affected. After three missed meetings, the person will be asked to step off the committee to be replaced by someone who is willing to participate on a fuller level.

### **Procedures:**

Minutes taken at each meeting provide a means of communication among the committee members, and others in the school. Distributing the minutes prior to the next meeting acts as a reminder for the date and time of the next meeting,

as well as a written review of the work completed and in process. Minutes of all committee work filed in the school office serve as a means of consistent record keeping. An agenda distributed before the meeting allows members to come prepared for the work at hand.

**Format:**

Setting goals for the group, with periodic review, encourages continuity and ownership of the work. Time allowed for open discussion and analysis helps the group reach a more unified decision. Consciously observe rules of decorum. Interrupting, talking while another is speaking, arriving late – these and other behaviors are disruptive to the group process. Committee work can be fun. Involve everyone, encourage all to participate and interact. Remember to give members rewards and show the committee they are recognized. Publishing the committee's accomplishments in the school bulletin and occasional social get-togethers help to raise awareness of the committee's function.

**Communication:**

Defining clear avenues of communication throughout the organization promotes healthy growth. Being aware of which decisions need input from Faculty, Board, parents and/or other committees can prevent misunderstanding as well as overlapping of responsibilities. Timing of the communication is also essential. Before a final decision affecting another group in the organization is reached, space for information gathering is needed. Finding avenues to communicate the process undertaken by a committee before reaching a decision will strengthen the final outcome. At all levels of activity, the following qualities are important: accountability, authority and responsibility.

**Accountability:**

Accountability is the key area which requires strengthening throughout our Waldorf schools. Built into the fabric of an organization without a single person "in charge," is the potential for lack of ownership. Delegation of tasks followed by clear and accurate reporting provides increased awareness and understanding of committee activity.

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Within the whole of the organization there are those with the authority to lead and guide the process. The role of leadership in a Waldorf school is one of facilitator rather than "Boss." We work towards consensus in the decision making process in order to reach a stronger and better supported outcome. In an interview with M. Scott Peck, the author of **The Road Less Traveled**, a group of physicians came up with this definition of consensus:

"Consensus is a group decision – which some members may not feel is the best decision but which they can all live with, support, and commit themselves to not undermine – arrived at without voting, through a process whereby the issues are fully aired, all members feel that they have been adequately heard, in which everyone has equal power and responsibility, and different degrees of influence by virtue of individual stubbornness or charisma are avoided, so that all are satisfied with the process. . . ."<sup>2</sup>.

Being a committee chairperson requires the ability to be conscious of each individual's contributions and needs, focusing on enhancing the abilities of the group and sharing observations. A person acting as facilitator keeps the committee members active and engaged. A good facilitator has an open awareness of the individuals interacting within the group. When a person sits quietly through a discussion, ask them to share their thoughts before moving on to the next topic. Being aware of everyone's need to participate in, and own, the process is a primary focus for the person leading the discussion.

In order for the organization to fully promote responsible action in committee work, levels of trust and clarity need articulation. The ability of the governing bodies to guide through delegation is essential, along with the commitment to review and revise the direction when necessary. When trust and confidence are in question, we must have the courage to confront issues. Allowing time for the differences in perspective to find expression can help prevent misunderstanding and hard feelings. Support the action of a committee. During the review process, find the insight for improvement for the future if needed. Finding ways to express the ideals of a Waldorf school will enhance the work in the committees.

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<sup>2</sup>. M. Scott Peck, **Context/No. 29**, Valley Diagnostic Medical and Surgical Clinic, Inc. of Harlington Texas and the Foundation of Community Encouragement, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1989.



Fundamental questions need to be addressed: "How do we foster inner work?" and "How do we balance the individual's needs with the needs of the group?"

**Conclusion:**

I am aware of the need to develop courage and enthusiasm for relationship building. When the awareness is clear and focused on the group, one can best facilitate and guide the work in committees. People volunteer in search of fulfillment and an inner desire to connect their wills with others. The schools have work to be accomplished and when volunteers are allowed to serve the organization, the work in the classroom is strengthened. The teachers can focus their attention on lesson plans and the deepening of the pedagogy when a shared confidence in the environment is living. In order to provide a working model for a social community, we strive to be a reflection of the principles carried by the teachers.