**How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure
coherence of understanding and implementation
of its educational method
Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE),
which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights,
through all levels of the organisation?**
(Part 1: Thesis)

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Part 1: thesis
Part 2: appendices
Part 3: ethnographic diary
Part 4: Interview and focus group transcripts

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Abstract

This study explores the question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust (RMT) ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method, Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' RMT is an educational charity which over the last 40 years has developed a unique educational method for children, young people and adults with a range of challenges, with over 1200 staff in 12 schools and colleges in Wales, England and Scotland. Considering the uniqueness and growth of the charity and the succession of the founder, the study examines the influences that shaped PSTE, the landscape that RMT operates in, the impact of leadership in educational organisations and the process of understanding and implementing an educational method.

The findings from the all-staff survey (n=69), ethnographic workshop observations (13 days), focus groups with direct contact staff (n=2), as well as individual interviews with senior leaders and staff of the organisation (n=15) were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022). The findings were discussed in three essential questions: How do we understand the method? How do we implement the method (people and systems)? How do we develop the method?

While staff try to understand the method in different ways, they often stumble when it comes to the underlying assumptions, which can challenge their current worldview and often prefer to remain with the day-to-day practical applications which convince. Senior leaders can take this one step further if they are open to and engage firstly in the underlying assumptions and secondly the craft processes, and by doing so transform materials into items of service as well as themselves, engaging in 'self-generated conscious action' (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Recommendations for future research, policy and practice within and beyond RMT were made.

Dedication

For the past, current and future students and staff of Ruskin Mill Trust who experience and create PSTE every day and who were my greatest teachers.

Acknowledgements

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AI   Artificial Intelligence

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

D   Ethnographic Diary

EHCM Education Health and Care Manager

EHCP Education Health and Care Plan

FG   Focus Group

I   Interview

PSTE   Practical Skills Therapeutic Education

RMLT Ruskin Mill Land Trust

RMT   Ruskin Mill Trust

PBL   Project Based Learning

PPOC Pedagogic Potential of Craft

PSTE   Practical Skills Therapeutic Education

RTA   Reflexive Thematic Analysis

S   Survey

SaLT   Speech and Language Therapist

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

"Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings, who are able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives" Marie Steiner (1923)

1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this study, I give context to the study as a whole, explain the main area of research, the scope of it, its aims and how I arrived at the research question. I also reflect on my positionality as a senior leader in Ruskin Mill Trust[1], how this impacted on the research and outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1. The context

Ruskin Mill Trust's (RMT) educational method, known as Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE), was created over the course of 40 years of working with children, adolescents, and adults[2] with a range of challenges such as neurodevelopmental disorders, like autism and ADHD, mental health difficulties, and learning disabilities. PSTE is the term for an outdoor, craft, and nature-based method of education that entails gathering raw materials from the land, employing arts and crafts that are rooted in the local cultural history, and creating a high-quality craft item of service for use or sale in social enterprises and public cafes. Within the totality of PSTE, Ruskin Mill differentiates seven different aspects of its educational practice, referred to as the Seven Fields of Practice (see 2.4.3.).

According to RMT, students learn practical, academic and life skills through this, as well as manual, social, and transferable work abilities which in turn increases their self-esteem (RMT, 2024; Gordon and Cox, 2024; Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021). Even as outdoor and nature education has become more popular, it is typically employed as an 'extra-curricular' activity or supplement (Jeffs and Ord, 2017). As far as we are aware, only Ruskin Mill employs this specific combination of nature education in conjunction with traditional

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[1] Beside Ruskin Mill Trust, Ruskin Mill Land Trust, The Field Centre, the Ruskin Mill Centre for Practice there are more than 20 charities and charitable businesses part of the Ruskin Mill group. For ease we shall use Ruskin Mill Trust and Ruskin Mill interchangeably and refer to the individual charities if the context warrants it.
[2] For ease of use and to prevent confusion we shall call all primary recipients of PSTE "students" throughout

crafts as the primary way of imparting education, functionalized by employing Rudolf Steiner's insights into human development.

The development of PSTE is connected to the biography of the founder Aonghus Gordon. Aonghus has gone through Steiner Education (see 2.3.3.) himself and following his training as a potter undertook his early career in a Steiner Special School in Gloucestershire for young people with learning difficulties and challenging behaviour (1st Interview Aonghus Gordon; Gordon and Cox, 2024). He soon discovered that, especially for the older students, classroom-based Steiner Education was not meeting their needs. Particularly for those students, using Steiner's insights, he started to develop an outdoor, nature and craft-based education, which then became Ruskin Mill College, the first college of Ruskin Mill Trust (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Over the years he developed with colleagues what was eventually termed Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE).

FIGURE 1 RUSKIN MILL, THE ORIGINAL BUILDING (RMT, 2024B)

Starting from the renovation of a textile mill in a dreamy valley in the Cotswolds with a beautiful fish farm and woodlands (figure 1) it has grown to be the biggest charity in the UK providing education and care in the special educational needs (SEN) sector. Today (2025) it has over 15 sites across England, Scotland and Wales (figure 2), more than 1200 staff and more than £65 million annual turnover.

1. grace garden school
   Bristol, 7–16

2. grace garden
   upper school
   Bristol, opening TBC

3. helios health centre
   Bristol, opening 2024

4. ruskin mill college
   Nailsworth, 16–25

5. coleg plas dwbl
   Pembrokeshire, 16–25

6. ty'r eithin
   Coleg Plas Dwbl
   satellite campus
   Swansea, 16–25

7. sunfield school
   Clent, 6–19

8. argent college
   Birmingham, 16–25

9. glasshouse college
   Stourbridge, 16–25

10. trigonos
    Social enterprise and
    conference centre

    coleg trigonos
    opening TBC

11. freeman college
    Sheffield, 16–25

12. brantwood specialist school
    Sheffield, 7–19

13. clervaux garden school
    Darlington, 10–19

14. clervaux fold
    Darlington, army families

    clervaux *rise*
    Darlington, 18+

15. fairhill *rise*
    East Lothian, 16+

● Research Centres

A. the field centre
   Nailsworth, RMT
   research centre

B. colquhoun
   research centre
   Pishwanton, East Lothian

C. castelliz research centre
   Pembrokeshire,
   opening TBC

D. sunfield research centre
   Clent, opening TBC

FIGURE 2 RUSKIN MILL CENTRES (FIELD CENTRE JOURNAL, 2023, P.135)

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1.2. aims of research, research question and scope

I pursued this research as an evaluation of the implementation of the method thus far, but also as an academic research study in its own rights. The context of the organisational growth, its uniqueness of educational approach and the succession process of the founder made this research necessary. For the purpose of taking stock of what has been achieved so far and what could be improved, also, as Director of PSTE, considering my own involvement in this. As an academic investigation in its own rights, it is also a case study of an organisation that has brought together very diverse and unconventional ideas to a form of education, that RMT claims, works better for many young people than what they have experienced so far. As it is unconventional it is complex. This study aims to investigate how this complex educational method has been understood and implemented, and how it could be understood better and implemented further. Therefore, possibly giving indications, how, in a climate of a debatably global standardisation of the education industry, diversity can be maintained, created and flourish for the future.

Hence, my research pursued the following aims and objectives:

- To critically interrogate the literature concerning some of the gaps and pressures impacting the underlying key principles of PSTE, namely between the current educational thinking and in the UK and Steiner's educational ideas, as well as literature around leadership, understanding and implementation as far as relevant to RMT and PSTE

- To critically explore and better understand the experiences of staff, especially leaders, of understanding and implementing PSTE, ranging from staff on the ground, senior leaders to trustees and governors

- To critically consider what has been helpful in furthering this understanding and its implementation and what has not, as well as which systems, means and modalities are used currently for this, or could be utilized in the future, and reflect on my involvement in this

- By doing the above, going beyond formulating recommendations for future actions for Ruskin Mill Trust to strengthen its future success to contributing to possible

solutions for other organisations that work out of a paradigm and with an educational approach that is different to that of the majority of the educational landscape

In relation to the above research aims my research question has been:

How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?

Although this study has not fully examined the method's components in its entirety or assessed its effectiveness, it has however attempted to clarify the fundamental ideas behind PSTE as they are experienced by staff and students. It has placed those principles in the context of current educational literature. Most importantly, through surveys, ethnographic observations, focus groups, and individual interviews, this study has investigated how those insights are understood, embedded, and applied within the staff body, ranging from staff on the ground to senior leaders and managers and trustees. The study has considered what has been helpful in furthering this understanding and its implementation and what has not, as well as which means, systems, and modalities are currently used and could be used in the future.

This study has therefore taken PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice as givens, accepting that they are not a single body of knowledge, but rather are described in a number of ways in publications (e.g. RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024; Sigman, 2023), as well as a lived experience, performed and understood in different ways by individuals (Dahlin, 2017). What was important to me was to explore the meaning making process of participants from the materials, trainings, experiences and conversations they had at their disposal and then to further explore how they used this to implement the method in their actions.

FIGURE 3 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Exploring fully the positive (or otherwise) impact and effect for the students at Ruskin Mill Trust is beyond the scope of this study (see figure 3). While studies on the efficacy of elements of PSTE such as outdoor, nature, and even craft education have been conducted, an evaluation of PSTE as a whole remains outstanding. There has been desktop research that has brought together studies in those aspects (Sigman, 2023), as well as a sensory review (Children Sensory Therapy, 2021) and further piece of research being undertaken by Coventry University (Coventry, 2021) currently.

It is also worth noting that, to the best of my ability I have anonymised participants in the research as well as the people, colleagues and sites they talk about. However, this did not really seem to make sense with regards to the founder and CEO Aonghus Gordon (OBE). As there is only one founder and he would be easily identifiable. It is also noteworthy, that to some extent I have used the three interviews and one email exchange (see appendix 5.4. and interviews 1-3) with him in the first parts of the study, i.e. the literature review, as his thoughts and voice has been so important in the creation of Ruskin Mill's educational method. I have also used these interviews to some extent to clarify some aspects of the method (see 2.4.). Lastly, while Mr. Gordon should really be addressed as Aonghus Gordon, OBE, Hon DUniv, Med, Founder and Executive Chair, in this research he will usually be addressed as Aonghus or Aonghus Gordon as this reflects how he is addressed throughout the organisation. This is by no means a reflection of disrespect but rather of the largely positive and personal relationship he has built with many staff members.

While Aonghus' biography and positionality is essential to understanding the development of the method and Ruskin Mill Trust, my positionality is essential in understanding how I arrived

at the aims of this study, the research question and how my positionality, which I explore in the next section, impacts on the study as whole.

1.3.   Positionality of the Researcher

There is little use in pretending that this is an objective piece of research. Encouraged through reading articles and chapters by Braun and Clarke (2022 and various) on reflexive thematic analysis and also listening to some of the podcasts in which they were interviewed (e.g. Whiffin, 2023), it has become clear to me that no such thing exists. While I write this and try to understand what my participants understand of the method, while I make this meaningful to me how they have made the Ruskin Mill method meaningful to them, while I ask these questions around understanding and meaning, I do this utterly from my standpoint, perspective and background, from my positionality. As Victoria Clarke states (Whiffin, 2023) there is no point in pretending research -even quantitative- to be objective, the only way is to embrace the subjectivity in the most reflexive way possible and try to be as transparent about it as possible. As this is not a universally accepted position, I will explore this further in chapter 3.6 and 7.5..

Equally, there is no point in trying to pretend that this study has been an emotionless piece of research. I have undertaken this research with hand and head, but also heart. It is highly emotionally charged, certainly for me, and if the reader can get a glimpse of this that would be wonderful. As Clarke says when you read a research article and you start crying then it is most likely a very effective piece of research (Whiffin, 2023). Therefore, throughout this investigation the reader will need to bear in mind, that I have tried to reflect on my positionality as well as being as openly transparent as I could. I have therefore written this report using the first person as anything else would have felt quite pretentious. As you, as the reader, courageously join me in this adventure (Braun and Clarke, 2022) that this study was, I would also invite you to reflect on your own positionality throughout.

To add to this, I will have to start with an utterly biased, subjective confession which the reader will have to bear in mind. Not only is the question of how to implement the Ruskin Mill method my daily professional question for myself and colleagues for more than 17 years. I

am also in love with the Ruskin Mill method. Ever since I came to Ruskin Mill, I loved engaging in it myself, in action, in workshops, on the land and in the homes. While I am also in love with Steiner Education and Steiner's insights, I felt immediately that I had found something new. I love seeing other staff battling with it, grappling with it, trying to understand it, I love watching students (and staff) grow through it. I have been personally involved in countless incredible and sometimes unimaginable biographical changes where students have turned their lives around and literally transforming themselves.

It has not all been wonderful either. I have been involved in incredibly challenging, sometimes dangerous situations where students have become very dysregulated, then had to make sense of the events myself and support staff in making sense of the situation for them. My usual go to was getting into the sometimes very sad biographies of students, who for example have been taken into care after birth, then shipped around the care system until they arrived at Ruskin Mill, or others who for example, aged 14, never had a birthday present from anybody else other than their parents because they never had any friends before they came to Ruskin Mill.

Hence, after reading and listening to Braun and Clarke (various; see also 3.6), it has become clear to me how much I am professionally, personally and emotionally invested in the Ruskin Mill method. I believe it works; I believe it is far superior to many things that are done with young people out there and I believe it should be applied more widely around the globe. I am passionate about it, and it pains me when I meet colleagues or external stakeholders who struggle to understand it or reject it. Therefore, I had to be conscious about my positive bias towards PSTE and Ruskin Mill, to pay attention and listen to staff when they voice negative thoughts and perceptions about the method and the Trust, allow those voices to be heard, give them consideration and let them appear in the research. Starting from designing methods of data collection which allowed the less enthusiastic voices to be heard, to being mindful that questions were truly open and allowed positive as well as critical comments. While holding my own views back and allowing the other's views to come forward and, of course, also failing in some or all of this on many occasions.

Therefore, if anything, this piece of research is also a story of my last 17 years in Ruskin Mill, of my daily excitements, successes, frustrations and failures. As I was born and had my education in Germany, I may have developed a different perspective on education, arguably broader 'Bildung', than the education I then encountered in the UK and the Anglo-American paradigm of education. After I left school, I landed 'by chance' in a Steiner institution for people with special needs and somehow followed that trajectory. Something that was only meant to last for 18 months is still exciting 28 years later. These people fascinated me as they saw the world so different. When the right socks were not in the cupboard, the young man I was looking after would throw all the furniture out of the window. Another resident would repeatedly check the windows and doors, and this was more important than anything. These people challenged my way of looking at the world, what priorities are. Starting to read Steiner I then also found the question of how the mind, consciousness and the body and the brain hang together an exceedingly fascinating question. And indeed, this is a question that 28 years later I am still contemplating, and it is one that goes throughout this study. As is the resulting question of freedom…but more on that below (see 2.2.).

Over the course of the last 28 years, I have then worked at a number of anthroposophical[3] institutions in Israel, Germany, Switzerland, Egypt, and since 2007 the United Kingdom. During this time, I have observed, experienced, learned and practised what I would describe as a thoughtful approach to education and childcare which has been inspired by Steiner's pedagogical thinking. As a matter of choice, I have not worked in 'mainstream' education, therefore certainly will hold a certain bias that education that originates in Steiner's educational insights 'works better'. I have always understood Steiner's educational ideas, as well as PSTE based on these, as a critique of mainstream practices. I can therefore confess that I hold a fairly critical view towards the way I perceive mainstream education to be organised, as well as much of the contents and practices that go with it. That is of course not to say that I recognise that there are many, if not most, hardworking, excellent individuals working in the mainstream system, also at times acknowledging its flaws. Having said all this, I appreciate that there is no such thing as 'mainstream education' as a solid body of practice

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[3] Informed by Steiner's insights, see below 2.3.1.

or knowledge as there is no such thing as 'Steiner Education' as practice varies from school to school and teacher to teacher.

Also, as a Head Teacher and senior leader in education and care in the UK I had considerable interaction with government policies, regulations, processes and inspectorates which contributed in many ways to Ruskin Mill's success in the mainstream system's own language, values and aspirations (see 2.3.4. and 2.5.3. for a fuller discussion). However, I tried to be mindful that I carried those views into the research, in the way I constructed questions, facilitated conversations and tried to maintain a balanced approach also appreciating the positives and advantages of external regulations, inspections and indeed 'mainstream education'.

Just to finish this line of confessions, I also have to confess that I was fairly critical of academia in general. While I had a very brief attempt to study after leaving school 28 years ago, I considered it aloof and removed from practice. At the time, through exposure to Steiner's work and other philosophical literature, a much more important question to me became the question of how mind and body are interacting, or how Chalmer (1995) calls it, 'the hard problem of consciousness' (see 2.3.1.). I wanted to explore this in a practical way and joined a Camphill[4] seminar where I could follow this question and also experienced the satisfaction of working with my hands. I only started to study in the conventional sense again at the Open University in my mid-thirties, it had to be psychology, and then embarked on this doctorate a number of years ago. I am glad I did, as it opened up many views I held on what academia is, also what education is or better: could be. It is fair to say that while I do like challenges, this really has been a challenge in so many ways I actually never expected, so frustrating, difficult, rewarding and satisfying, sometimes all at once or in short sequence. While I write this part towards the end of what feels a very long journey I have gone with this project, it also feels very much like a beginning and I am curious what comes next.

I do believe that we create our own realities (Sikes, 2004) and I am extremely curious about the various ways that people accomplish this (see also 3.6). I also recognize the importance

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[4] Based on Steiner's insights Karl Koenig (1902 –1966) started in 1940 with the Camphill Community for Children in Need of Special Care near Aberdeen a global movement of inclusive living communities (Selg, 2008)

of understanding each of our unique histories in order to do this. I have to keep in mind that I am a senior leader in the organisation, so I have a lot of actual or perceived authority, and that others might say or do things that they believe I would want to hear or see during conversations and observations. I made an effort to lessen the impact of this throughout the conversations and observations. I have tried to be tactful and reassured staff that their views will not be 'reported'. I emphasised that conversations would remain confidential while also pointing people to where they can possibly conduct additional research or improve their practice with regards to the method in a free, supportive manner. I have been mindful of the perception that an honest disclosure of not understanding certain elements of 'the method' in the conversations could appear to participants (and myself) as an underperformance (see also section 4).

FIGURE 4 AUTHOR IN THE BLACKSMITHING WORKSHOP

This is different from my day-to-day work where I also visit workshops and classrooms, usually with a view to quality improvement and hence judgement. While of course, I will also aim to gain a deeper understanding of what I see, be it staff or student behaviour or the learning environment, and why that is so, whether desirable or undesirable, my role as a director for the Trust is usually to facilitate change, ideally rapidly. Also, as the implementation of the Ruskin Mill method has been very much in my portfolio, I have to be mindful that for years I have been often the instigator and creator of some of the most far-ranging systems within Ruskin Mill Trust to support the implementation of the method (albeit usually collaboratively and co-constructing with colleagues). Some examples are the way that all-staff training is delivered (going through the Seven Fields of Practice over a 3-4 year period), the Seven Fields Standards (see 2.5.5.), the Senior

Leadership Induction (see 2.5.5.) and countless quality assurance visits to all of our sites to support implementation of PSTE to name but a few. Naturally, I will have some attachment and bias towards some or all of these systems and processes and in this study I am also trying to assess their impact, reflect on them and refine them. Being a researcher therefore required me to be even more thoughtful (that is not to say that as a senior leader, I would be thoughtless) and possibly stand back more, with even more emphasis on wishing to understand what I see, hear and experience. Experiencing the method first hand in the workshop, where students meet and transform materials, guided by the tutors, and stepping into this experience (figure 4) was important to me.

Lastly, I will also have to be mindful that as 'Director of PSTE' there is an assumption, by my environment as well as to some extent by myself, that I am an expert and knowledgeable in PSTE. While personally, I like to think that I am still very much on a journey, with many exciting discoveries on a regular basis, the former is certainly how I am often perceived by colleagues. I had to be even more open, consciously trying to withhold judgement and, if at all, look for other parameters than my own judgement (Braun and Clarke, 2022 and various; Dean et al., 2018; see 3.6.)

1.4.   Structure of the thesis

With this backdrop I wish to give an overview of the structure of the rest of the thesis:

In chapter 2, the literature review, beginning with the research question, I critically explore the purpose of education as the starting point to the educational endeavour. As a phenomenon that is situated in the paradigm of a certain time and place, it also has a connection to our understanding of what man is. I critically evaluate how Steiner's answer to this question shaped his educational insights and how, as the main source PSTE, he as well as others (namely Goethe, Ruskin and Morris) contributed to the formation of PSTE. Furthermore, I critically explore crucial aspects of the research question, namely leadership, understanding and implementation, their significance and relationship, illustrated by one example of the implementation of another educational method, namely project-based learning.

In chapter 3 I explain how my research question has led me to using a mixed method research design in order to gain an understanding of how a range of staff at different levels of the organisation made sense of the method, tried to work with and implement it. With a survey I wanted to reach as wide a range of members of staff across the Trust as possible; also, those who are maybe not heard very often or are not positive about all aspects of the method. Through ethnographic observations I wanted to be where PSTE is actually practised: in the workshop, where students work with materials, guided by the tutors, and experience how tutors experience the method and try to work with it. In focus groups with staff members who have direct student contact and interviews with other staff and senior leaders I wanted to explore the meaning making process of staff, what has been helpful, what has been difficult to their understanding and efforts to implement PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice. This diverse data has led me to a flexible method of data analysis, namely Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022, various) describe it.

In chapter 4 I elaborate on the ethical considerations before, during and after the data collection and research, namely on my relationship as a researcher with the participants as well as a senior leader in the organisation and the complexities that emerge through this.

In chapter 5 I present the findings from the quantitative part of the survey to gain a better understanding of the demographics of the survey participants. This helps the reader to gain a more differentiated understanding of the organisation, the different aspects staff are involved in at different levels and their relationship to the method.

In chapter 6 I develop the emerging lines of analysis further by integrating the findings from the qualitative parts of the survey, the ethnographic observations, the focus groups and interviews. I critically discuss those findings in relationship to the research question, the survey results and the relevant literature.

In chapter 7 I draw the critical discussion to a conclusion and from this, I come to recommendations and possible further studies for Ruskin Mill Trust, as well as for research, policy and practice beyond RMT. I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the study, its contribution to the academic community and how I have developed as a researcher and practitioner as a result of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to the literature review and overview

In this literature review I want to lay the foundations to critically explore the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation.

In order to understand some of the challenges and gaps in understanding and implementation of the method that staff can experience, the starting point is to appreciate the difference in underlying assumptions of the purpose of education (Allan and Goddard, 2017; Bass, 1997; Beckmann and Cooper, 2004; Campbell, 2008), which leads to the question how this serves the developing child (Biesta, 2015b; Dahlin, 2017). This debatably determines the way education is delivered (Schieren, 2024; especially chapter 3; Daniels and Shumow, 2003) (see figure 5).
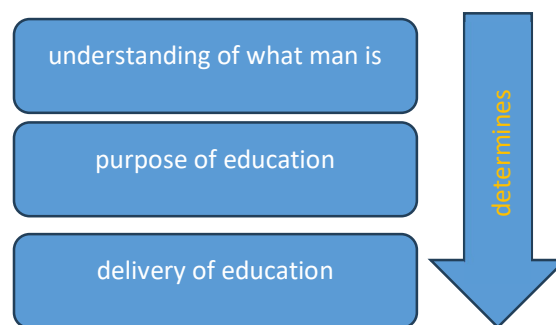
FIGURE 5 RELATIONSHIP OF PICTURE OF HUMAN BEING TO PURPOSE AND DELIVERY OF EDUCATION

Therefore, in point 2.2. this literature review firstly critically explores the assumed purpose of education in the current educational landscape in the UK and globally as the context within which the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' is set.

As Steiner's insights are so central to the organisation (and the research question) the study critically explores these in section 2.3.; Steiner's starting point (2.3.1.), how this impacts on his view of the human being (2.3.2.), how this in turn informs the purpose of education and

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his educational insights (2.3.3.) and how these are in some ways in tension with the current educational landscape in the UK and globally (2.3.4.).

Section 2.4. briefly explores some of the other influences on PSTE, namely Goethe, Ruskin and Morris, that have led to the distinct difference between Ruskin Mill education and large parts of the current educational landscape, as well as to Steiner Education.

Section 2.5. brings those insights together and, building on the organisational context of Ruskin Mill Trust (2.5.1), critically explores how those elements have been brought together (2.5.3.), what the role of research and training are in the development of PSTE (2.5.4.), some of the systems that I have developed over the years to aid its implementation (2.5.5.) and how all of this aids the main purpose of PSTE, namely 'self-generated conscious action' (2.4.6.).

Section 2.6. critically explores the role that the leadership can or could play in the implementation of PSTE and the resistance to change in an organisation and individuals.

Section 2.7. investigates further the potential and actual mechanisms of understanding and implementation, illustrating this with an example, namely Project Based Learning (PBL).

Section 2.8. brings this critical literature review together full circle in integrating all these strands together in the research question.

2.2. The educational paradigm and method- The purpose of education

The question of 'how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation' is situated in the wider educational context in the UK and globally. The perception of what education is, what it should accomplish, who it is for, and how best to carry it out has evolved over time and varies among cultures and times (Allan and Goddard, 2017; Bass, 1997; Beckmann and Cooper, 2004). The larger social discourse, as well as the prevailing beliefs, presumptions, and worldviews, may have an impact on how people understand the purpose of education. It is challenging to determine whether an action has been effective or not without knowing its goal and purpose (Campbell, 2008; Biesta, 2015, 2015b). The potential differences between the individual staff

member's understanding of what education is for (and hence, what it should look like) and what RMT defines as its educational purpose could possibly be one of the root causes of a lack in coherence and challenges in further understanding and implementation of PSTE.

Traditional definitions of education's goals include fostering a love of learning and a sense of community, as well as paving the way for enlightenment, the development of the mind and life experiences (Allan and Goddard, 2017; Campbell, 2008). Its stated goals have changed in more recent times to include graduating excellent citizens with marketable skills and the ability to integrate and enjoy society, education for happiness, or just finding a job that pays well (Purpose of education, 2015). Many scholars emphasise that, especially in the United Kingdom, since the industrial revolution and the introduction of education for everybody, the education systems and schools have been particularly geared towards a preparation to become a useful 'cog' in the economy (Bass, 1997; Macdonald, 2005; Biesta, 2015). That the purpose of education should be based or at least linked to an understanding of child development is also not a given but debated (Schieren, 2024; especially chapter 3; Daniels and Shumow, 2003).

How our understanding of what the human being is and how it develops impacts on the way how education is delivered can also be very clearly seen in special needs education. For example, in the contrast of ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis) and PSTE. While ABA as a 'treatment' or educational method for autism remains controversial it is also very commonly used (NAS, 2025, Foran et al., 2015) either in an explicit form or in some form of behaviourist approach. Emphasising change in and focus on visible behaviour also assumes a backgrounding of whatever else is happening in the "black box" of feelings, underlying intentions, thoughts, hopes, fears and aspirations. An approach that would more focus on these would be a humanist approach (Patrick and Nordin, 2025; Feigenbaum, 2024; Kumari, 2024, Yin; 2018), or bridging both and emphasising "self-generated conscious action" would be PSTE (Gordon and Cox, 2024) (figure 6 and 7).

While these two positions can certainly be seen as simplified and extremes of the different understanding of the purpose of education (ABA: to modify behaviour; humanist approach: to enhance what is in the black box) they can be seen as an extension to the above discussion

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of what works in education (Biesta, 2007 and 2010) and where the emphasis is put. Is the human being understood as a machine that can be programmed or an animal that can be trained like other animals, or as an individual that needs holistic support to grow into the person they want to become?

While these strong positions might be helpful for the reader to position their own underlying assumptions on the purpose of education, to locate the author's position (which I have clearly declared above in 1.3.) and where PSTE and Steiner Education is on this spectrum I also want to be clear that the actual reality of educational streams as well as individual positions is likely to be much less clear and much more nuanced. There needs to be a distinction between on the one hand the idea of education, the written documentation; and on the other, the actual enacted education and how this is experienced by the individual pupil (Tyson, 2023 and 2017; Dahlin, 2017). Furthermore, one cannot always assume a logical and causal connection between those aspects as well as the underlying picture of the human being (Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988) but reality is likely to be much more fuzzy, illogical, and also based on one's socialisation and imagination (Tyson, 2023). None of spiritual science, Steiner Education, mainstream education, ABA or humanist education are monolithic, homogenous edifices and bodies of work but are mediated by individuals, cultural contexts, times and places, also differing in depth and intensity. Therefore, in the research design (see 3.1.) I was keen to employ methods that could explore the experience and understanding of practitioners at different levels of the organisation.

An arguably uniform worldwide education system that is heavily influenced by 'what works' has emerged in recent years as a result of globalization that is mostly commercially motivated (Lewis, 2017; Biesta, 2007). This is also a very European and North American-centric view as in other times and regions the purpose of education has been defined very differently (MacDonald, 2005; Biesta, 2007). Seeing it in the wider historical perspective, the way education has developed from focussing on "enlightening and educating students" (Harari, 2015, p. 198) has largely shifted towards a mass education with an industrial model:

It is fascinating to observe that assessment procedures handed down by tradition were in this century rather uncritically adopted in mass education, possibly leading to major inefficiencies in education and, for too many students, a lack in quality of school life. (Wilbrink, 1997, p.44)

Radical educationalists have criticised this standardised approach to designing a curriculum, the resulting teacher training, the valuation of particular outcomes, the overall underlying pedagogy and governance as a system that seeks to maintain knowledge-based and economic imbalances of power on an individual level (teacher and student) as well as on a societal level (ruling class and those being ruled) (Dewey, 2005; Lichtenstein, 1985; Illich, 2002, 1973; Freire, 2017; see also 2.4). While Steiner could possibly be seen in this line as critiquing the education system of the time (although partly for different reasons, see 2.3.1.), Ruskin Mill's PSTE can be seen as a critique of Steiner Education aspiring to make it more appropriate for young people with special needs, situating it in the British context and aesthetics and taking learning out of the classroom into the landscape (see 2.4., Court, 2021).

Whilst there are a number of growing and influential voices demanding the fostering of 21st century skills, namely the four Cs: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023; World Economic Forum 2015 and 2020; OECD, 2019 and 2024) the language as well as the methods and means to get there are more than unclear (Lucas, 2019; Grey and Morris, 2024). Some even claim that in a globalised education system that educates compliant citizens with a focus on economics, former purposes of education such as fostering creativity and critical thinking have been lost altogether (Beckmann and Cooper, 2005) and squeezed out through standardized assessment systems (Vaughn, 2014; TES, 2024). However, others (e.g. Biesta, 2007; 2015b) feel that, despite the existence of a global education industry, decisions can still be made regarding how we educate children, how we train teachers, which outcomes we deem desirable, and, most importantly, what we believe the purpose of education to be.

While I do not wish to explore the outcomes for students in this study (see 1.2.), it is important to be clear with regards to the purpose of education at RMT and what it tries to achieve as this determines the way that it goes about it (Campbell, 2008; Biesta, 2015, 2015b). RMT states clearly that it considers the purpose of PSTE to be 'self-generated conscious action'

(RMT 2024c, Gordon and Cox, 2024). As we will see below (see 2.5.3. and 2.5.6.), this concept is situated in Steiner's philosophical and educational insights. Ruskin Mill Trust as a charity has chosen to put Steiner's ideas central to the way it wants to deliver education, which is most clearly set out in its legal documentation as the charitable objectives, which are:

1. The advancement of the education of young people with learning difficulties and/or behavioural problems or special educational needs through training in the areas of the arts, crafts, agricultural and environmental sciences with particular reference being given to the indications and insights of Rudolf Steiner in these areas;

2. The promotion of research into the practice and development of those areas of education provided that all such research findings will be widely disseminated;

3. The promotion of Rudolf Steiner Educational establishments

(Charity Commission, 2024)[5]

As the training for young people with challenges shall be undertaken "with particular reference being given to the indications and insights of Rudolf Steiner" it asks the question whether and to what depth staff at the different levels of the organisation need to understand Steiner's educational insights. Therefore, it appears to be important to investigate those indications and insights further in the following section.

2.3. Steiner

The following sections critically explore how Steiner's insights inform Ruskin Mill's method. For this we first need to elaborate on Steiner's ontology, his starting point, namely his understanding of consciousness, thinking and what he would term 'spiritual'. Then we explore the consequences of these insights, namely what it meant for Steiner's understanding of the human constitution and lastly how this informed Steiner's insights on education.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was an Austrian scientist and scholar, mystic and educator (Dahlin, 2017; Ullrich, 2014). While undertaking a PhD in philosophy, he was involved in the publication of Goethe's scientific writings (see also 2.4.1.) and became later chairman of the German theosophical society. In 1912-13 he founded the Anthroposophical Society in which

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[5] At the time of writing these objectives are being reviewed to include Practical Skills Therapeutic Education and health and widen it from "young people" to "people".

he developed his supersensible insights and concepts on the human being through anthroposophy ('wisdom of man' from Greek, Anthropos=human, Sophia=wisdom) based on western esoteric traditions (Dahlin, 2017).

With more than 30 books and over 6000 lectures, travelling all over Europe, he was a prolific author and lecturer. He lectured on a wide range of subjects, including architecture, medicine, literature, education, special needs education, performing arts, agriculture and the sciences (Dahlin, 2017; Ullrich, 2014; Goldshmidt, 2017). His suggestions led to the development of a wide range of projects and approaches, including a particular farming method (biodynamic agriculture), specific forms of movement art (eurythmy), architecture, medicine and therapy and education in the form of Steiner or Waldorf[6] Schools and Special Needs Communities (Camphills) (McKeganey, 1984). With more than 1000 schools, 2000 kindergartens, and a century of experience, Steiner Education can be seen as a very successful global educational movement (Martin and Rawson, 2008; Rawson and Avison, 2014; Woods et al., 2005). Steiner's educational insights do need to be seen as a consequence of his views on child development, the human constitution and, in the end, consciousness, thinking and his critique of positivism as explored in the following section.

2.3.1. Steiner's starting point: consciousness and thinking

According to Steiner (e.g. 2007, 1985), the situation at the moment is that a paradigm of materialism in the broadest sense, as Steiner understood it (Steiner, 2007), could be used to characterize the scientific paradigm and the research procedures and methodologies based on it (Sheldrake, 2013; Greenbank, 2003). The view that there is an objective reality out there, that can be understood and researched, is referred to as positivism, where also psychological events (e.g. thoughts, feelings) have got a material cause in the end (e.g. brain chemistry) (Park et al., 2020; Sarasso et al., 2021; Velmans, 2009; see also Harari, 2018). In contrast to this, Steiner derived his educational insights from sources that are outside the purview of 'usual' scientific inquiry and investigation, which can present considerable challenges to any 'mainstream' thinker (Goldshmidt, 2017; Steiner, various; Dahlin, 2017). However, being a

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[6] The expressions "Steiner Education" and "Waldorf Education" shall be used interchangeably here. The term "Waldorf" was given after the first Steiner School 1919 in Stuttgart was established for the children of the workers of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory (Dahlin, 2017).

trained scientist himself, Steiner continued to emphasise that his views should not be seen in contrast to the scientific paradigm of the time and his findings do not contradict but extend the findings of usual scientific enquiry (Steiner, 1994). Positivism postulates a division between researcher and subjects or the issue to be researched (Park et al., 2020; see also Goethe in 2.4.1.). Steiner however critiqued that there is at least one exception to this: the observation of one own's thinking. Here the observer and the observed object are identical as explained further below (Steiner, 2007).

The existence of this subjective experience of thinking and consciousness, which is arguably non-material, was referred to by the philosopher David Chalmers as 'the hard problem' of materialism (Chalmers, 1995; Tononi and Koch, 2015). This is exemplified in the essay 'What is it like to be a bat' (Nagel, 1974). Nagel (1974) elaborates on the difference of essential subjective experience, which is shaped by our sensory organism and the processing of incoming information, and the objective reality out there in the example of a bat. A bat perceives the world mainly through ultrasound and hence very different to how we humans perceive with our sensory organism, therefore debatably experiencing a different consciousness and reality. Furthermore, most studies which make general claims about human consciousness and psychology are conducted on western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (WEIRD) participants which are the least representative when one wishes to make claims about the human condition (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010). Therefore, even from a materialistic viewpoint, our knowledge about states of consciousness has to be very limited (Harari, 2015).

48. The spectrum of consciousness.
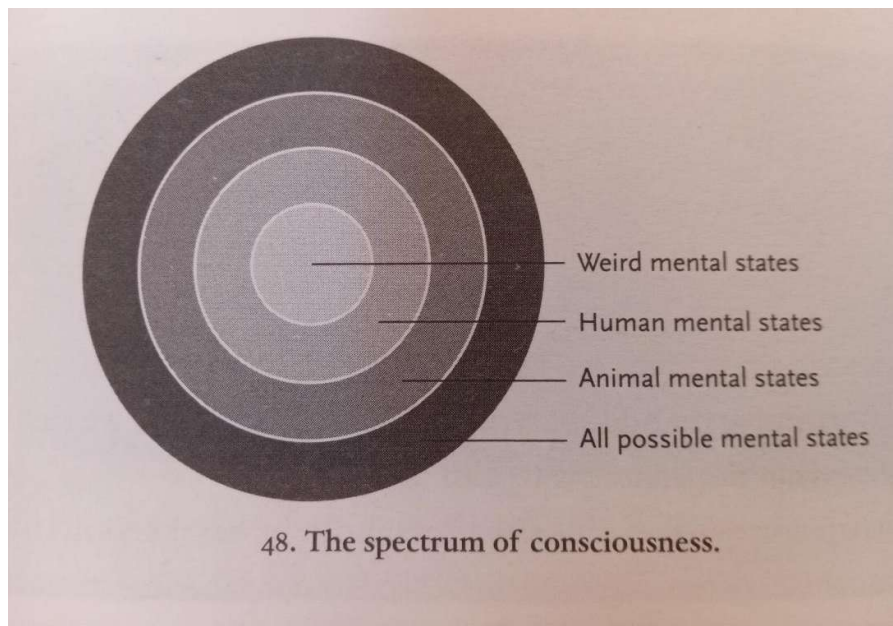
FIGURE 6 THE SPECTRUM OF CONSCIOUSNESS (HARARI, 2015, P.418)

In his book 'Philosophy of Spiritual Activity,' also known as 'Philosophy of Freedom' (Steiner, 2007), Steiner explored how people might have non-material experiences just by engaging in the process of thinking. According to Steiner, the idea that there is just matter is shown to be untrue if there is at least one activity that is non-material but 'spiritual,' which Steiner claims anybody can experience by thinking a thought (Steiner, 2007, p.17):

> However, one possessing the ability to observe thinking, - and with goodwill every normally organized person has this ability, - this observation is the most important he can make. […] he finds himself confronted not by a foreign object, […] but by his own activity. […] A firm point is attained from which, with well-founded hope, one can seek for the explanation of the rest of the world's phenomena. (Steiner, 2007, p.17)

In fact, this particular 'spiritual' action is open to one's own experience and serves as the foundation for one's own consciousness[7]. As a result, as previously said, the non-material character of thought and consciousness presents the main challenge for a science that is primarily concerned with the observation of outward as opposed to internal reality. Not only that a person in the act of thinking can experience a 'firm point' (Steiner, 2007, p.17) but s/he can also have an experience of 'self' beyond reasonable doubt.

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[7] While the concepts of "thinking" and "consciousness" would warrant a much wider exploration, in this study it shall suffice to understand the significance for Steiner's insights and how those impacted on his view of the human being and educational thinking.

2.3.2. From Steiner's starting point to his understanding of the human being and the 'self'

Steiner claims that this experience of thinking, where we can observe our thinking with thinking, is essentially experiencing the self in action and hence the purest form of experiencing ourselves:

> Human consciousness of necessity must be self-conscious at the same time, because it is a thinking consciousness. For when thinking turns its attention to its own activity, then its own essential being, that is, its subject, is its object as well. (Steiner, 2007, p.25)

Steiner then goes on to explain how this experience that something non-material is existing (the 'thinking self' in the activity of thinking), and one can be certain about its existence (as one experiences it in the very moment). For materialism, as Steiner understands it (i.e. everything is matter, ergo nothing non-material, i.e. spiritual, exists), this leads to at least two conclusions:

Firstly, this is in his view the proof that materialism is incorrect and something non-material exists:

> Materialism can never arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the world. [...] The materialist tries to understand thoughts by regarding them as a purely material process. He believes that thinking takes place in the brain much in the same way that digestion takes place in the animal organs. [...] How does matter come to reflect about its own nature! Why is it not simply satisfied with itself and with its existence? The materialist has turned his attention away from the definite subject, from our own I, and has arrived at a vague, indefinite image. (Steiner, 2007, pp.11 and 12)

Secondly, should one accept that things of a non-material nature exist (i.e. 'spiritual' in Steiner's sense), one is confronted consequentially with further, even more complicated and controversial questions (Goldshmidt, 2017). Subsequently, Steiner poses other queries like, 'Where does this entity originate?', 'Can it exist in the absence of a physical body?' or, even more challenging, 'Is it conceivable that there are other entities without physical bodies if that is the case?' (Steiner, 1994 and 2011). As a result, when exploring Steiner's educational insights, one runs into concepts like 'incarnation' or even 're-incarnation,' 'karma,' and 'non-physical bodies' (Tyson, 2023b and 2024b; Goldshmidt, 2017).

How far these concepts actually are essential to Steiner's views on education, curriculum, and instruction is a matter of ongoing debate, considering also in how far these concepts are needed in day-to-day educational practice (Goldshmidt, 2017; Dahlin, 2017; Ullrich 2014; Tyson, 2024b). While there are voices that advocate Steiner Education without Steiner (i.e. without the underlying anthroposophical assumptions, e.g. Ullrich, 2014), Goldshmidt (2017) points out that there is certainly a difference in the way one teaches whether one sees the student as a spiritual entity or a brain that is to be changed (or possibly both). Goldshmidt (2017) is of the view that this understanding of the concept of materialism and conceptualising the child as a spiritual entity that gradually takes hold of its body, is the central tension that Steiner Education, and to some extent possibly also PSTE, may experience. This is sometimes explicitly and sometimes more implicitly.

It is however necessary to clarify that, in contrast to the German that Steiner and Goldshmidt (2017) use, the words 'spiritual' and 'spirit' have slightly different meanings in contemporary English (Oxford Dictionary, 2018, 'Spirit'). When used in English, the word 'spirit' has a faintly anti-mainstream connotation with possibly controversial associations with spiritism, whereas in German, the word 'Geist' is more frequently used to refer to the everyday concept of 'mind'. The German word 'Geisteswissenschaften,' which could be translated literally as 'spiritual science', has the meaning of 'humanities'. However, Steiner uses the term 'Geisteswissenschaft' in the German context slightly differently to describe his explorations of and insights into 'Higher Worlds', i.e. levels of existence behind the purely material level (Steiner, especially 1994, 2007, 2011) where the material life is an expression of the immaterial reality that stands behind this.

Furthermore, Goldshmidt (2017) notes there are a number of possible definitions (see Woods et al., 1997 for more information on how the term 'spiritual' is defined in the context of Steiner Education). While Steiner uses the term 'spiritual' in a very concrete and tangible way as well as a conceptual framework, Goldshmidt (2017) noted that 'spirituality' is frequently discussed in education and research in terms of its practices (for example, see Ergas, 2015's discussion of 'mindfulness'). For example, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which inspects Ruskin Mill schools and colleges, defines the spiritual development of pupils in their Independent School Inspection Handbook as:

- ability to be reflective about their own beliefs (religious or otherwise), and perspective on life
- knowledge of, and respect for, different people's faiths, feelings and values
- sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them
- use of imagination and creativity in their learning
- willingness to reflect on their experiences (Ofsted, 2024a, p.71)

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Interestingly, in the Ofsted Further Education Handbook (Ofsted, 2024b) the term 'spiritual' is absent. From this one can only assume, that in the eyes of the inspectorate for education, either spiritual development as defined above is completed by the age of 16, or is not essential anymore.

In research, growing interest has been shown in spirituality and religion, as well as how they might improve both physical and mental health. The majority of studies, correlating religiousness and spirituality with fewer physical illnesses and with overall lower mortality, were reviewed in the 'Handbook of Religion and Health,' which examined 1200 papers and 400 reviews in 2001 (second edition in 2012; Koenig et al., 2012; Charles, 2001). The expansion of courses in US medical schools that offer study of religion, spirituality, and medicine, from a small number of schools to over 50% of the schools in less than 10 years is one example of this growing interest (Charles, 2001). Sheldrake (2018) assesses the growing popularity of spiritual practices and how these practices are adopted at an increasing rate, as the benefits of these practices are demonstrated by positivistic informed research, but he also argues for a science that goes beyond materialism (Sheldrake, 2013, 2018).

As Allan and Goddard point out that "ancient philosophies were not studied in the abstract; they were adopted as a way of life" (Allan and Goddard, 2017, p. 10). However, one could argue that this also holds true for the, what Steiner termed 'materialistic', paradigm of today, which permeates all parts of life, including academia, education, and the selection of research procedures. Thus, it is crucial to take into account the underlying paradigm and response to the question, 'What is man?' while assessing the purpose of education (Goldshmidt, 2017; Allan and Goddard, 2017). Having said that, today a much more individualistic approach to answering this question is possible. Hence each individual participant, staff member will have an implicit or explicit answer to this question. This then forms the foundation of how that staff member educates the child in front of them, as described above (see 2.2.).

It seems agreeable that the human constitution is complex and can be seen through different lenses, aspects or domains (Dahlin, 2017; e.g. Bloom et al. ,1956; Kraiger et al., 1993). Amongst other aspects Steiner (especially 1994, 1985) described the human constitution consisting of at least four parts, which he terms 'bodies', using (unfortunately) esoteric technical terms:

- the physical body: which is clearly perceivable to everybody, consisting of tangible matter
- the etheric body: consisting of the life forces, physiological forces and biochemical processes
- the astral body: feelings, perceptions, desires, consciousness, psychological aspects
- the "I"- ego[8]: the essence of the individuality, the most spiritual aspect of man

As Steiner developed his insights into different fields of work such as education, agriculture, medicine and arts, his endeavours draw inspiration from his insights of how those four aspects or 'bodies' develop and relate to each other and the activities or experiences a person undertakes (Steiner, 2004 and various).

2.3.3. From Steiner's philosophical insights to his educational theory and practice

Following on from the above exploration, one hundred years later, Steiner's philosophical insights, which have then led to his educational insights, continue to shape a vibrant, frequently state-funded community of educational practice (Waldorf UK, 2024) that is unfortunately underresearched in the English language (Dahlin, 2017). This may have contributed to Steiner Education's recent demise in the UK, especially in England, where a gap seemed to have widened between a more traditional, but underfunded and not very well organised, Steiner Education and the state education inspection regime (UK Government, 2019a and b). Although with currently 18 schools and 9 different Early Years settings across the UK (Waldorf UK, 2024) Steiner Education continues to struggle to gain or maintain traction

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[8] Steiner uses the concept of "ego" differently to Freud

in the UK, as evidenced by recent events and school closures. However, it is one of the educational movements with the fastest growth worldwide (Dahlin, 2017).

As stated in the majority of Steiner Schools in the UK and around the world: "Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings, who are able out of their own initiative, to impart purpose and direction to their lives"[9]. While mainstream educators may still agree to this, although perhaps not as a first priority (Ashley, 2005 and 2008), challenges certainly arise when implementing Steiner's educational insights. For instance, the course that was offered soon after the first Steiner School opened in 1919 and is now regarded highly by Steiner Teachers worldwide as one of the major sources of pedagogical inspiration, insight, and practice is called 'Study of Man' (Steiner, 2004c). In this course Steiner asserts that 'the task of education conceived in the spiritual sense is to bring the Soul-Spirit into harmony with the Life-Body' (Steiner, 2004, p. 12) and develops how those four bodies named above impact on the daily teaching practice (Steiner, 2004; see 2.3.2.). He also takes into account concepts like karma and reincarnation in the design of the curriculum, English, Maths, the other subjects and the teacher training (Goldshmidt, 2017; Stockmeyer, 1991, Tyson, 2024b).

While possibly alienating to many on the one hand, on the other hand this naturally results in a substantially different way of educating young people compared to one that solely takes account of a materialistic view of the world (Goldshmidt, 2017). Key in this has been Steiner's understanding of education supporting the emergence and development of the "I" or ego as well as his idea of freedom (Steiner, 2007), as explained above (see 2.3.1.). They are in Steiner's view very closely connected, in fact dependent on each other, for in Steiner's view only deeds and actions that come from free thinking, where it is a sole activity of the 'self', unhindered by external or internal pressures, are free:

> To understand this nature of thinking in living experience is at the same time to recognize the freedom of intuitive thinking. And if one knows that this thinking is free, then one also recognizes that sphere of the will to which freedom can be ascribed. Acting human beings will consider that will as free to which the intuitive life in thinking, on the basis of inner experience, can attribute a self-sustaining essence. (Steiner, 2007, p.115)

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[9] While this quote is attributed to Rudolf Steiner it is actually from the foreword of the lecture cycle of Modern Education, CW 307, written by Marie Steiner (1923)

Very much in congruence with this, being free of external (and internal) pressures, being able to find your own agency, ability to change your life and to some extent the relationships and world around you, have also been named as the ultimate goal of PSTE, here named 'self-generated conscious action':

> The Trust holds that everyone has the potential to shape their own future through meaningful relationships with universe, earth and people. Its method […] seeks to enable each learner to further develop their capacity for self-generated conscious action, whether they are a young person in the Trust's care or a staff member. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 31)

While both descriptions are very much aligned and indeed Gordon draws largely on Steiner's insights, Steiner (2007) elaborates on freedom in his seminal book 'Philosophy of Freedom' (also called 'Philosophy of Spiritual Activity') with a focus on consciousness and the activity of free thinking. In contrast to this, Ruskin Mill approaches this with an emphasis on 'action' (Gordon and Cox, 2024). As the goal and foundation of PSTE we will elaborate further on self-generated conscious action below (see 2.5.6.).

Steiner's insights might become even more difficult to understand to some when he states some of the practical conclusions he makes such as: "The child cannot yet breathe in the right inner way, and education will have to consist in teaching the child to breathe rightly" (Steiner, 2004c, p. 4). What would this mean to somebody, not having encountered Steiner's language and thoughts before? Exploring this more in context that the young child has to learn how to connect to the world, how to take things in and how to bring things out of him/herself into the world, possibly makes more sense to more people. Perhaps this could be further understood as breathing in the widest possible sense; that there is a rhythmical connection in the earlier years of childhood being established between the child and the world and sense perceptions, thoughts, nutrition and substance coming in and going out. A movement into only one direction would not be healthy. Neither is it good for things and thoughts to only come in and not to go back out into the world, or vice versa, hence a rhythmical connection like breathing is the healthiest way of connection which is in balance but not static. So, contemplating an example like this might be more helpful and lead to new insights, especially when done over a longer period of time, with observations of teaching and the children's responses rather than taking it literally that the teacher is supposed to teach the child to breathe.

Interestingly, Steiner never solidified his educational insights into an actual curriculum. Following the opening of the first school in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919, Steiner gave ongoing lectures on aspects of the curriculum, teaching and learning and overall general pedagogy, all for that specific time and place and the specific group of pupils and teachers (amongst others see Steiner, 2004a-c; Dahlin, 2017; Rawson, 2024). This was only done after Steiner's death firstly by Heydebrand (1931) in 1925 and then supported by Stockmeyer (1955) who collated literal quotes in thematic order. This was reworked and to some extent updated by Richter (2023) and first published in German in 1995. Richter's (2023) 'Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum' became only available in the English language for the first time in 2000!

While Steiner's educational insights where indeed highly successful in instigating a global educational movement, there would be much more to say regarding the considerations that for more than 75 years no English curriculum was available, how his insights landed in the different cultural contexts (Boland, 2015), how to overcome eurocentrism (Tyson, 2023; Rawson, 2023) and how the practice and student experience aligned with any form of written curriculum altogether (Tyson, 2021).

Equally as relevant as Steiner's insights for neurotypical children, are his insights on education for children with SEN (Steiner, 2005). These were amongst his earliest educational experiences (in his youth he very successfully home-educated a young man with hydrocephalus in Vienna) and might well form the foundation of his educational insights (Dahlin, 2017). His insights into education for children with SEN were amongst one of the last lecture cycles he gave in 1924 (Steiner, 2005). Again, he did not give a curriculum as such, but discussed the children and their educational needs, the constitution of their four bodies (see 2.3.2.) and gave exercises for the individual child. While the practice of discussing individual children in front of a circle of professionals would be considered challenging today, as well as some of the language used (e.g. "retarded" etc) the ethical approach, as well as organisations that grew out of this initiative, were well ahead of their time when children with special needs were still kept in mental institutions.

Additionally, it should be noted that Steiner Education strives to give children plenty of time to grow, rather than focusing on quick fixes or the most affordable solutions (Steiner, 2004a, 2005). As an illustration, the emphasis on a child's motor and will development from 0 to 7 years old, lays the groundwork for a sound cognitive development from 14 to 21 years old. This also implies that, as often mentioned by Steiner in his pedagogical courses, the effects of educational acts may not always be evident (or measured) right away but instead may not manifest until much later in life (e.g. Rawson et al., 2014; Steiner, 2004a, 2005). According to Plutarch's (or Yeats', for that matter)[10] metaphor, 'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire,' it is not only about having enough knowledge of various subjects. However, it is also about 'becoming,' not just 'having' (Rawson, 2018, p. 21). It is indeed a rather reductionist attitude to limit learning to a 'change in memory' (Ofsted, 2019), and it will be interesting to observe how the debate develops. This focus on the cognitive and knowledge rather than the practical and skills could be seen as reflection of what is valued in society and the way the education system as a whole has developed (Goodheart, 2020).

As already indicated with regards to possible barriers to understanding and engaging with Steiner, there is also the possibility that not only the concepts that Steiner is using are difficult, leave alone the experiences that Steiner describes, but also the language that he uses. As mentioned earlier (in this section), firstly Steiner's concepts and language are taken from Germany 100 years ago and transposed into a British context in the 21st century, secondly sometimes translated without acknowledging the different nuances of the British language. One example is the word "spirit" and "spiritual science" as mentioned above (see earlier in 2.3.3.). Another relevant example of a controversial translation is that of the German "Heilpädagogik" to the English "Curative Education". While certainly in the UK the term "special needs education" is used for the education of children with special needs, Steiner inspired organisations will often still use the term "curative education" (e.g. Brown, 2017; Koenig, 1994) based on the "Curative Education Course" by Steiner (2005). The term "heilen" is connected to "making whole again" and is much gentler and supportive compared to "to cure" which has more a connotation of to 'cut out' and eradicate an illness. Using language such as "cured" in the British context of autism could be considered highly offensive by parts

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[10] It is still debated whether this quote should be attributed to Yeats or Plutarch (see Irish Times, 2013; Quoteinvestigator, 2013)

of the autistic population (Bloomer, 2024). However, "Heilpädagogik" is still the name used - in its wider context- in Germany for the education of children with special needs. Therefore, considering the question how Ruskin Mill can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its method of PSTE, which is based on the educational insights of Steiner, through all levels of the organisation, possible tension arises at a fundamental paradigmatic level, through translation, on the cultural, language or conceptional level.

2.3.4. Steiner's educational insights situated in the current educational landscape

As shown in terms of its underlying philosophical presumptions, stated aim, methodology, and desired goals and language, Steiner's educational insights differ significantly from those employed in mainstream education (e.g. Woods et al. 2005; Dahlin, 2017). Which is where many Ruskin Mill staff have been trained and had the formative years of their profession. While there has been one large scale study in the UK, the DFE-funded study by Woods et al. in 2005, since then no research has been done with the traditional priorities of UK-based education in mind (progress in English, Maths and Science as focussed on in the latest Ofsted research: Ofsted, 2019). Additionally, there is a clear distinction between mainstream education and Steiner Education in terms of teaching and learning methodologies. The basic difference in the perceived aim of education and its underlying presumptions is essentially connected to both of these discrepancies (Goldshmidt, 2018; Dahlin, 2017; Ullrich, 2014).

Therefore, it may be claimed that Steiner Education and mainstream education have very different goals, justifications, and strategies for achieving those goals in the present discussion surrounding measurement, evidence-based practice and governance (Biesta, 2007, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Ruskin Mill however bridges the gap well with consistently positive inspection outcomes in its schools and colleges as well as social care settings, while sourcing inspiration from Steiner's educational insights (2.5.3.). Dahlin (2017) makes the point that because secondary literature is typically written by Steiner educators for Steiner educators, it can lack challenge and the need to communicate ideas in a way that non-Steiner educators can grasp. The effects of this fundamental paradigm mismatch between Steiner's educational insights and the majority of mainstream education are wide-ranging, although they are frequently mostly ignored or unconscious. In essence, it revolves around the question 'What

is man?' (2.3.2.). This distinction therefore affects how education is conducted and how it is delivered. Steiner Education has a more organic view of education than the more mechanistic view that sees it as an 'evidence-based science' (Davies, 1999) where one can clearly prove that an educational activity has a (measurable) impact (Rawson et al., 2014).

While I do not wish to examine the impact of Steiner's educational insights on student outcomes, it has to be stated that this has been undertaken in a number of large-scale national studies, including those by Woods et al. (2005) in the UK, Baldwin et al. (2005) in the US, Gidley (1998) in Australia, Dahlin (2007) in Sweden, and Barz and Randoll (2007) in Germany (Paschen, 2010; Ullrich, 2014; Dahlin, 2017), in addition to surveys of empirical research (Randoll and Peters, 2015; Tyson, 2024). Most recently these insights have also been drawn together (Schieren, 2024), unfortunately mostly drawing on studies in German, hence with sources difficult to access for the English-speaking world.

To fully participate in the current educational and academic discussion, this level of critical self-reflection within the community of educators using Steiner's insights may also require another paradigm shift. It might be challenging to engage in a genuine discussion and critical academic research because, according to Rawson (2018), "critique can be seen as disloyalty to a good cause that already has to deal with lack of acceptance" (Rawson, 2014, p.17). This furthermore gives credit, validity and urgency to Ruskin Mill Trust's efforts to engage in high level academic critical research, such as this study.

2.4. Other influences on RMT and PSTE

When considering the question of how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, we also need to consider some other influences. While Steiner's insights are a big influence on PSTE ("45%" according to interview 2 with Aonghus Gordon, see appendix part 4), it is important to appreciate that it is distinctly different from Steiner Education and Steiner special needs education. This is also due to the influences that it draws from the other two main thinkers: John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2014; Gordon and Bulow (2012); Appendix 2nd Interview with Aonghus Gordon). These, as well as

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and their contribution to PSTE shall be discussed below. A full discussion and critical evaluation of all of these contributors, as well as of some others which are in certain contexts mentioned by Aonghus in lectures or also in Gordon and Cox (2024), however would go beyond the scope of this study. Ruskin, Morris and Goethe are discussed to a level where debatably the understanding of their concepts and influences on PSTE would be helpful for staff to understand and also in how far they have occurred in the RMT literature and staff training (also see section 6).

Aonghus describes the relationship of the three main thinkers and their impact on PSTE:

> […] I borrowed extensively from Steiner's educational insights. He provides a treasure trove of new thoughts and entry points. I don't draw from him exclusively because there are many aspects of his work that needed to be anglicised […]. I also drew from Ruskin's incisive perception about the difficult condition of England in the last century and the type of thinking that was needed for trans-disciplinary insights. […] Into this came the important work of William Morris, who redesigned the entire aesthetic of the time with one drawn from nature and handwork. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, pp.25f.)

As Aonghus in lectures as well as in his book (Gordon and Cox, 2024) would often mention other contributors, I asked him how he would allocate the impact, resembled by the number of peas allocated, that different thinkers had on the development of the Seven Fields of Practice and PSTE (2nd Interview with Aonghus Gordon). The below figures (Figure 7 and 8) are what we came to in the conversation (on that particular day and with the particular names I had prepared cards for; see also table 1 in 2.4.4.).

FIGURE 7 PEAS ATTRIBUTED TO CONTRIBUTORS OF PSTE (INTERVIEW 13 JUNE 2022)

43
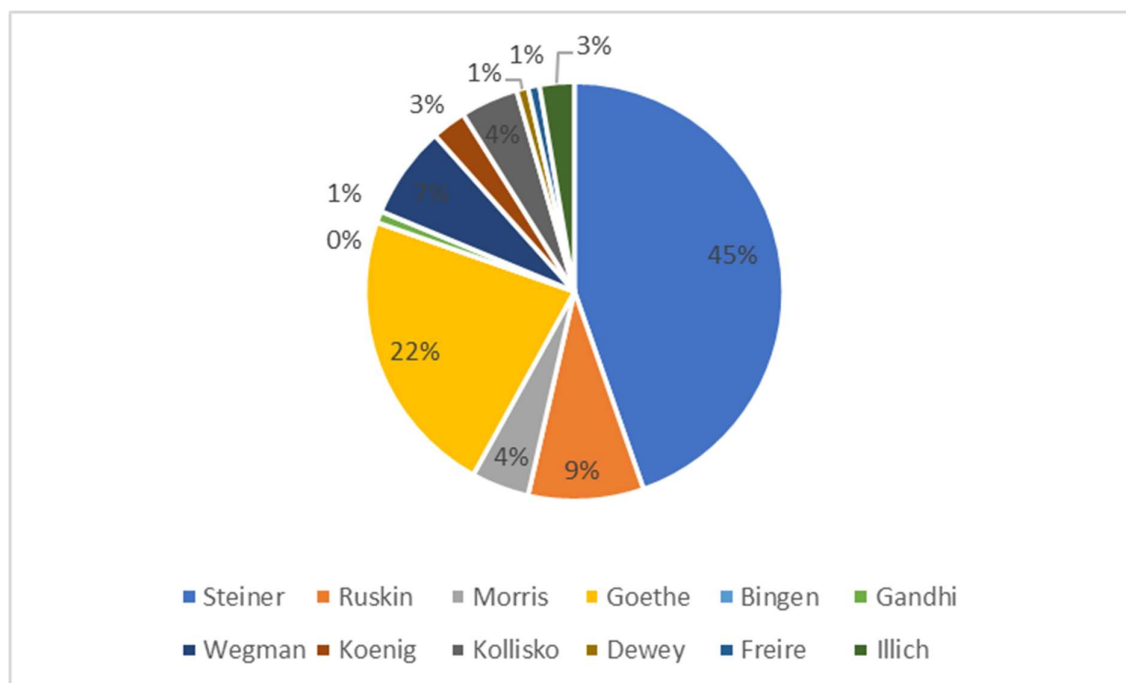
As indicated above, in order to understand PSTE it is important to understand some of the main contributors that shaped the underlying principles. While understanding Steiner's insights might pose a challenge in itself due to conceptual as well as language barriers, it is important to appreciate that PSTE is distinctly different from Steiner Education, in fact can be perceived as a critique of Steiner Education, as Steiner Education can be perceived as a critique of mainstream (Dahlin, 2017).

I am far from assuming that these three bodies of knowledge and practices ('mainstream', Steiner Education, PSTE) are monolithic edifices, but rather constantly moving concepts and practices coloured by the context of the time, locality and individualities involved in it (Dahlin, 2017). However, by way of an excurse and a short observation exercise, I do want to give the reader a poignant impression of some of the differences. Drawing on Dahlin's (2021) explanation that the classroom could be considered as a manifestation of the curriculum, I have compared them critically previously in the Field Centre Journal (Court, 2021) through the comparison of three classrooms (figures 9-11) and shall expand further below (2.4.1.-2.4.3). The classrooms are very different and invite the observer to question: What is this spaces made for? What learning will take place here? What does it do to the students? What was the design thinking behind this space?

FIGURE 9 MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM IN ENGLISH SCHOOL (AUTHOR, 2017)

FIGURE 10 STEINER SCHOOL CLASSROOM (WIKIPEDIA, 2024)

FIGURE 11 PSTE WORKSHOP - A GREENWOODWORK SHELTER (AUTHOR, 2022)

And most importantly: What would be the assumed purpose of education in this space? These were certainly also questions which were present in the ethnographic observations in this study (Appendix Part III). In fact the picture of the greenwood workshop (figure 11) was taken in the course of the study.

Taking those questions and possible answers with us, we want to build on this short observation exercise and examine further how PSTE, and its underlying principles, is a critique of Steiner Education (as well as mainstream education), despite both drawing on Steiner's insights, by exploring some of the other above named main contributors who have shaped PSTE namely Goethe, Ruskin and Morris.

2.4.1. Goethe

In addition to Steiner, someone who had an immense impact on PSTE is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Goethe may not be well-known outside of nations where German is spoken, where he holds a similar place as Shakespeare does in the British consciousness (Wahl, 2005). Goethe published extensively on a variety of scientific subjects, including geology, biology, optics, physics, morphology, and anatomy. While he preceded Steiner, he was a contemporary of Darwin, de Cuvier, Kant, von Humboldt, Linne, and Hegel (Merke,

2019; Vine, 2015). While Goethe corresponded with all of his contemporaries directly or even knew them personally, whilst these disciplines were still in their infancy, he is primarily remembered for his contributions to literature rather than to science (Weik, 2017). Furthermore, while Goethe produced a great deal of plays, novels, poetry, and treatises on science, he also put a great deal of effort into practical life, serving as a minister for mining at one point as well as a theatre director, journal editor, educator and statesman (Wahl, 2005).

As editor of Goethe's scientific writings for more than 13 years, Steiner was significantly influenced by Goethe in his view of the world and perception of nature (Steiner, 1985, 2010 and 2011). Goethe's philosophy and worldview served as Steiner's foundation and, as a result, had an even greater impact on his personal development, the growth of Steiner Education, and Steiner's educational discoveries (e.g. Steiner, 2008; Rawson et al., 2014).

Goethe was promoting a worldview that goes beyond the 'subject-object' division that serves as the foundation of modern science, despite the fact that he was a contemporary of many individuals who helped establish scientific fields. Only a decade after Goethe's passing, according to Weik, "the Natural Sciences changed towards a materialist-reductionist approach that, in hindsight, has impeded rather than promoted the study of life" (Weik 2017, p.336). He engaged in contentious discussions with two scientific giants throughout his lifetime that are best represented by his two best-known sections of his writings: 1790 addressing the 'Metamorphosis of the Plant' with Carl von Linne and 1840 regarding the 'Theory of Colours' with Isaac Newton (Weik, 2017; Goethe, 1999). Hence, he showed the possibility of different paradigm compared to the way that the sciences then largely developed (as discussed above, see 2.3.1.), emphasising that not only the educational paradigm is a result of choices but also the underlying scientific paradigm as well expressed by Sheldrake's (2017) discovery:

> I felt that there was something radically wrong, but I could not identify the problem. [...] I discovered that Goethe, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had a vision of a different kind of science – a holistic science that integrated direct experience and understanding. It did not involve breaking everything down into pieces and denying the evidence of one's senses. (Sheldrake, 2017,p. 3.)

Goethe's holistic science or 'Goethean Science' introduces the method of 'Goethean observation', is something that participants in the interviews will refer to and which potentially offers a different, more connected way of looking at the world (Gordon and Cox,

2024). An essential concept, or rather experience, is that of 'metamorphosis' by which Goethe (and Steiner in fact) described the organic and dynamic change of a physical form, for example in a plant (see figure 12). Through observation of a lot of these 'metamorphoses' the thinking itself can be changed to become 'morphological', more organic and alive, being able to be in the development of something (or someone) rather than just observing it (Steiner, 1994b).
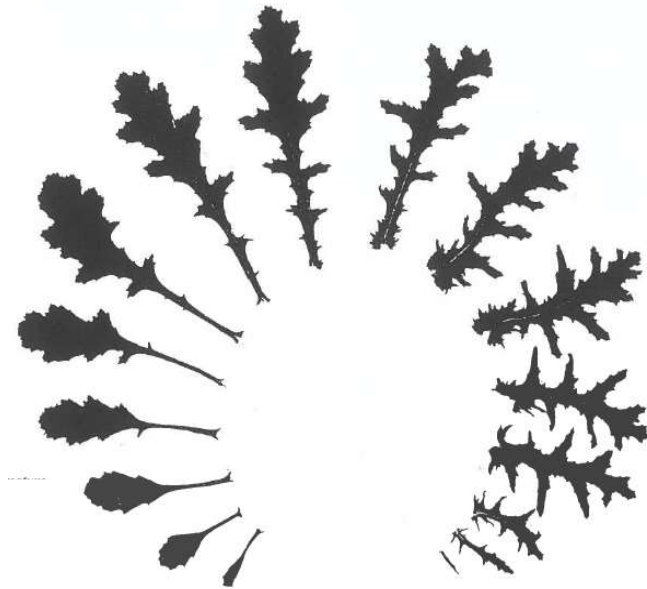
FIGURE 12 LEAF SEQUENCE OF A PLANT (COLQUHOUN AND EWALD, 1996, P.77)

This morphological thinking informed the way how Steiner looked at child development (Steiner, 1985), hence, also how child development is understood in PSTE (RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024). It is also used extensively in Ruskin Mill throughout the Seven Fields of Practice, but especially Field 1 Genius Loci. Through direct observation and immersion in the qualities of a place, the participant(s) aim to come to an experience of the essential being of the place, the Genius Loci (Reakes, 2022 a and b; Colquhoun, 1997). This way of seeing and observing firstly then leads to considerations which crafts are emerging, or will be situated well in the location, drawing on the raw materials that grow in that specific location (Field 2), connected to the geology, flora and fauna of the place (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Therefore, Goethe's contribution to a different qualitative understanding of science (Steuer, 2002) and to the Ruskin Mill method is fundamental as he gives importance to the individual experience again.

2.4.2. Ruskin

Ruskin's contribution to PSTE is the aesthetics as well as the focus on arts and crafts connected to a British lineage (Gordon and Cox, 2024; Ruskin 2018, 2020, 2024). The word 'aesthetics' is derived from the Greek 'perception' or 'sensation', and refers to both, the artistic act, whether or not it is beautiful, as well as an environment that could be defined as beautiful (whether man-made or natural) (Lim, 2004). While the definition of what is beautiful would require a deeper philosophical discussion that would go beyond the scope of this study (Lim, 2004), it suffices to say that art and aesthetic education typically focusses on the act of creating artistic artefacts rather than the status of the environment around the child. It appears that aesthetics in the classroom are frequently underestimated or simply not intentionally taken into account, despite the fact that some educational philosophers have done so, and usually exclusively in Early Years settings (Apps and MacDonald, 2012). Comparing the classroom pictures above (figure 9-11) provides a good illustration of aesthetics and in fact the importance of it.

As can become apparent when observing figure 10 by referring to the 'curriculum' in Steiner schools, everything that the student encounters or is intended to encounter during the course of the school day, 'consciously or subconsciously', is meant to be part of the experience (Dahlin, 2017, p. 88; see also Rawson and Avison, 2014). While there is no doubt that teaching methods and curriculum content have a significant impact on students' learning, looking at the three pictures (figure 9-11) above makes it clear that, even if the contents and methodologies were to be very similar, students' learning experiences in each of those environments would be very different. Many of the differences may be difficult to describe and quantify, but by evaluating whether the environment is stimulating healthy physical development, including the development of the senses (see also example on 'breathing' in 2.3.3.), or is actively engaging, the observers can quickly form their own opinion (O'Brien et al., 2011; Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021).

The ideas of John Ruskin further inspired the pragmatic and artistic approach of RMT. Gordon and Cox (2024) explained how neither the mainstream curriculum nor the Steiner curriculum could meet the needs of young people with special needs and challenging behaviour. Hence, building on Steiner's insights into how the materials used and the educational environment

can support the child's healthy development of the senses (Steiner, 1916; RMT, 2024c), Aonghus came to the conclusion that learning can take place outside of the classroom in the beauty of nature and the landscape (RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024). Here students can benefit from experiencing nature's cycles and natural laws while working with materials like greenwood to create high-quality and beautiful craft items that others can use (see figure 11 and 5.3.2.).

Like Steiner and Goethe, Ruskin was a polymath who wrote on a variety of topics, including botany, geology, social issues, and art and architecture (Ruskin 2018, 2020, 2024; Attwood, 2008). He is typically regarded as an art critic, social thinker, and philanthropist rather than an educator. However, Ruskin's efforts were ultimately educational, whether they involved writing books, instructing Oxford University students, opening museums to provide an aesthetic experience to people of all walks of life, or, especially in later life and similarly to Steiner and other radical educationalists (Lichtenstein, 1985), criticizing social structures and making recommendations for their renewal (Attwood, 2008). 'What to admire, what to hope for, and what to love' should be taught to children (Ruskin, 2011, p.255). Ruskin believed that education should promote a child's 'learning to see' rather than overburden their thoughts and senses (Scully, 2017) as one might feel when observing figure 9.

Ruskin recognized that crafts provide the opportunity to learn something at a high degree of expertise and offer hands-on experience (Ruskin 2018, 2020, 2024). Crafts also include numerous skills, including self-reflection, planning, and revision. As with Steiner, Ruskin believed that education and its more academic components should be holistic. For instance, questions about a plant might involve examining its economic value, geography, chemistry, as well as drawing it to a high level of skill and exploring its symbolic meaning (Attwood, 2008). Ruskin believed that the goal of education was to help individuals find 'what will fit them to do their work and be happy in it,' rather than to make them more knowledgeable (Ruskin, 1853, p. 262). Ruskin acknowledges the person as well. He pushed for individualized education that focuses on each person's unique talents and aptitudes rather than aiming to make everyone equal (Ruskin, 1853). Although Ruskin always emphasized the act of serving one's fellow man, in the end he recognized, as did Steiner, that practical work aids in an individual's growth (Dahlin, 2017).

2.4.3. Morris

Like Steiner, Ruskin believed that aesthetic education and art always include a moral component that is good for society (Attwood, 2008). With William Morris, it was even more obvious (Morris, 2016). Morris was a multi-talented artist known for his poetry and textile designs. He was also the editor of the Socialist League's propaganda newsletter, 'The Commonweal,' and one of its founding members (Morris 1993, Morris and Belfort Bax, 2021). Morris later turned to the intensive artistic activity of creating handprinted books and wallpapers, for which he is best known (Weinroth, 2018; Morris, 2016). Morris was lecturing on the arts from a theoretical as well as practical point of view to artists and craftspeople, the arguably more pragmatic people, rather than as an academic pursuit. Morris is largely excluded from the philosophical and academic discourse surrounding art and aesthetics education, probably for that very reason (Petts, 2008). While this is debated, Petts (2008) regards Morris' transition from intensive political involvement to intense artistic pursuits as a continuum. Morris transitioned from political activism that pushed for greater equality and education for all to the aesthetic of utilitarian objects like wallpaper, tapestries, and books so that they could be used whilst also surrounding ordinary people with beauty (Petts, 2008). Morris' influence on PSTE could be seen as utilising the educational value of aesthetics in the everyday item in order to bring about greater equality and social change. These aspects are illustrated by a student with special educational needs and possibly a challenging history of upbringing making a silver spoon of the highest quality and industry standard, which is then exhibited in the Millenium Galleries in Sheffield (Sheffield Museums, 2024).

2.4.4. Other contributors

Whilst the above discussion or the table below (table 1; see 2.4. and figure 7 and 8) do not do these contributors justice in terms of their contribution to mankind, it simply gives a notional idea of their level of contribution to PSTE as percieved by Aonghus (Gordon and Cox, 2024; 2nd Interview with Aonghus Gordon):

	Number of peas	Contribution to PSTE
Steiner	50	Discussed above
Goethe	25	Discussed above
Ruskin	10	Discussed above
Wegman	8	Holistic medicine; geographic medicine; Field 6
Morris	5	Discussed above
Kollisko	5	Collaboration of the teacher, the farmer and the doctor
Koenig	3	Elaborating on some of Steiner's concepts; child development, Focus, Grasp and Step
Illich	3	Decommissioning the classroom, social change
Gandhi	1	Changing the world through the work of your hands
Dewey	1	Experiential education
Freire	1	Moving away from "banking education", social change

TABLE 1 OTHER CONTRIBUTORS TO PSTE

I want to emphasise that this is not an attempt of a hard and fast quantitative apportioning of contribution to PSTE. It should however serve as a playful illustration of the variety of contributors and thinkers, reformers and educators, who all in their very own way were critical towards the status quo, be it in education, medicine, the way of scientific enquiry or social inequalities. It should also serve to illustrate the complexity and depth of thought that has gone into the development of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice over the last 40 years (Gordon and Cox, 2024) and, hopefully, also going forward. Furthermore, it shows the flexibility and possible lack of clarity around 'what is in and what is out', what is part of the method and what not. Hence it is, as mentioned before (2.2. and 2.4.), as 'mainstream education' and 'Steiner Education', not one neatly packaged method and practice, but a continuum and variety of aspects and practices, shaped by many factors (as explored above, especially in section 2.2. and 2.3.4.) and therefore in constant flux. Whilst all of those names are mentioned in Gordon and Cox (2024) to a greater or lesser extent, the attribution of proportions by Aonghus was undertaken on that specific day and with the names chosen by myself as I attributed importance to them (see Interview 2, ll. 260-261). Therefore, their contribution might be estimated differently by Aonghus on a different day.

Lastly, this variety of contributors and aspects, should illustrate why some staff and leaders might have difficulties understanding the method, maybe only understanding certain aspects, leaving alone implementing it and communicating it to other staff and stakeholders. However, to end this section on both a positive and a critical note, the variety might also be the very

thing that makes the method so attractive: there are many different entry points. If you have not heard about Goethe, maybe you have taken an interest in Freire at some point in your life, or you felt drawn to Illich so then it is maybe the point of the initial interest and the gate to explore the method from. This is certainly something that resonated with some of the participants (see section 6.). For myself, I can say that it is such a vast canvas of ideas that exploring them, their relationship to each other and how they possibly can inform the education of young people never loses its interest. In the next section we shall explore how some of these ideas have then come together in the method of Ruskin Mill Trust, Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE).

2.5. PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice - The educational method and practice of RMT

2.5.1. Introduction

In order to critically explore the question how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, we need to understand some of the development and key concepts of PSTE.

PSTE has been developed in Ruskin Mill Trust since 1981 (RMT, 2024b; Gordon and Cox, 2024), mainly by its founder Aonghus Gordon, drawing Steiner, Ruskin, Morris and Goethe as well as others (see 1.1., 2.3. and 2.4.). Starting with the renovation of the building itself (figure 1), the founder and CEO Aonghus Gordon with colleagues developed an education for young people with special needs that draws on the materials, crafts and history as found in the place, enhanced by biodynamic agriculture, seasonal celebrations and festivals, growing their own food and an emphasis on immersion in nature and beauty. As the 'Seven Fields of Practice' and 'Practical Skills Therapeutic Education' concepts of human development described by Steiner's spiritual science have found a language and context in modern Britain that also external stakeholders, families, inspectors and academics can access. This journey has been brought together in the very recently published book "Place, Craft and Neurodiversity: Re-imagining Potential through Education at Ruskin Mill" (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

2.5.2. Brief overview of the development of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice

FIGURE 13 THE FIELD CENTRE (RMT, 2024A)

While the practice of PSTE has developed in the work of the practitioners, the language of PSTE has largely developed through conversations, meetings, lectures to staff and to the public in an oral tradition. Only since 2011, especially since Ruskin Mill has engaged with Higher Education and ran collaborative Masters studies in PSTE, more written documentation has emerged (see 2.5.4, 6.3.2.6.6. and 6.4.1; see also 1st Interview with Aonghus Gordon). This has culminated in Aonghus' own collaborative Masters thesis (Gordon and Buelow, 2012) which has consolidated language and terminology around PSTE significantly and named "The Seven Fields of Practice" for the first time. This thesis has then been rephrased and re-written as the Ruskin Mill Practitioner's Guide (RMT, 2014) for staff. With this first Masters programme, which Aonghus initiated with Rudolf Steiner University College in Norway, the journey of Ruskin Mill Trust in Higher Education began (Gordon and Bulow, 2012; 1st Interview with Aonghus Gordon) which led to the development of its own research centre, the Field Centre (RMT, 2024a; figure 13 and 14), as a physical manifestation of the method. It also led to a number of regular publications such as the *Field Centre Journal* as well as publications for specific occasions and anniversaries, all of which are publicly accessible on the Field Centre website (RMT, 2024a). A sequence of Masters programmes as well as other

staff training programmes (RMT, 2024d) helped to further consolidate the language and understanding of PSTE, most importantly it led to a higher level of critical interrogation and reflection on the method (compare to 2.3.4.).

According to research on outdoor and environment education (Dyment et al., 2018; Jeffs and Ord, 2017) or craft education (e.g. Page and Thorsteinsson, 2018; Korn, 2017; Sennett, 2007; Marchand, 2008 and 2023), the benefits of this method may be numerous (Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021; Wilson, 2010) and may include more than the sum of its parts when combined in Ruskin Mill's PSTE (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024; Petts, 2008) as described in the next section.

2.5.3. From Steiner to PSTE as an educational method

While PSTE is largely based on Steiner's educational insights, it is nevertheless significantly different to the curriculum of a 'Steiner' or 'Waldorf' school (see 2.3.4. and 2.4.), even very much so in its vocational and craft element.

Making and creating were constantly emphasized by Steiner, and in comparative studies, this is viewed as a strength of Steiner Education (Rose et al., 2012; Rose et al, 2016). Whilst there are a great number of studies on the Steiner school craft curriculum in German speaking countries, there is a relative paucity of those in the English-speaking world (Tyson, 2019, Dahlin, 2017 relative to other streams of education and especially UK based (see table 2 below). These also need to be seen in the context of the differences in educational policy and culture in the different countries with regards to vocational education (Tyson, 2019). Rist and Schneider (1979), a UNESCO case study and one of the few English publications on the craft curriculum, based on Steiner's insights, explain the importance of learning integrated craft processes for the adult life, as opposed to the usual experience of fragmentation due to the division of labour since the industrial revolution:

> The contemporary industrial working world is more functional and planned than it has ever been before. As a result, work processes are so fragmented that their overall purpose can no longer be experienced in individual jobs. The worker must, therefore, have learnt to act out of his previously acquired capacity for insight. He must feel an elementary need to justify his work to himself. So prepared he will be motivated to participate actively in achieving the overall purposes even where the significance of his specific job to the whole process is not immediately evident. (Rist and Schneider, 1979, p.155)

As a result, since its inception, Steiner included experiences and lessons in dealing with materials like clay, wood, wool, copper, iron, and stone as well as bookbinding and even shoemaking (Martin and Rawson, 2008). In this, Steiner created a trajectory connecting the stages of development of the child to the resistance of the materials, starting with softer materials like beeswax, wool, and clay and then progressing to wood, metals, and stone in the end. While in Steiner schools these crafts usually only form a part of the curriculum, in PSTE they indeed are the curriculum (RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024). Nevertheless is the Ruskin Mill PSTE curriculum informed by Steiner's understanding of how developing children must encounter and overcome increasing levels of resistance in their education and

in life in general and describes this as the 'Descent into Matter' Curriculum (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024c). Gordon and Cox (2024) explain the use of, and in fact need for, resistance of the material in the light of Steiner's insight into child development and the use of crafts:

> Steiner discusses childhood as a gradual "incarnation", coming into the body, which Ruskin Mill translates as "descent into matter" in order to underline the importance of genuinely being in the world. The growing child becomes increasingly present in their own body and in the material engagement with the physical world around them starts to shape. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 103)

This also resounds with Biesta's (2012) reflections on the importance of experiencing resistance and in fact on a different level the resistance one can meet in life later on, for example as a senior leader aspiring to implement a method (see sections 2.6.4. and 2.6.5.). However, compared to how crafts are used in Steiner Education one of the essential differences in PSTE is the diligence of sourcing the raw materials for the craft processes. In sourcing materials from nature (e.g. clay, wool, willow, wood) students re-engage in cultural processes which had been of the utmost importance in human history:

> In the craft process, that engagement can be thought of as moving from the relatively simple processes of collecting raw materials, through the more complex work of processing them into something new and into the most developed practices of working with the refined or transformed material. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 105)

A further difference, apart from sourcing the raw material from nature, and through this re-connecting with nature, is that in PSTE Steiner's insights on child development shape the individual learning experience, whereas in Steiner Education they inform the whole class curriculum. For RMT, this might also mean that a student whose biological age is 16, is emotionally and/or socially at the age of a 6-year-old. This process of re-engaging at this level and processes appropriate for this age is termed 're-stepping' in PSTE (Gordon and Cox, 2024):

> Re-stepping these processes, which of course many young people, not just at Ruskin Mill, today have barely if ever experienced, can help them to come to exist more fully in the material and practical world around them – not only on their phone screen […]. These activities demand the cooperation and coordination of the different senses, providing an important experience of integration through practical action. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, pp. 105 and 106)

Beyond practising to meet and deal with resistance, Gordon and Cox (2024) explain the pedagogy that is implicit in making high quality purposeful craft items:

> Now craftwork requires the student to enter into what we call the lawfulness of the material they are working with – its nature and how it works, how it responds to what you do. At the same time the student is undertaking a task which already has other people inside it: the wider community or the specific individual that you are making a pot or a knife for. You are doing it for them, but you also know that it is they who decide whether the knife is sharp, because it is they who will either use it or not. The effort involved in making craft items brings the students to a higher level of awareness in relation to other people and to the material they are working with, and that effort is a teacher in its own right. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 55)

This also highlights the pedagogical importance of experiencing whole craft processes, from sourcing the material to the finished craft item. This aims to balance the disconnectedness that we experience as society as a whole nowadays. Young people with disabilities and autism, might feel even more disconnected (Gordon and Cox, 2024). It encourages re-connection to nature and the environment (by sourcing the raw material) as well as to other people and society (by serving the needs of others and making something of service). Hence the pedagogy of the craft process is clearly defined from two directions (see figure 15).

sourcing of the raw materials from nature

making/resistance of material

item of service defined by the other/society
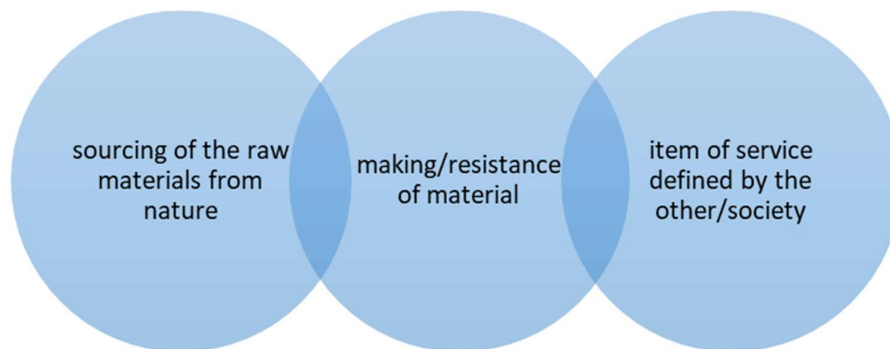
FIGURE 15 PEDAGOGY OF THE CRAFT PROCESS

While the pedagogical use of traditional crafts is certainly a unique feature of PSTE, it goes far beyond that. Through the collaborative Masters thesis in 2012 (Gordon and Buelow, 2012) aspects of PSTE were phrased as "the Seven Fields of Practice" (figure 16), which to some extent codified and situated pivotal elements of the insights of Steiner's spiritual science in the RMT context. This then required and enabled staff to engage with Steiner's thoughts in a more structured way (see also Gordon and Cox, 2024, for further explanations), making it more tangible, comparable and possibly more concrete to understand. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that to somebody who has been familiar with Steiner's work to a good extent

before coming to Ruskin Mill (like myself) it offers structure to Steiner's work being used in an educational context, with interesting additions (see 2.4.) and even more depth and application to practice in an educational context in the UK in the 21st century. However, whilst relatively few may fully appreciate the contents of Steiner's 6000 lectures and understand all their intricacies, the structuring of ideas into 7 Fields of Practice does not necessarily make the ideas any easier to understand, as became apparent from some of the participants' comments (see section 6, especially 6.2.3). Here I can only give a short overview to help the reader understand what participants are referring to as the Seven Fields of Practice in the survey, interviews and focus groups:

Field 1 Genius Loci / Spirit of Place - acknowledges the uniqueness and history of the locality, drawing on Goethean Observation as a method (see 2.4.1.). Ruskin Mill staff and students work with the landscape and location, its geology, flora and fauna, history of human endeavours and heritage to develop the unique curriculum activities for each educational provision.

Field 2 Practical Skills – employ the craft and land-based activities and are the totality of a school's or college's curriculum activities. They are developed out of the heritage of the location and therefore draw in the local history, skills and people with the richness of experience and culture that comes with this. They are intended to support the students' physical, emotional, sensory and cognitive development whilst also embedding academic skills. By sourcing the raw materials directly from nature to a great extent, such as clay, wood and wool, working on the material, experiencing its resistance and producing a high quality artefact for use or sale, the students reconnect to the earth, themselves, and their community (see consideration before on Ruskin 2.4.2. and Morris 2.4.3.). Rather than in a classroom, learning ideally takes place as close to the source of the raw material as possible, i.e. the clay workshop above the seam of clay, the textile workshop in the barn next to the sheep (see table 1, Illich). Essential aspects of Steiner's thinking in this are the planes of space in which one moves (Koenig, 1994; see 2.4.4.), integrating focus, grasp and step, while undertaking the craft activities through which a person gets to inhabit the physical space around them (figure 16 and 5.3.2. for example).
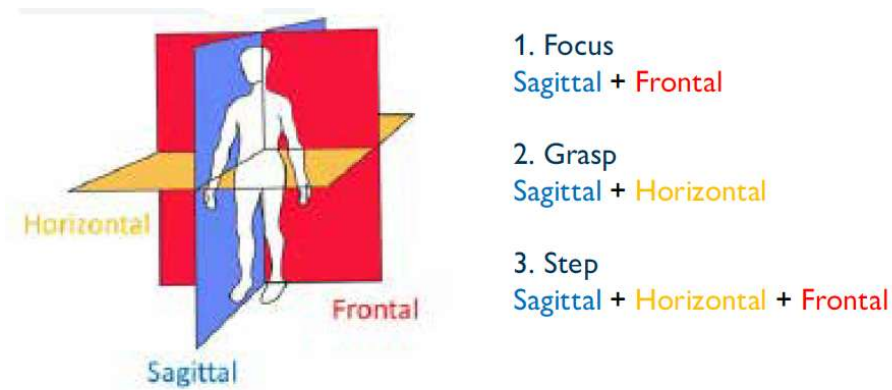
FIGURE 16 THE PLANES OF SPACE (RMT, 2024C)

Field 3 Biodynamic Ecology - appreciates that each farm and garden is a dynamic, integrated organism connected to larger, more subtle cosmic influences. This field draws a lot from Steiner's original insights on a new form of agriculture (Steiner, 2004b; Brock et al. 2019; Leiber et al., 2006; Turinek et al., 2009) and places these in an educational context. Students are encouraged to eat healthily and follow a seed-to-table curriculum to celebrate nature's rhythms (RMT, 2024c; see also Kollisko, table 1).

Field 4 Therapeutic Education - is based on Rudolf Steiner's insights such as the 12 senses and their interrelationship and integration as well as Steiner's insights into phases of human development (Dahlin, 2017; Ullrich, 2014; Steiner, 1990; Rawson, 2021; Gordon and Cox, 2024). Students re-step missed developmental opportunities by engaging in age-appropriate activities (RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024). This facilitates movement instead of stagnation and wholeness instead of fragmentation.

Field 5 Holistic Support and Care - is the field that underpins the twenty-four-hour holistic curriculum and informs, in particular, the experiences of residential students. Students learn basic living skills by actively participating in the homemaking. These learning opportunities aid in the development of healthy life processes, draw on Steiner's understanding (Steiner, 1996 and 1990; Gordon and Cox, 2024). Again, here the aesthetics that the student experiences in the residential home are of utmost importance (see Ruskin 2.4.2. and Morris 2.4.3.).

Field 6 Holistic Medicine -offers a variety of holistic therapies to support students' health and wellbeing, drawing on Steiner's and Wegman's insights (see table 1) as well as conventional therapies. Collaboration between a multidisciplinary team of practitioners, support staff, doctors, and therapists promotes the field of Holistic Medicine. The multidisciplinary meeting of the 'student study' is at the centre of this Field of Practice, drawing on Steiner's initial insights of human development (Steiner, 2006; Steiner and Wegman, 2021).

Field 7 Transformative Leadership - recognises and values multiple intelligences, including emotional and aesthetic intelligence, as well as situational awareness. Staff consciously role model positive relationships with other humans as well as their environment and are self-reflective practitioners in order to support the students' working towards self-generated conscious action (Aonghus and Bulow, 2012; RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024).
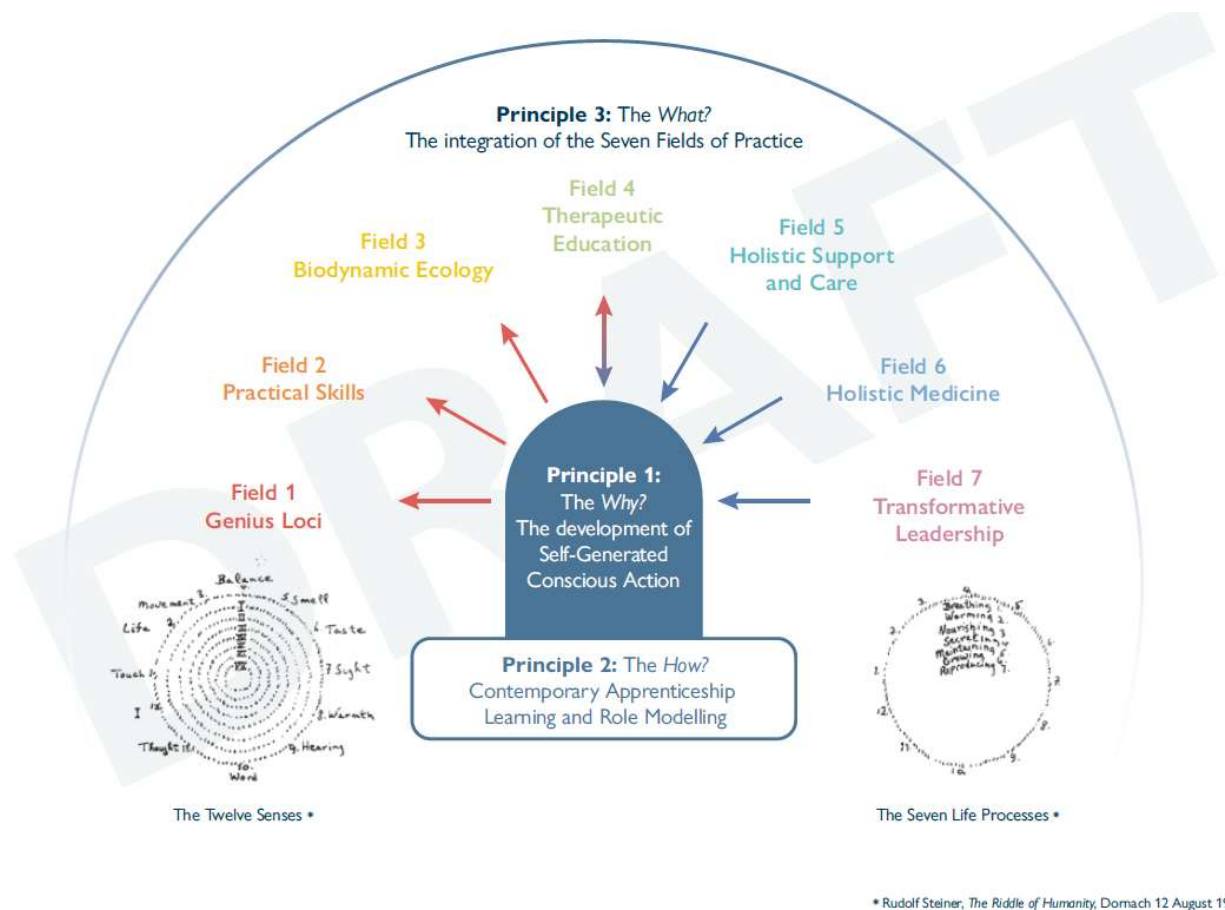
FIGURE 17 THE SEVEN FIELDS OF PRACTICE (RMT, 2024C)

2.5.4. Research and training as part of the method

This self-reflection of the practitioner found its way into the method of Ruskin Mill Trust as research and was part of Aonghus Gordon's vision, educational practice and method from the start (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Hence it also found its way into the charitable objects of the organisation (Charity Commission, 2024; see 2.2.) and was practiced as action research from the beginning by practitioners, starting with one of the first projects: the renovation of the first building (figure 1). Here Aonghus 'laid the foundation' of what later became PSTE as the educational method of the Trust in the 'Zodiac Floor'. This floor resembles key thoughts of Steiner's educational insights, such as the 'Twelve Senses' and the 'Seven Life Processes' (e.g. Steiner, 2002) literally 'in stone' in a mosaic (figure 18).

FIGURE 18 THE ZODIAC FLOOR (RMLT, 2024)
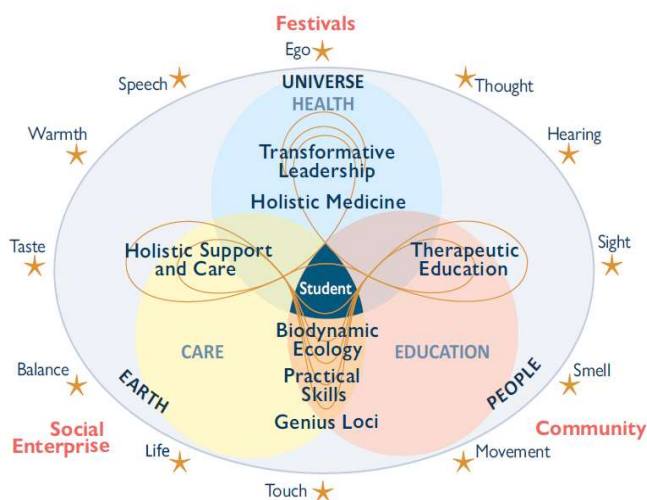
These coordinates found their way later, following Aonghus' Masters (Gordon and Bulow, 2012) into what Ruskin Mill calls the "Meta-Diagram" (figure 19) as well as into the physical architecture of the Trust's first research centre, the Field Centre.

FIGURE 19 THE SEVEN FIELDS OF PRACTICE IN THE RMT META DIAGRAM (RMT, 2024C)

The vision of the reflective practitioner, of the craft person who then embarks on a Masters or PhD research project, or the academic who goes into the blacksmith workshop, of 'research that enhances practice and practice that enhances research' (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.180) has been there from the start as depicted in the picture of Hiram (figure 19) which was commissioned in 1995 by Aonghus (see personal email correspondence, Appendix 5.4)

FIGURE 20 HIRAM-PICTURE BY DAVID NEWBLATT (APPENDIX 5.4)

Drawing on Wenger's (1999) "Communities of Practice" Gordon and Cox (2024, especially p. 155) explain the importance of staff at all levels undertaking research of varying intensity and formality (see also Omidvar and Kislov, 2014). While the conceptualisations of practice, community, learning, change, power and informality differ (Cox, 2005), the hope is that this gives staff the possibility to reflect on what they do and by doing so enhance, renew and invigorate their practice. Aspects of research are also woven into the broad training offer

(RMT, 2024d), ranging from short courses like the three-day home-making seminar to the two year "Pedagogical Potential of Craft" Course, or the two year biodynamic training "Growing Land-Growing People". All of these courses have short action research projects as part of the syllabus (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Participants are asked to reflect on their practice, undertake changes as a result of their insights from the training course and then present back to the group their findings of the changed situation. It would be difficult to do justice to the staff training offer for the currently 1200 staff in this study as each of the Fields has got a training offer, as well as role specific courses and courses which go across all Seven Fields of Practice. This is best seen on the Ruskin Mill Trust website (RMT, 2024d). While there is a broad range of entry points into the method regarding the contents, given the fast pace of technological development and changes in how we interact and learn, more work could be done around the 'how' of staff training, considering different modes of learning and instruction (e.g. Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016; Entwistle, 2022), as well as ensuring that staff are able to apply insights into practice (e.g. Salas et al., 2012; Grossman and Salas, 2011; Botke et al., 2018; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023).

Aspects of research culture can also be found in the ongoing training of staff, starting from the induction. There is a 2-week PSTE induction for all staff in which they experience some of the activities and challenges that the students experience and 'step into the students' shoes', engaging with materials in craft workshops, or the land and animals in the market gardens and farms. For several years this has been intensified for senior staff in the Senior Leadership Induction (see 2.5.5., 6.3.2.6.5. and Appendix 1.5). Throughout the year there are a number of staff training days in which staff can experience the method in action, participate in workshops and in working groups and lectures reflect on their experiences.

The Field Centre, which has largely been constructed out of local lime-stone, clay from the different provisions of the Trust and hence has literally 'grown out of the Trust', the vision of a research centre has become reality in which practitioners have got the possibility to reflect on their practice (Gordon and Cox, 2024). It now houses the Masters in PSTE, underwritten by Huddersfield University (Field Centre, 2024), as well as the doctorate researchers who have been commissioned to explore certain aspects of the Seven Fields of Practice with a number of different universities and already accomplished academic researchers. This has also led to a number of collaborative academic publications beyond the regularly published Field Centre

Journal (Field Centre, 2024) on a variety of themes connected with the method of the Trust. These include "Ruskin today: John Ruskin for the 21st century" (Cox, Gordon and Hewison, 2023); "Light, warmth and life: Exploring the work of textile artist Eta Ingham Lawrie" (Tennyson, 2022) or "Experience colour" (Vine, Loebe and Rang, 2018), which was a collaborative publication with the Goetheanum[11]. There are also a further 3 research centres emerging across the Trust (see figure 2).

It is also worth pointing out that, while Ruskin Mill has recently undertaken a lot of publications, these have not filtered so much into the peer-reviewed academic arena, which makes this study (and hopefully following academic publications) even more important (see 7.3.) as a brief literature review reveals:

search term / Library	"Steiner Education"[12]	"Waldorf Education"[13]	PSTE "Ruskin Mill"	"Practical Skills Therapeutic Education"	"Montessori education"[14]	"education"
Google scholar[15]	2,460	5,050	10	32	9,300	8,600,000
Sheffield University - Star Plus[16]	224	357	1	2	644	8,114,098
Hudderfield University Library[17]	219	363	1	2	648	8,416,206

TABLE 2 LITERATURE SEARCH: NUMBER OF PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES 16 NOVEMBER 2024

The results of the searches for "PSTE 'Ruskin Mill'" and "Practical Skills Therapeutic Education" on closer inspection showed that apart from some Masters and one PhD thesis[18]

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[11] The Goetheanum is a research and conference centre in Dornach, Switzerland, and the world centre of the anthroposophical movement (https://goetheanum.ch/en).

[12] See also Tyson (2024)

[13] See explanation for "Waldorf" in section 2.3

[14] Used here as a comparator as it is another alternative method of education

[15] References in Google Scholar include a variety of sources, not all peer reviewed in the academic sense

[16] Peer reviewed journal articles only, search beyond library and search within full text enabled

[17] Peer reviewed journal articles only, search beyond library and search within full text enabled

[18] Reed, S. (2017) Creative Journeys: Enlivening Geographic Locations Through Artistic Practice. Phd thesis. University of Derby.

there are only 5 publications that would have gone through a more thorough external editing process (not by Ruskin Mill staff, e.g. for the Field Centre Journal)[19].

While it does become apparent that there is a paucity of peer reviewed academic publications on PSTE (see table 2 below), there is of course, as explained above, a lot of practitioner research being undertaken. It is the hope that with the Field Centre and Ruskin Mill currently going through the process of gaining Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP), there will not only be a Higher Education Institute that is connected to many other current forms of knowledge making (Ellis, 2020) but a 'Practitioner University' with "practitioner-researchers" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.156). This was already envisioned in a perhaps a more imaginative way in the picture of Hiram (figure 20). Through this engagement of practitioners in research and researchers in practice, from its early days Ruskin Mill hoped to enhance the consciousness of what it undertakes, as well as aid the development of the individual practitioner, in short, the development of 'self-generated conscious action' (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

2.5.5. The Seven Fields Standards and the Senior Leadership Induction

Having realised that the Seven Fields of Practice provide the curriculum for the student experience, as well as the template for staff development and training, in 2017 RMT trustees had the wish to support the senior leadership of the organisation with a more systematic and quantifiable tool. This was to ensure the method progresses in the different centres and is understood and implemented. This was the beginning of the development of "The Seven Field Standards" which were developed by me in collaboration with trustees and more than 50 staff across the Trust (Appendix 1.2). The data from this self-assessment could be displayed in a simple overview dashboard (Appendix 1.3). The idea was that for each Field of Practice there could be visible elements, that answer the question "What do you expect to see in place for each of the Seven Fields?" and it can be answered with a simple "yes" (it is in place) or "no" (it is not in place-yet) which is explained in the guidance notes (Appendix 1.4.). This

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[19] These are Briggs et al. (2022); Tutt and Williams (2023); Gordon and Cox (2024), Mata et al. (2016) and McElearney (2020). Only the last two could be considered peer-reviewed in the academic sense.

model has been worked through with the trustees of RMT and different groups of staff at a number of strategic review meetings (Appendix 1.5.).

While the Seven Fields Standards are meant to be an organisational tool that can be used for self-assessment as well as quality assurance at around the same time, I was also asked to design a standard induction for Senior Leaders (Appendix 1.6). Through the growth of the organisation and the emergence of more Ruskin Mill centres, it became necessary to recruit accomplished leaders such as Head Teachers, Deputy Heads, Principals of Colleges etc who had undertaken their career outside of Ruskin Mill. Hence, they met PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice, as well as everything underpinning these, in most instances for the first time. Compared to the standard two-week induction for all staff, the Senior Leader Induction was designed to lead senior leaders deeper into PSTE and over a longer period of time (six months, the length of their probationary period). The intention was also to allow senior leaders insights into the design thinking of Ruskin Mill provisions by visiting these across the Trust and hence experience "Ruskin Millness" in the different locations, the essence of what makes a place a Ruskin Mill place. All this with a view that they will take this into their individual day-to-day decision making (see also 2.6.3.; 6.3.2.6.4.; Lacerenza, et al., 2017).

2.5.6. Self-generated conscious action

Insightful and free day-to-day decision making by the student at Ruskin Mill, as well as by the staff member, as "self-generated conscious action" is the main goal of PSTE: "Its method, […] seeks to enable each learner to further develop their capacity for self-generated conscious action, whether they are a young person in the Trust's care or a staff member" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 31). While Gordon and Cox (2024, p.111) also compare self-generated conscious action to 'executive functioning', it still goes beyond this. It is the capacity to resist external pressures, of which nowadays there are so many: be it for our young people (and often adults and staff) being 'plugged' into the stream of social media messages, omnipresent advertising, the promise of even better and greater experiences, addictions and coercion. Instead, the aspiration is to enable young people through "self-generated conscious action" to make positive changes in their lives and the world and being aware of the consequences of their actions:

> This shift away from what used to be called "alienation" and is now simply taken as normality is a remarkable one; what we do changes our world. […] self-generated conscious action, what Ruskin Mill aims to enable young people to take part in, depends on realising that you can do something more than simply inhabit a world made by other people. (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.73)

The Practitioner Guide (RMT, 2024c) explores further the relationship of the staff, their ability to perform "self-generated conscious actions" and the impact on the young people they work with:

> In PSTE we use the term "self-generated conscious action" to describe the space of freedom we aim to support young people to enter. […] if this is not embodied by the staff young people meet, they will realise very quickly that we are presenting them with "Do as I say, not as I do". Our challenge as staff then is to engage in self-generated conscious action ourselves. […] We cannot do this without also paying attention to our own development in this direction. (RMT, 2024, p. 153)

In the above discussion I have hopefully shown that there is a line of argument emerging which holds all of the above together. Here it does become apparent that, starting from the fundamental difference and tension of a materialistic and non-materialistic paradigm (2.3.1.), insights of Steiner around what the human being is and the importance of freedom (2.3.2), how these then shape educational insights and an education that creates the conditions which are supportive of this development (2.3.3), how RMT contextualises Steiner's insights in modern Britain for young people with SEN (2.5.2 and 2.5.3), and finally how research and reflection throughout the organisation (2.5.4) lead to the concept of and facilitate the development of "self-generated conscious action", decision making with 'real' choices and self-leadership (see table 3).

considerations of consciousness (2.3.1.)
space of human freedom (2.3.2.)
understanding of human constitution (2.3.2.)
informing educational insights (2.3.3.)
inform PSTE (2.5.2. and 2.5.3.)
applied as research and reflection to PSTE (2.5.4.)
culminates in the concept and experience of self-generated conscious action and self leadership
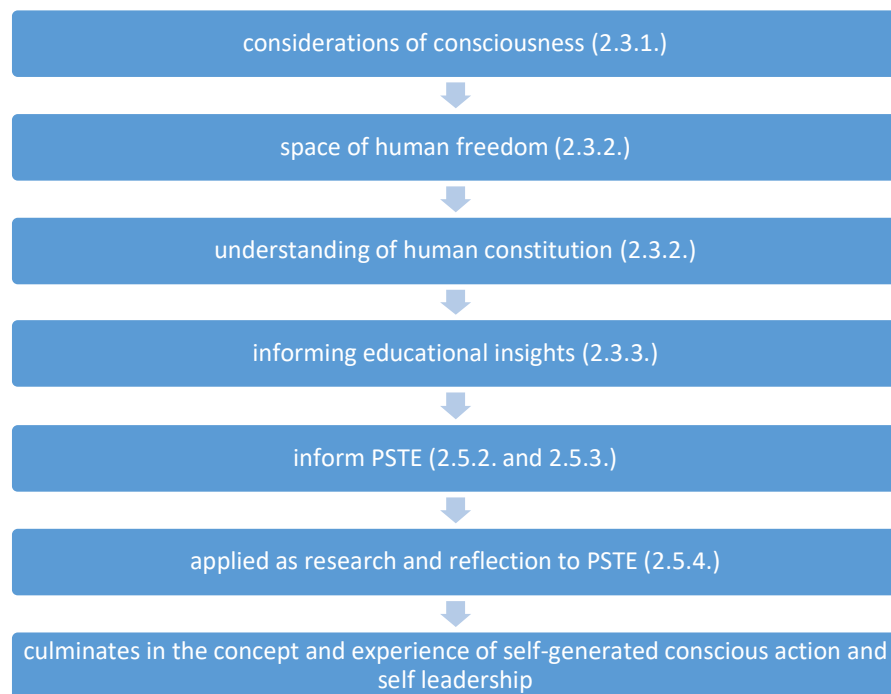
TABLE 3 LINE OF ARGUMENT SO FAR

We have explored some of the key concepts of PSTE and their underlying insights as far as they are relevant for the understanding of staff at different levels of the organisation. Now we want to explore what research has to offer with regards to some of the elements that serve the implementation of PSTE, such as the role of educational leadership, approaches to overcome resistance and the relationship of understanding an educational method and implementing it.

2.6. Leadership

2.6.1. The importance of leadership

In trying to answer the question how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, the leadership of the organisation will have a key role to play (e.g. Fullan, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019; Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Holst, 2022; Mogren, Gericke and Scherp, 2019). Research suggests that educational leadership plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of educational methods, shaping the organisational culture (Laloux, 2014; Coyle, 2018), facilitating change,

and promoting innovation in teaching and learning. It is out of the scope of this study to review leadership and management theories in full, however, we have to contextualise the research question in the current landscape of educational leadership theory to some extent. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, this chapter provides a critical analysis of the leadership practices and processes that contribute to effective implementation, highlighting the complexities and nuances of educational change to evaluate the evidence against (see chapter 6).

There is a wide-ranging discourse on leadership and management, their similarities and differences, purpose and definitions without having reached any agreements (e.g. Hersey et al., 2001; Bush, 2020; Algahtani, 2014; Shinde, 2016; Boynton, 2016; HBR et al., 2011). Warren Bennis gave a colourful description:

> To survive in the 21st century, we are going to need a new generation of leaders — leaders, not managers. The distinction is an important one. Leaders conquer the context — the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seem to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them — while managers surrender to it. (Bennis, 1989, p. 7)

This description is possibly slightly unfair as all leaders also need people to actually make things happen, i.e. managers. However, it resounds with the thoughts on leadership and management in RMT by Gordon and Cox (2024, p.187) defining leaders as those people who have got the right 'orientation' to take the right decisions, whereas managers are those that perform the tasks given by others. This also points to the challenge of becoming a leader, which is not learned in courses but is a lived and 'lived-through' experience, so that leading does not become following a learned script but a form of self-expression from the human essence (Souba, 2014), a state that is certainly in close proximity to self-leadership and self-generated conscious action as explored in the previous section (2.5.6.).

Ideas on leadership and management theory and practice are manifold and how an organisation should be best led and managed, or indeed if at all, remains the topic of academic as well as popular debate, with leadership and management books dominating the bestseller lists (e.g. New York Times, 2023; Amazon, 2023; Laloux, 2014). While a lot of the management and leadership discourse focuses on business and corporate organisations, we

want to give some thought to educational leadership in order to explore the context to this study.

2.6.2. Types of educational leadership and leadership in Ruskin Mill Trust

While a lot of the popular as well as academic educational leadership theory has focussed on the core process of teaching and learning in educational establishments, more recently this has taken account of the wider organisational factors (Daniëls et al., 2019; Bush, 2020, Carter and McInerney, 2020; Preedy et al., 2011). Globally, school leadership has gained a lot of attention in the past two decades, due to the increasing culture of accountability, national and international comparison of outcomes (e.g. OECD, 2013; Daniels et al., 2019; Biesta, 2017) and discussions around governance (e.g. Lewis et al., 2016).

Educational leadership is often conceptualised through various theoretical lenses, including transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008). Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of inspiring and empowering followers to achieve collective goals and aspirations, fostering a shared vision and commitment to change (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Distributed leadership recognizes that leadership is distributed across multiple individuals and roles within an organisation, emphasizing collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective responsibility (Spillane et al., 2004). Instructional leadership focuses on the role of leaders in improving teaching and learning outcomes, providing support, guidance, and resources to enhance instructional practices and student achievement (Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

Although these models have got something to offer in the context of this study and the research question, the concept of spiritual leadership might be more interesting and applicable. This model was first suggested in the early 2000s (Fry, 2003) and at the time defined as ''the value, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership'' (p. 711). Whilst in the subsequently developing literature 'spiritual leadership' is compared and contrasted with other leadership styles (see Samul, 2024), little or no attention is given to a congruent definition of "spiritual" which therefore can mean many

different things to many different people (as discussed in section 2.3.2.). Overall, there appears to be a high overlap with other positive and value-based leadership models such as servant leaderships (Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2008), authentic leadership (Alvesson and Einola, 2019) ideological leadership, pragmatic leadership or ethical leadership (Anderson and Sun, 2017). Leaving the possible confusion about a definition of 'spiritual' and the overlap of concepts and nomenclature by the way, it appears that all of these approaches aim to provide leadership which is drawing on moral and ethical values for the benefit of the individual, the team and the organisation (Samul, 2020; Chaston and Lips-Wiersma, 2015; Chen and Li, 2013).

While there is a range of leadership approaches and practice in RMT, there are very clear aspirations laid out in Field 7-Transformative Leadership (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024 c). This describes firstly the importance of leadership as mentioned above as being those who have got 'the right orientation' to make the right decision (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.187) which is different from managers who are performing a task but do not need to set direction. What this means for the implementation of the method in Ruskin Mill Trust (see below 2.7.1.), is, that where there is alignment with the vision of the organisation, more 'free' decision making is possible. As Wenger aptly puts it: "The process of alignment bridges time and space to form broader enterprises so that participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions and practices" (Wenger, 1999, p. 179; see also Cox, 2005).

However, having said that, these decisions are likely to have to adhere to the value set of the organisation, namely the framework of the Seven Fields and PSTE. Systems which have been devised to support this such as for new leaders in entering the organisation (see section 2.6.2 and Senior Leadership Induction, Appendix 1.5) and performing the task of leading a centre (the Seven Fields Standards, Appendix 1.1) create greater alignment (and assurance for the organisation) but arguably less freedom. Therefore, as the direction is set, one could argue, and in this study we shall reflect on this (see chapter 6), that people who have conceptualised themselves as accomplished leaders are now to a greater extent managers as the direction is set.

However, this could be further critically explored, as debatably, also in a 'mainstream' school, the directions are set by the paradigm, the system and conventions. If in a local authority school the Headteacher was to decide to sell off the building, buy a woodland and a field

instead and have the lessons taking place in yurts, workshops and in the farmyard; it would not be taken lightly either. Hence, the question of what the role of the educational leadership in implementing the chosen method is, will need to be explored further.

Furthermore, how leadership in Steiner-inspired organisations is conceptualised and practised is full of paradoxes and complexities (Rawson, 2023). Whilst Steiner was advocating a very democratic way of leading the first school and the intention was that the teachers collectively held the responsibility, there is little acknowledgement of the fact that he named himself as the director (Rawson, 2023; Dahlin, 2017). To this day many Steiner-inspired organisations struggle with the concept of leadership and debatably struggle overall as a consequence (see 2.3.4.; Schaefer, 1998; Rawson, 2023). Even one of the latest comprehensive publications in the English language, Zech (2024) paints a picture of Steiner schools as being autonomous, self-governing organisations. While he acknowledges that from the 1960 Steiner schools started to move away from having only teachers run the administration of the school collectively and moved to appointing professionally qualified administration and leadership, this leadership is hardly explored at all. Zech (2024), while having published in English, draws solely on German publications, nearly exclusively on Steiner informed insider research, not taking account of the far evolved discourse around leadership and organisational development globally available.

This emphasis on 'autonomy' might become understandable and in fact very informative for our considerations in this current study when we acknowledge the connection and correlation of an education that has as its stated purpose 'developing free human beings' (see section 2.3.3.) (Steiner Education) or 'self-generated conscious action' and self leadership (PSTE) for the students and moreover to being an aim for the adults and staff as well. This is clearly in contradiction to the general idea of leadership which is that some are leading, and others are being led, hence those who are being led debatably cannot exercise full 'self-generated conscious action' or full human freedom. While maybe not as far reaching and focussed on the individual as Steiner, also some of the other previously named contributors such as Ruskin and Morris, even more so Freire and Illich, saw education as a tool for societal change and to address inequalities and power imbalances (Freire, 2017; Illich, 1973, 2002).

Whilst Ruskin Mill practices a fairly standard corporate structure, and the Seven Fields of Practice do acknowledge the importance of leadership in Field 7 "Transformative Leadership",

as can be seen from some of the participants comments (see section 6), this paradox is unresolved and Field 7 is still very much in the process of developing.

2.6.3. The Role of Educational Leadership in Implementation

The available literature assumes that educational leadership plays a pivotal role in all stages of the implementation process, from planning and preparation to monitoring and evaluation (Fullan, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019). Effective leaders provide vision, direction, and support, guiding the organisation through change and promoting a culture of continuous improvement. Subhaktiyasa et al. (2023 and 2022) highlight that as education, especially for school aged children, is more than professional development and transmission of knowledge and skills but also about values and character education (see also discussion above, 2.2). Therefore, value based or spiritual leadership aligns well with educational leadership. The role of educational leadership in implementation can be examined through several key functions.

Educational leaders firstly articulate a clear vision for change, aligning the implementation of educational methods with the mission, values, and goals of the organisation (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Bush, 2020). They inspire and motivate stakeholders, fostering a sense of purpose and direction that guides implementation efforts. Leaders (and even more so managers) engage in strategic planning processes to develop implementation plans, set priorities, and allocate resources effectively. They identify barriers and challenges, anticipate resource needs, and develop strategies to address them (Kotter, 2012).

Effective educational leaders involve stakeholders in the decision-making process, seeking input, feedback, and buy-in from teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. They create opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and shared ownership of implementation initiatives (Harris and Muijs, 2005; Bush, 2020). Leaders establish systems for monitoring and evaluating implementation progress, collecting data on quality, and outcomes. They use evidence to assess the impact of educational methods on teaching and learning, identify areas for improvement, and make data-informed decisions (Hall et al., 2013). Leaders prioritize professional development and support for teachers and staff, recognizing the importance of building capacity and expertise to implement new methods

effectively. They provide training, coaching, and mentoring opportunities, as well as access to resources and technology (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). It is noteworthy that in multi-site trusts the mentoring of the leaders themselves has been found to be very valuable (Torres et al., 2018). The process of change and transformation in educational organisations is certainly very akin to implementing an educational method with the importance of the educational leadership in this and is also described as "coherence making" (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Holst, 2022; Mogren et al., 2019). Fullan and Quinn (2015) describe the process of creating coherence as creating shared depth of understanding about the purpose and essence of the work.

2.6.4. Experiencing resistance: challenges and barriers

Despite the critical role of educational leadership in implementation, leaders can face various challenges and barriers that can impede their efforts. The greatest barrier can be resistance to change, as organisational change in general interferes with individual autonomy (see 2.6.2.), hence the individual potentially feels a loss of control (Sasson et al., 2022; McIntosh & Layland, 2019). The more care leaders need to exercise in communicating the need for change, addressing the expectations and needs of the staff (McIntosh & Layland, 2019), considering the background of the staff and allowing enough time for the change of paradigms (Flamholtz & Randle, 2008). Leaders must address resistance through communication, collaboration, and support (Kotter, 2012).

Beside resistance of the staff to change, several other factors can impede the implementation process: Limited resources, including funding, time, and personnel, can hinder implementation efforts and limit the scope of change initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2008). Leaders must prioritize resource allocation and seek creative solutions to overcome constraints. Uncertainty about goals, expectations, and roles can create confusion and ambiguity, undermining implementation efforts (Fullan, 2016). Leaders must provide clarity and direction, communicating a clear vision and actionable steps for implementation. Organisational culture, norms, and contextual factors can influence the success of implementation efforts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Leaders must consider the unique context of their organisation, adapting strategies and approaches to fit the needs and characteristics of their stakeholders.

It is also noteworthy that the educational leadership in England is at a very difficult point with one in three secondary school leaders in England leaving within five years following their appointment (Weale, 2022). Also great numbers of teachers are leaving the profession (see for example Adams, 2023), all adding to further instability in a sector that is struggling to find stability due to continuous political changes.

2.6.5. Overcoming resistance and creating coherence: strategies for effective educational leadership

To overcome challenges and promote effective implementation, for educational leaders it is important to ensure open and transparent communication (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This is essential for building trust, fostering collaboration, and addressing concerns. Leaders must communicate the rationale, goals, and expectations of implementation initiatives clearly and consistently.

Also, as staff going through change are at risk of feeling overwhelmed and losing control, leaders should aspire to empower stakeholders by involving them in decision-making, encouraging participation, and recognizing contributions (Spillane et al., 2004). They should create opportunities for shared leadership, ownership, and accountability, empowering individuals to take ownership of implementation initiatives.

In unstable times leaders should show staff that they are valued and invest in capacity building and support for teachers and staff, providing training, resources, and professional development opportunities (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Salas, 2001; Salas et al., 2012; Thayer, 2012). Ideally, they create a culture of continuous learning and improvement, encouraging experimentation, reflection, and innovation. Leaders should demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in response to changing circumstances, adjusting strategies and approaches as needed (Hall et al., 2013). They monitor implementation progress, identify barriers and challenges, and make timely adjustments to overcome obstacles.

Furthermore, and most importantly, they should be creating coherence and consistency of vision (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Holst, 2022). According to Fullan and Quinn (2015) "coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding of the purpose and nature of the work" (p.1). On an organisational level coherence refers to integrating the different elements, subsystems and aspects of an organisation (Holst, 2022). Coherence is challenged by fragmentation,

overload and frequent changes of direction, but furthered by clarity, precision of practice, purposeful interaction, working on capacity, monitoring of progress and continuous correction (Fullan and Quinn, 2015). It is also important to appreciate that coherence is less about what leaders want and how things 'should' be, but more about what is in people's minds and their actions (Fullan and Quinn, 2015), as individuals and as a collective, which is what this study investigated.

Ideally, leaders achieve a 'whole school approach' (Mogren et al., 2019) in which all stakeholders are aligned with the vision (Hugo and Iverson, 2024). In creating a community of practice (Wenger, 1999; Cox, 2005; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014) that has a sense of belonging, while striving towards a common goal, leaders may also consider the importance of work being fun for employees (Laaksonen and Hietala, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). In this way they can create a community of practitioners who wish to work towards a common goal rather than having to be coerced in that direction which is much less likely to be successful.

2.6.6. Concluding and further thoughts

Educational leadership plays a critical role in the successful implementation of educational methods, shaping the organisational culture, facilitating change, and promoting innovation in teaching and learning (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Fullan, 2016). Effective leaders provide vision, direction, and support, guiding the organisation through change and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By understanding the complexities of educational leadership in implementation and employing strategies to overcome challenges, leaders can enhance their capacity to implement educational methods effectively, promote positive change in educational practice and create coherence. This leads, especially in the context of Ruskin Mill Trust and PSTE, to the importance that leaders are aligned as much as possible (Holst, 2022; Mogren et al., 2019; Hugo and Iverson, 2024) and understand the method that should be implemented (see also 2.5.5.).

2.7. understanding and implementing an educational method
2.7.1. Implementing an educational method

In considering the research question how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation we need to explore the relationship between understanding and implementation. Understanding and implementation are closely interconnected processes that influence each other in various ways (Bush, 2020; Lovell, 1994; Hersey et al. 2001). Before implementing an educational method, individuals or organisations must first understand its principles, goals, and procedures. Understanding provides the necessary foundation for effective implementation by ensuring clarity of purpose, alignment of practices, and awareness of potential challenges (Bush, 2020; Hall et al., 2013). Without a clear understanding of the educational method, implementation efforts are likely to be haphazard, inconsistent, or misguided.

Understanding of the underlying principles and theoretical framework of an educational method informs implementation decisions, such as adaptation, customisation, and contextualization. Individuals or organisations with a deeper understanding of a method are better equipped to make informed choices about how to implement it in their specific context (Leithwood et al., 2008). For example, they may assess more accurately the needs, preferences, and constraints of their staff, students, stakeholders, local requirements and unique challenges in order to implement the method successfully.

A shared understanding of the method among stakeholders promotes effective communication, collaboration, and shared ownership of implementation efforts. When individuals or organisations are aligned and have a common language, vocabulary, and conceptual framework, they can work together more cohesively towards common goals. Understanding fosters a sense of coherence and purpose that enhances implementation success and sustainability (Harris and Muijs, 2005).

Implementation serves as a form of experiential learning, reinforcing key concepts, principles, and skills (Guskey and Yoon, 2009) and is of great interest to organisations as employees and leaders transfer their learning from theory to practice (Hutchins and Burke, 2007; Blume et al., 2010). As individuals or organisations engage in the implementation of a method, they

deepen their understanding through hands-on experience, reflection, and feedback which is very much how learning and research is practised in RMT (see 2.5.4.). Through iterative cycles of implementation and reflection, stakeholders refine their understanding, improve their practice, and enhance their capacity to implement the method effectively as Aonghus described the development of the method overall (see 1.1. and 2.5.2.).

Evaluation and feedback mechanisms are integral to both understanding and implementation processes. Evaluation provides data and insights into the effectiveness of implementation efforts, highlighting areas of strength, weakness, and improvement (Bush, 2020). Feedback from stakeholders informs adjustments to implementation strategies, enhances understanding of the method, and promotes continuous learning and adaptation (Bush, 2020; Hall et al., 2013). Currently this is part of the senior leadership induction in the form of a reflective essay and presentation of insights to the Executive Team (see appendix 1.6.) on an individual basis and through the Seven Fields Standards on an organisational level (see appendix 1.2-1.4).

In summary, understanding and implementation of an educational method are interdependent processes that mutually reinforce and influence each other. A deep understanding of the educational method serves as a 'orientation' (Gordon and Cox, 2024) for effective implementation, guiding decisions and facilitating problem-solving. Conversely, implementation activities contribute to the development of understanding through experiential learning, reflection, and feedback. By recognizing and leveraging the relationship between understanding and implementation, individuals and organisations can enhance their capacity to implement educational methods effectively. This eventually leads us to the question: How do we understand 'understanding' and what are the processes that relate to and support it?

2.7.2. Understanding an educational method

As 'understanding' is a key concept in the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, we will have to explore 'understanding' as an important next step.

Understanding has been conceptualized and studied from various theoretical perspectives, such as psychology, philosophy, education, and communication, each offering unique insights into its nature and mechanisms (Hannon, 2021). It plays a central role in human cognition and social interaction, influencing how individuals interpret information, make sense of their experiences, and interact with the world. While an agreed definition of understanding is still debated (Hannon, 2021), recent advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence have invigorated the interest in how we understand (Blaha et al., 2022).

Understanding has been a subject of inquiry for centuries, with philosophers exploring its epistemological and metaphysical dimensions (Stoerig, 1999). Aristotle, for example, distinguished between different levels of understanding, ranging from sensory perception to conceptual understanding. Descartes emphasized the role of clear and distinct ideas in achieving genuine understanding, while Kant proposed that understanding arises from the synthesis of sensory impressions with innate cognitive categories (Stoerig, 1999). Steiner also approaches this from a philosophical perspective in his "Philosophy of Spiritual Activity" (Steiner, 2007) as well as from a sensory perspective in "Anthroposophy-a Fragment" (Steiner, 1996).

From a cognitive psychology standpoint, and therefore also as it is conceptualised in the more recent educational science, understanding is often associated with processes such as perception, attention, memory, and reasoning (Anderson, 2013; Grimm, 2011). According to this perspective, understanding involves the integration of new information with existing knowledge schemas or mental models, building the foundation of what we call 'learning', allowing individuals to make sense of complex phenomena and predict future events (Bransford et al., 2000; Perkins and Unger, 2013).

Whilst they are not really explored in this study, it is worth appreciating that understanding involves a range of cognitive processes that contribute to the construction and organisation of mental representations. Clearly, how processes of the body and the mind interact also touch on metaphysical questions as discussed above (Anderson, 2007; section 2.3.2). Although there is still ongoing debate about which processes are included and which not, the majority of scholars agree that a number of processes form an important part of understanding (Rummelhart, 1991; Grimm, 2011; Nickerson, 1985; Bransford et al., 2000), including encoding, storage, integration, elaboration, monitoring, assessing and others.

Critical thinking involves the evaluation of information, the analysis of arguments, and the synthesis of ideas, contributing to deeper levels of understanding and intellectual growth (Grimm, 2011; Nickerson, 1985; Bransford et al., 2000).

Although all these processes are at play in PSTE of course as well it might be most helpful in the context of this study to explore not only the individual cognitive process but also the social and communicative phenomenon of understanding. Communication plays a crucial role in facilitating understanding, as it involves the exchange of information, ideas, and perspectives between individuals. Effective communication relies on shared language, context, and cultural background, as well as active listening, empathy, and feedback mechanisms (Grimm, 2011; Ting-Tomey, 1999; Wenger, 1999).

Misunderstandings can arise due to differences in interpretation, language barriers, or miscommunication of intentions. Addressing misunderstandings requires clarification, empathy, and a willingness to engage in dialogue to bridge gaps in understanding (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Understanding has practical implications across various domains, including education, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. In education, fostering understanding is a central goal of teaching and learning, as it promotes deeper learning, critical thinking, and knowledge transfer (Bransford et al., 2000). Educators can enhance understanding by providing clear explanations, scaffolding learning experiences, and promoting active engagement with the material (Grimm, 2011) which does need to be considered in the way that staff are introduced to and learn about PSTE in section 6.

In interpersonal relationships, understanding plays a crucial role in fostering empathy, compassion, and effective communication. Building understanding requires active listening, perspective-taking, and openness to different viewpoints (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). Cultivating understanding can strengthen relationships, resolve conflicts, promote social cohesion, organisational coherence and alignment with the organisational vision and method, in our case PSTE.

In decision-making and problem-solving, understanding enables individuals to assess complex situations, weigh competing priorities, and make informed choices. Decision-makers rely on their understanding of relevant factors, risks, and consequences to formulate strategies and

allocate resources effectively (Klein, 1993), in our case, the understanding of PSTE, as it gives the leaders (and managers) the 'orientation' to make the right decisions (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

With regards to understanding PSTE through embodied learning it also appears important to emphasize the learning that happens in the more liminal space (Savin-Baden, 2020; Hugo and Iverson, 2024). It might be that the less clearly defined, the less clearly worded and explained, the less planned an experience is, maybe the more there is to take away from the practical experiences. Drawing on the example of how a geology student engages with the practical field, Savin-Baden (2020) emphasises the importance of living in the liminal space between confusion and understanding, being able to sustain this and eventually working your way out of it yourself on the learning journey, albeit only ever partially (Land et al., 2014).

The points raised above illustrate how multifaceted and still relatively undefined 'understanding' is as a concept that encompasses cognitive, communicative, and social dimensions. It is central to human cognition, communication, and interaction, influencing how individuals interpret information, make sense of their experiences, and navigate the complexities of the world. By critically examining the theoretical foundations, cognitive processes, communicative aspects, and practical implications of understanding, we can gain deeper insights into its nature and significance across diverse contexts which shall be exemplified in the next section.

2.7.3. example from the practice in understanding and implementing educational models - project based learning

When exploring the factors that impact on the understanding and implementing of PSTE it might be helpful to look at an example of another educational method with studies that have reviewed its implementation, also considering, in how far they are comparable to Ruskin Mill and PSTE as well as the wider educational landscape in the UK. I have chosen to explore the implementation of Project Based Learning (PBL), as it has got a long history which made me hopeful that attempts of its implementation and mechanisms were well studied (e.g. Boss, 2015; Kokotsaki, Menzies and Wiggins, 2016; Rohm, Stefl and Ward, 2021; Laverick, 2018). Also, at first glance, some elements were quite close to elements of PSTE with its emphasis on practical experience, social processes and integration of skills. However, from the

explanations above (sections 2.3.-2.5.) it should be clear that PSTE is grounded in a very different paradigm.

PBL is a form of student-centred form of active, inquiry-based learning that has three key principles: learners are an active agent in their learning, learning is dependent on the context, and learners achieve their aims through the sharing of knowledge and social interactions (Kokotsaki, Menzies and Wiggins, 2016, Schmidt et al. 2011). Whereas these are also prevalent in other educational methods, such as problem-based learning, in PBL the focus is not only on the learning but also on the tangible outcome in real life contexts (Kokotsaki, Menzies and Wiggins, 2016) or indeed artefact (Boss, 2015; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Miller, Severance and Krajcik, 2021). This could be seen as another similarity to PSTE.

The roots of PBL are usually traced back to Dewey's (1859-1952) conceptions of learners being active agents in their experiential learning (see for example Dewey, 1902), then developed by William Kilpatrick in 1918 and popularised in the 70s by Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (Kolb and Fry, 1975). While there is a long history of PBL many applications and studies today emphasise the use of modern technology (Boss, 2015; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Miller, Severance and Krajcik, 2021), which would be a key difference to PSTE, which emphasises traditional and heritage crafts due to their engaging of the senses (Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021).

Boss (2013, 2015) explores the key ingredients for a successful implementation of PBL and some of the challenges. Educators often feel that content coverage is a challenge. In PBL the emphasis is that the project is designed to cover the actual content and not as a 'dessert-project' (Larmer and Mergendoller, 2010) after the teacher has covered the content at the front; teachers may find it difficult to plan for the project to cover all of the content. While this appears less a challenge in the Ruskin Mill FE provision it is certainly the case in the Ruskin Mill schools where the teachers come with a stronger classroom thinking and more obligations in regard to content coverage.

Furthermore, participants generally reported a greater need for planning for learning in the unstructuredness of the project as the teacher loses some of the control with regards to the direction of the learning which needs some innovative thinking (Lenz, Wells and Kingston, 2015; Parwati et al., 2019; Bradley-Levine and Mosier, 2014). As Ruskin Mill students often

struggle with the authority of the teacher, in the modern apprenticeship learning (Gordon and Cox, 2024) the learning is more directed by the material, craft activity and the craft item, by the 'lawfulness of the material' (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.55). Also, while the learning is more unstructured it supposedly still takes place, however, this will need to be assessed ongoing in PBL (Trauth-Nare and Buck, 2011; Sumarni, 2015; Handrianto and Rahman, 2019) which is equally the case in PSTE.

The other challenge, which is related to having to structure and plan for content coverage, is that PBL might demand longer periods and a restructuring of the teaching-time, e.g. blocks rather than 45 minute lessons (Breadley-Levine et al., 2010). This is certainly a challenge that was encountered numerous times in this research (section 6.) as the time required to forge a hook or make a stool is very much determined by the project and its requirements. Boss (2013, 2015) points out that this also means a more fluent way of managing student behaviour and facilitating their growth in PBL which is also sometimes challenging staff who come from a more structured learning environment to RMT.

Interestingly the classroom environment and the need for its possible re-arrangement (e.g. pushing the tables together for groupwork) is named as a difficulty in the implementation (e.g. Boss, 2015 and Breadley-Levine et al., 2010) and nearly comes as an afterthought. As discussed, huge importance is attributed to the learning environment and it is and is seen in fact as an opportunity in PSTE (see 2.3.3. and 2.5.3.).

Lastly, communication with other stakeholders; parents, officials etc also new students who might expect a more traditional school and learning set-up and will need explanations (Lam et al.,2010; Breadley-Levine et al., 2010). This appears to be also an important point when considering the implementation of PSTE as it starts with a new staff member visiting the website, coming for interview and building and having certain expectations.

As far as the implementation process is concerned a lot of the studies focus on the teacher, classroom and the direct interaction with the student or the challenges that the wider environment pose, e.g. teacher training, expectations of parents and stakeholder, educational practice and paradigm) (Boss, 2013; Boss, 2015; Kokotsaki, Menzies and Wiggins, 2016) rather than the leadership of the organisation. The behaviour of the leadership (administration) is usually much less discussed other than that it must be 'supportive' (Lam et

al., 2010). Little is said about the actual understanding that is required of the educational method itself or its underlying assumptions by the leaders. Cain and Cocco (2013) discuss the application of PBL in leadership training and interestingly find that PBL promotes more modern types of leadership, less hierarchical, flatter, more collaborative and with shared responsibility which appears to allow more decisive and connected decision making. This appears to be congruent with some of the ideas of Ruskin Mill on leadership where it is less about status and power, but about authenticity, role-modeling and 'self-generated conscious action' (Gordon and Cox, 2024; see 2.5.6. and see also section 6.)

Therefore, in summary, the main challenges of implementing PBL have been described as:

- planning for content coverage is a challenge for teachers in a project based approach (Larmer and Mergendoller, 2010);
- teachers give up control (Lenz, Wells and Kingston, 2015; Parwati et al., 2019; Bradley-Levine and Mosier, 2014);
- learning takes place but will need to be assessed differently (Trauth-Nare and Buck, 2011; Sumarni, 2015; Handrianto and Rahman, 2019);
- time is determined by the project rather than by 45 minute sessions (Breadley-Levine et al., 2010);
- student behaviour is managed differently (Boss, 2013) and the classroom environment will have to be adjusted (Boss, 2015 and Breadley-Levine et al., 2010);
- communication and explanation is key with all stakeholders (Lam et al.,2010; Breadley-Levine et al., 2010);
- a less hierarchical but supportive management style is helpful (Cain and Cocco 2013; Lam et al., 2010)
- no studies could be found that discuss the understanding of the leadership of the educational method

Many if not all of the above points will typically also appear in a Ruskin Mill setting (school or college) implementing PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice and shall be discussed in section 6. However, it does need to be considered that PSTE goes indeed much further as the PBL studies which were still situated in standard educational establishments (school/college/university environment with tables and chairs) as well as based on the

(implicit) scientific paradigm of the time. The insights from this comparison of the implementation of PBL to the implementation of PSTE as well as from the above discussion of the elements and underlying insights of PSTE, considerations of the role of leadership and mechanisms of understanding and implementation culminate in the considerations of the research question which the next section addresses.

2.8. Research question

The research question(s) guides the design (Mears, 2021), focusses and gives direction to the research (Cohen et al., 2018; White, 2017), it helps to decide on the scope of the research, what is part and what should not be part of the research. Lipowski (2008) suggests that rather than contemplating data, 'practitioner-researchers' (see also Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.156) especially should start the development of a research question with contemplating interesting questions. He suggests that these are most likely stemming from day-to-day issues the practitioner-researcher is facing. Ideally these questions should be developed in collaboration with colleagues, they should be challenging and help to see things from a different perspective. They should stem from logical and logistical challenges but -especially with researchers who research their own practice- also have a more emotional, personal and visceral aspect to them. White (2013) also points out that any research should stem from curiosity. Most of these points resonate much with my own experiences:

Ever since working at Ruskin Mill Trust in the UK from 2007, as well as in previous organisations (see 1.3.), in my role(s) I was faced with the question, firstly, how to help staff understand a paradigm and educational practices (namely those based on Steiner's insights) which substantially differ to those in the 'mainstream' and secondly how to implement those (see also 2.2.). The focus and approach have changed over the years as I changed roles, depending on who I was working with, the different staff groups, the number of staff and scale and fields of work but the basic question remained (see also presentation to trustees, appendix 1.5., slide 2: "How can we ensure that the method (PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice) is implemented throughout the organisation?"). In conversations with the founder Aonghus Gordon the same question gained an even more pivotal role in the context of his own succession and an educational method which was is in the process of consolidation. With his own succession becoming a more pressing issue (Tuomala et al., 2018; Rothwell, 2010),

also finding answers to these questions, which could be cast into the organisational fabric, became more and more important.

With the development of the Field Centre as a centre of research into the method, the development of a Masters in PSTE in collaboration with different universities and the publication of a substantial book on the history and method of Ruskin Mill Trust (Gordon and Cox, 2023) substantial steps had been taken. However, in conversations with him we also came to the conclusion that the work so far, the systems, processes, courses and training that have been put in place, and their complex interplay, warrant a deeper and more thorough evaluation than has been possible on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, from the literature review it appears that firstly research on PSTE is an obvious gap (see 2.5.4), secondly education based on Steiner's insight is a neglected field of academic research, certainly in English speaking countries as well (see 2.5.4. and 2.3.4.). While there is a lot of research on educational outcomes for educational methods such as PBL, there is less on the implementation of this educational method (Boss, 2015). The available research is usually focused on the implementation in the classroom rather than on an organisational level (see Boss, 2015; Cain and Cocco, 2013). Therefore, little is known about the role and requirements of the administration or leadership of an educational establishment in implementing an educational method that deviates from the established classroom teacher instruction, let alone a method as complex as PSTE. Finally, no studies could be found that discuss the meaning making process and understanding of PBL, or in fact any other educational methods, of leaders.

Interesting questions (Lipowski, 2008) that occurred again and again were:

1. What is the role of Rudolf Steiner's educational insights in PSTE and how can staff be helped to understand those, or do they have to?
2. What measures need to be taken so that the method is not eroded by external influences (such as inspection frameworks, compliance pressures etc) but still continues to develop?
3. How can leaders and all staff best be helped and supported to understand PSTE?
4. What should the training for governors and senior leaders be?

5. How can we ensure that systems and processes are coherent with the method of Ruskin Mill Trust rather than obstructing it?

6. How do research insights translate into practice on the ground and how does the practice impact on the research?

7. How does the method translate into practice on the ground and what is the role of the leadership of the organisation as a whole as well as the local centre leadership?

It is needless to say that it would not be possible to answer all of those questions in a single doctorate, but it is more about synthesising them into a single question. Lipowski (2008) suggests that from those recurring interesting questions the second stage is to have a research question emerging.

Furthermore, as a result of those gaps mentioned above in the research, the recurring conversations and personal questions over years it was felt that a significant contribution to the organisation as well as to academia could be made by exploring them (Cohen et al., 2018). Considering the above recurring questions with colleagues in my day-to-day work, in trustee meetings (see also Appendix 1.5) and with the founder I eventually came to the research question:

'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?'

In the development of this question, other considerations that I had collaboratively with Aonghus Gordon and colleagues were:

1. While giving the context and sources of the method (especially as above in the literature review) and lays out the complexities of the paradigm(s) it assumes PSTE as an educational method (see 1.2.).

2. It assumes the importance of Rudolf Steiner's educational insights. In conversations with Aonghus Gordon, in the interviews that have been part of this research (see interview 1-3 with Aonghus Gordon), as well as, in the most recent publication of the Trust (Aonghus and Cox, 2024) this has been stressed again and again. Therefore, I felt it justified to have this as part of the overall research question and title of the research (see interview 2; 2.2. and 2.4.).

3. Having said this, it was felt important to limit Rudolf Steiner's insights to his educational thoughts or at least in how far they are relevant to the educational method of PSTE (e.g. biodynamic agriculture is a large part of PSTE, Field 3- Biodynamic Ecology, but not necessarily considered part of Steiner's educational insights). This however is fluent and some of Steiner's thoughts which are currently outside the scope of PSTE, or considered not educationally relevant, might well be in the future.

4. In how far certain aspects are understood clearly differs from person to person, however, it was felt that it is worthwhile teasing apart where aspects of the method can happen without it having to be understood (e.g. a student can work on a biodynamic farm) and by whom (the importance of that might need to be understood by the centre lead to ensure appropriate resource allocation but not by the craft tutor working on the farm).

5. It was also felt that it would be worthwhile to explore the level of coherence throughout the organisation, the different sites (some more established, some joined only recently) and roles in the organisational hierarchy, where decisions 'from the top' can have a supportive impact with regards to the method or not. While there are significant differences in the FE side and school side of Ruskin Mill and different frameworks apply (hence different inspection frameworks, different teacher-training etc) I was keen to focus on the core method, even if it plays out slightly differently and different external pressures apply.

Agee (2009) points out that the research question is really the beginning of the research, also further determines the methodologies and modes of data analysis (see also Cohen et al. 2018; White, 2013 and 2017). She also points out that a great research question does not necessarily lead to a great research study, but a poorly conceived research question is certainly not helpful. On reflection I can see that the question of how to implement PSTE has been with me for a very long time (see 1.3.), therefore, a great deal of thought and consideration had gone into the research question even before it had been conceived as such in this study. With the methods applied to explore this research question I wanted to reach all levels of the organisation, explore the meaning making process particularly of senior staff, but also correlate this with the experiences of practitioners in the workshop with students as discussed in the next chapter.

3.   Methods
3.1.   Research design - methods, methodology and data analysis

In order to address the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, I explored which qualitative and quantitative approaches could be the most appropriate. I felt early on that a purely quantitative approach (e.g. through surveys) could possibly reach a greater number of staff but would not give me the depth of understanding and the challenges of the individual journeys. However, I also did not want to explore only the understanding of individuals through interviews but wanted to reach all levels of the organisation. In the end I therefore settled for a mixed method approach and to open the door to and take the views of as many staff as possible (survey) and explore the understanding of staff of the method (focus groups and interviews). I wanted to really go into the depth of understanding and implementation, and the positives and challenges of this, especially with the leadership of the organisation (interviews), and also correlate this with the experiences 'on the shopfloor', in the workshop with staff, students and materials (ethnographic observations). Other research methods such as literature and document based analysis I cancelled out early on due to the fact that PSTE is so much based on an oral and experiential tradition with the first book (Gorden and Cox, 2024) only being published shortly before the completion of this study. I also considered action research as a possible method, but felt that my research question has been born out of years of practice and action (see 1.3 and 2.5) and will continue going forward and therefore had already an action research element to it.

The research design is determined by the 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 173). The purpose of the research determines the design, which then determines the methodologies used. In our case the purpose as outlined in the research question is to examine the understanding and implementation of an educational method across a national organisation and the role of the leadership in this, the research design must shine light on the organisation and its leadership in sufficient breadth as well as depth. Studies which have undertaken research into the implementation of an educational method have utilised a range of methods. Clearly the implementation is contingent of as well as affecting a great number

of variables and levels, hence a multimodal approach seems appropriate in trying to gather evidence to answer the research question and understand the complex interplay of variables and individual situations (Cohen et al., 2018; Sahin and Oetztuerk, 2019).

A study that aspires to explore the implementation of an educational method necessarily harbours a number of tensions. One of the main tensions of this study is that it moves between a normative and a descriptive research design. A normative approach which supports the aim to implement an educational method, while the study also wishes to explore the current status quo and the challenges within it as a baseline- therefore having a descriptive approach as well.

"The implementation of the method" per definition will always be a piece of work that is ongoing as in a staff body of over 1200 staff, with new sites opening every year, every day there are some new staff joining, some staff leaving, and also each of these more than 1200 staff being on their individual journey.

It therefore was important to find research methods and methods of data analysis that support and can adequately explore this tension and fluidity. Breadley-Levine et al. (2010) in their study examining the implementation challenges of Project Based Learning have used a mixed method methodology, collecting data through interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys. A case study, which this study essentially is, deploys a range of methods, as a detailed in depth investigation of a real life organisation (Tight, 2010) seemed appropriate to explore its 'complexity and uniqueness' (Simons, 2009, p.21). Therefore, while essentially this study is a case study of Ruskin Mill Trust the study has used a more differentiated mixed method approach of survey, ethnographic observations and individual interviews as well as focus groups.

In summary, it can be said that while the study is working towards a normative outcome the intention of the research is, therefore, fundamentally descriptive, laying the foundation for future work.

3.2.   Survey

3.2.1 general considerations

A mixed method study seems ideal to address the research question with the necessary depth of individual understanding as well as achieving an overview across the organisation (Cohen et al., 2017). The study began with a thorough online survey as a first step to get a sense of how the application was understood as well as the real and perceived impact of PSTE across the entire employee body. The purpose of the survey was to investigate staff members' knowledge of the methodology and their own experiences with various facets of it. However, a further purpose was also to make it known across the organisation that this study is being undertaken, to stimulate questions and conversations and to "scan a wide field of issues" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 334). Furthermore, and possibly most importantly I wanted to enable the greatest number of staff possible to participate in the study to some extent, allowing for anonymity in the hope to also hear some of the voices who disagree, who don't understand, wishing to pretend that they do or are simply not interested. I wanted to hear the critical voices and hoped that an anonymous survey will be able to elicit those. While I assumed a self selective bias towards being positive about the method simply for the fact that it is a long survey and hence, I had assumed that mostly those with interest in the method would complete it to the end, I also learned that some scholars assume a negativity bias in open ended survey question (Poncheri et al. 2008). It appeared to be therefore an even playing field which indeed was confirmed by the results (section 5).

As a template for the construction of the survey the "Seven Fields Standards" (see appendix 1.2.) were used but changed the focus from being on the organisation, school or college to be relevant to the individual employee. In the process of this, I have taken feedback from individuals who are engaged in research or the specific fields of work, I have also added and omitted questions from the organisational template as seemed appropriate. Following Cohen et al.'s (2017; especially pp. 340ff.) advice, I have considered the following in the survey construction (not exhaustive list):

- I have tried to keep the survey questions simple and comprehensible
- starting with easy to answer questions about themselves going to more complicated questions about aspects of the method

- bearing the research question in mind, starting with more conceptual questions around the theory of the method, moving to application and implementation, as I was interested in reflections of each individual staff member on implementing the method
- using a simple overarching structure of preliminary questions and then seven subheadings for each of the Seven Fields of Practice
- constructing preliminary questions in a way that still ensure anonymity
- technically, I have not allowed 'non-responses' or participants to skip a question in order to encourage deeper thinking (Smyth et al., 2006)
- the questions are constructed for each of the Seven Fields of Practice in a way that they are addressing something very tangible, moving on to more conceptual aspects of the field
- a range of questions were used:
  - closed questions: to allow collation of data and to see overarching trends
  - questions that allowed answers of a scale of 1-5 to allow participants to answer within a gradient
  - open ended questions to allow participants to explore questions in depth and allow for qualitative analysis

It seemed important to pilot the survey to test technical issues, clarity of questions and receive general feedback (Cohen et al., 2017) (see appendix 2).

3.2.2. survey construction and dissemination

The following steps were undertaken with regards to the construction and dissemination of the survey:

1. Construction of the survey; this was done on the basis of the Seven Field Standards (Appendix 1.2).
2. Circulating the draft survey to knowledgeable colleagues as a pilot (Cohen et al., 2017). Therefore, it was constructed collaboratively taken the views of some other experts in the respective aspects of PSTE and in many instances changed accordingly (see emails in Appendix 2.1-2.4)

3. A number of colleagues who had agreed to undertake the pilot survey were invited to complete this (n=5). In this, technical glitches could be ironed out, some wordings were adjusted and repetitions removed (see Appendix 2.8 for final survey questions).

4. An email was send to all Provision Leaders (Principals of Colleges and Headteachers) to inform them about the research, the upcoming survey, my workshop observations and focus groups with staff and also ask for volunteer participants for individual interviews (see Appendix 1.8) (Wu et al., 2022; Saleh and Bista 2017).

5. The reviewed survey was then sent to all staff (n= approx. 1200) for the staff training day in January 2023 through the email distribution list (Appendix 2.5).

6. Briefing note was prepared for the Training Coordinators at the different sites to be read out on that training day (Appendix 2.7). However, in conversation with my tutor we decided not to give actual time to colleagues to complete the survey (which I could have facilitated in my managerial capacity) as this could have been felt as a coercion to complete the survey (Cohen et al., 2017). This briefing note was read out on the training day, ensuring good coverage of the organisation to make the study and its purpose known.

7. Two follow up emails were sent to encourage further participation, especially of groups which so far seemed to be underrepresented (i.e. residential staff and senior leaders) (Appendix 2.6) (Wu et al., 2022).

8. 54 staff undertook the survey in the first instance; following the reminder emails a total of 69 staff undertook the survey in full.

9. Some informal feedback was received from Training and Research Coordinators. This was generally positive and staff were happy that this is being researched. Some struggled with the technicality of the survey (which could be resolved). Some afterwards said verbally that it took too long. One coordinator reported that a very small number of staff felt this could be used as a performance measure. In a follow up email (Appendix 2.6) this was addressed as a further kind reminder to complete the survey if possible, but also to assure participants again about anonymity (Cohen et al., 2017).

10. Survey results were downloaded a day after the closing date (full results available on request)

11. Survey data was analysed.

3.3. Ethnographic Workshop observations

In the context of exploring the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation I also chose to use ethnographic research. This was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the tutors and teachers in the workshops, shining a light on the complex interplay and exploring those situations in depth (Cohen et al., 2018; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Originally stemming from the field of anthropology it could be argued that ethnography is a very old methodology, with already Greek and Roman authors giving very vividly descriptive accounts of other nations (Jones, 2010). However, these accounts of the 'barbarians' or 'savages' were very similar to those of European colonial explorers 1500 years later and were largely emphasising the differences of the "other", in the context of colonial power. Trying to understand it from the inside (Jones, 2010) and making efforts to more genuinely understand 'native' or indigenous people with the use of the term of "ethnography" debatably first emerged in the 1830s (Ugwu, 2017).

Since the 1920s ethnography has been employed also to explore the modern urban life, in the last 50 years ethnography has thrived and has been situated in many different fields, ranging from the exploration of gang culture, to corporate situations and educational research being some of them (Venkatesh, 2009; Leidner, 1993; Jones, 2010; Hammersley, 2018; Woods, 1986). While there is still controversy about the actual definition of ethnography and what it is and what it is not (Hammersley, 2018; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018) some common aspects seem to be agreed:

- the literal translation "writing"="graphia" and "people, nation or culture" ="ethnos" (Jones, 2010) points towards a research method that explores meaning and importance that objects and people have for people in the activities they undertake, in other words 'culture'
- it takes place over a longer period of time; relatively long-term data collection process,
- it involves observation and/or participation
- it takes place in the natural context
- it aims to document what actually happens in a rich description

An ethnographic method seemed very appropriate for the second stage of the research because of the emphasis on embodied learning, the creation of artifacts, and the significance of the learning environment in PSTE (Downey et al., 2015; Marchand, 2008). The purpose was to find out and collect data and evidence on what 'actually happens' on the ground (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Reeves et al., 2013). While following rigorous processes and being aware of sensitivities (Neyland, 2009), the researcher becomes part of the group for a period of time.

Having agreed the approach initially with the relevant centre leads, I had contacted the tutors directly and asked them for the opportunity to participate in their workshop, explaining my research project (see Appendix 3.2 and 3.3). I then discussed this also in person with them to ensure they felt comfortable (Neyland, 2009) and had taken them in person through the participant information sheet and consent form as the focus was on them as participants. While students were present in the workshops, I made it clear to all involved that the focus was on the tutors as participants of the study. The students (and their parents) had been made aware already prior to the days of the research (Appendix 3.4 and 3.5).

While all people I shared the workshop space with and beyond where informed about the research, on the days when I conducted the ethnographic workshop observations, I took great care not to alienate the people I shared the space with, i.e. staff and students (Neyland, 2009). Therefore, while I declared my reason for being there was to research the implementation of PSTE, I was primarily focussed on how the tutor did that and what his/her thoughts about this were (see script in Appendix 3.5), I took care to 'fit in' and become 'one of them' (Neyland, 2009). For example, I chose clothes that fitted a workshop such as steel toe cap workboots (also of course for health and safety reasons required), jeans, a more 'scruffy' olive coloured jumper as opposed to managerial clothes and shoes that I often (have to) wear. I tried to be mostly involved in my own activity, while being interested in what other people did and open to conversation and questions, while taking care that the students did not feel 'interviewed'. Following the engagement in the workshop I would undertake a semi structured interview with the relevant tutor to have an even richer data set (see interviews 11, 12 and 13).

Furthermore, in order not to alienate tutors and students, I chose to not take notes in the workshop but to record (and then transcribe) my reflections and observations as soon as I left

the workshop in the car on the drive home. This ensured having rich descriptions altered not too much by time that had passed by (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019).

3.4. Focus Groups

In the exploration of how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, I was looking to also bring in the voices of more diverse staff groups through holding a number of focus groups. I was specifically interested in those staff who work directly with the students and PSTE, such as residential staff, supportworkers, teaching assistants, therapists and landworkers. I was seeking to add more richness and colour to the research (Cohen et al., 2018) and see what their perceptions are.

Focus groups are a form of group interview which allows the members of the group to interact and for themes to emerge, rather than being strictly moderated by the interviewer (Cohen et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2021; Adler, K. et al., 2019). The interviewer moves into the role of the moderator of the conversation who manages the group dynamic, keeps the conversation flowing, probes, summarizes and reflects back (Cohen et al., 2018). It is seen as a very time effective way to gather views of a larger number of people in a short space of time (Gibbs, 2021; Brannen and Halcomb, 2009). It was important to me that there are no line-management relationships between people or senior managers present (see ethical deliberations below, section 4) as I wanted to limit the impact of power-relationships between members of the group (Gibbs, 2021). As with group interviews, as opposed to individual interviews, it is unlikely in this group situation for personal matters to surface (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). However, I did want staff to speak as freely as possible. Krueger and Casey (2015) also emphasise that it is important to create a confidential, comfortable, non-threatening environment and that they need to be well designed and thought through (see also Acocella and Cataldi, 2021). I believe this was achieved in both cases, by emphasising the confidentiality of the conversation at the beginning, as well as openly discussing my positionality as a researcher rather than a senior leader of Ruskin Mill Trust. I did find comfortable locations, meeting rooms in the school and the college. As I knew most of the staff and most of the staff knew me who took part in the focus groups it cannot be excluded

that the participants were self-selective, i.e. those who I have got a reasonably good relationship with (which is hopefully the majority) and wanted to talk to me attended the group. Those who have got real or perceived issues with myself, my role, senior leaders in general or PSTE possibly did not. Hence, I did take great care in the process to allow also comments and opinions other than positive ones, which did indeed emerge (see section 6).

The idea of focus groups was already introduced to the wider staff group as part of the emailed online survey which was asking for volunteer participants at that point (Appendix 2.5). In order to make the focus groups as accessible as possible I intended to have online as well as face to face focus groups at different times and days of the week.

Out of the 69 completed survey responses there were 13 participants (19%) who gave their email to be contacted for an online focus group. An invitation email was sent (Appendix 4.3), giving participants two opportunities on different days of the week and at different times. Unfortunately, on each occasion there was only one participant in the online group (interviews 14 and 15), hence the transcripts of those two sessions, which were intended to be online focus groups, found their way into the transcripts as interviews, lasting about 30-40 minutes each.

For the face-to-face focus groups, I wanted to have one situated in a school and one in a college and I asked for the help of the local training coordinators in setting these up. This was mostly discussed by phone and face to face conversations with the coordinators, as well as with the management teams of the school or college. I designed an introductory email to be sent to all staff of the site, asking for volunteers of different staff groups (see Appendix 4.1). In addition to that I designed a sign up sheet for the training coordinators to use in a staff training session (Appendix 4.2).

In this process, while allowing for free choice and participation, I am also clear that I had the organisational advantage of using existing communication channels and power structures (Gibbs, 2021). This eventually led to two face-to-face focus groups being set up with 5 participants each, lasting for about 30 -40 minutes. The online focus group was freer to be more accessible, but possibly because of that did not find many participants. However, it can also be assumed that there were more logistical challenges as potential participants might have been busy or experiencing other obstacles to attendance. In the face-to-face focus

groups these obstacles could be removed with the help of the local management teams and participation was enabled.

One of the transcripts unfortunately was cut short due to technical difficulties in the recording which was only noticed after the focus group finished. On completion of the conversation, I thanked the participants and offered them to contact me in case any further thoughts emerged, which none of the participants did.

3.5. Interviews

In depth, semi-structured interviews have been described as a good methodology to gain insights into participants' meaning making and attributed significance of situations and to learn from the qualities of their experiences (Mears, 2021). Mears (2021) describes how interviews can be a way to access another's perspective and how significance can be shared in depth and the meaning they make from an experience. While the data from interviews is debatably not seen as credible, valid and generalisable as quantative data (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) it certainly yields insights into the life worlds and significance of experiences of the participants (see discussion below). One could also argue, that given that a good number of individuals of the leaders of the organisation, including the CEO, were interviewed their experiences and hence the interview data is highly relevant and impactful. As I wished for the collected insights to have the greatest validity for PSTE as a method of a multi-site organisation as possible, it was crucial that the participants and environments chosen for the study were representative if the study should be representative for Ruskin Mill Trust as a whole (see also consideration in 7.4.). Therefore, a cross section of the following categories was taken into account when reviewing the participation for the individual interviews (and focus groups):

●   Roles (trustees, senior leaders, middle managers, front-line staff)

●   Departments (land, crafts, residential)

●   Gender, age, length of service within RMT (to some extent and not formally assessed or recorded)

●   From a number of different sites

As the leadership of the organisation should be examined, I aimed the initial email at Trustees of Ruskin Mill Trust (n=8), Principals of colleges, Headteachers of schools and Directors of School and Colleges (n=11). In the initial email to senior leaders of the organisation (Appendix 1.7) I asked the question for voluntary participants to be interviewed and was surprised by the immediate positive responses (Appendix 5.1). I initially aimed for 5 participants but conducted 7 interviews with senior leaders and trustees (3 with Aonghus, so 10 in total), covering a good range of Executive, school and college leader position as well as trustees. Following the initial emails, the participation also emerged as the result of individual conversations and questions that came towards me. Some participants wanted to know more before they engaged and were ready to be interviewed. While the logistical challenges to find times for interviews were easier than pulling a focus group together, the participants were in leading positions, hence had very busy diaries.

Again, I knew all of the participants, some as very close work colleagues with weekly if not daily interaction, therefore, it was important to emphasise first of all that my positionality here and on that day was that of a researcher, not a colleague or senior leader of the organisation. My curiosity was genuine, and I had to create a confidential and comfortable space (Cohen et al., 2018). For convenience of the interviewee as well as due to logistical challenges, some interviews had to be via video conference, but many were face to face which was my preference. Sometimes they happened in environments which were not free of distractions, e.g. a café. While this aided the participant feeling comfortable and it was sometimes easier to fit into the busy schedules, it was not distraction free, and the quality of the recording suffered. Interviews were semi-structured, which means, I had some questions prepared to focus the conversation (see Appendix 5.2) but I also allowed significant scope for a free conversation, wherever the interviewee (or I) wished to take it. For this, questions were open rather than closed (Mears, 2021). The participant information sheet and consent form had been sent to the participants in advance (Appendix 1.7). Prior to starting the interview, I established the main points of the information and consent form. Where it had not been completed, we went through it together and completed it. I also reiterated the intent of the study. A semi-structured interview requires attentive listening and probing further where interesting points emerge, clarifying and rephrasing; it does require a constant awakeness and awareness by the researcher (Mears, 2021; Cohen et al., 2018) which I aimed to provide.

Apart from the interviews with the senior leaders and craft tutors, I undertook 3 interviews with Aonghus Gordon, the CEO and Founder of Ruskin Mill Trust throughout the course of the study. I felt it was important to explore in sufficient depth with him his views on the method, how staff understand it and work with it. As it is really his life's work from bringing concepts together, working with staff and students and also learning very much from his own experiences. The first interview (Appendix 21/12/21) I undertook, in fact before even undertaking the survey and I wanted to really take the direction from him as well as updating him on the steps that the study would take (I have had conversations with him also throughout every phase of the EdD and he was very much a critical friend in the construction of the study as were other colleagues). In the second interview (Appendix 13/06/22) I explored more about the people who inspired him and what he thought their impact was on PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice. Furthermore, when the study started, his book (Gordon and Cox, 2024) was equally still in process (a process that I was also part of with reviewing sections of it), consequently, there were not many fixed and published documents on the method.

Including Aonghus' interviews, the online focus groups turned interviews and all other interviews, I undertook 15 interviews, each for about 30-40 minutes. While I used an electronic app for the transcription which was doing the rough work (Getwelder, 2023) it is important to emphasise that ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018; Sheffield University, 2024) were followed. No personal data (e.g. full names) was shared, nor was any data stored on the application (see also 4.3.). I easily spent hundreds of hours revisiting and correcting transcripts as many words were transcribed wrongly, due to words being very specific to Ruskin Mill or were misheard by the app. This process also helped me greatly to become familiar with the interview data (see 3.6.; Braun and Clarke, 2022; Cohen et al. 2018) and was already the first step of data analysis which will be discussed in the next section.

3.6 Approach to data analysis – reflexive thematic analysis

In addressing the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by

Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation both, qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. While with the survey some quantitative data was collated, with the workshop observations, focus groups and interviews the majority of the data collated was qualitative as the emphasis of the question was on the way that understanding or meaning is made (Coe et al., 2023) and put into action.

The focus groups and interviews gave the opportunity to explore how the participants made sense of experiences around understanding the method and how they derived meaning from this and vice versa, how they brought theories to experiences and attributed meaning, how it impacted on their day-to-day work and implementation of the method. In order to make sense of, i.e. to analyse, this rich, in-depth, context specific, subjective qualitative data without violating it (Cohen et al., 2018), ways had to be found to reduce complexity and distil key-points, patterns and relationships (Gibbs, 2021).

While there are a great number of methods for data analysis available, such as grounded theory, content analysis, narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis (Cohen et al., 2018), the latter seemed to me to be the preferred method to explore the rich qualitative data. That was due to its flexibility, systematic process, and ability to uncover rich insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2017, 2022). At its core, thematic analysis is based on the premise that meaning is constructed through patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Whiffin, 2023) and that meaning is identified in the data rather than being imposed by the researcher in a purely inductive way.

Thematic analysis allows researchers to apply the method across various data types, including interviews, focus groups, and textual data, e.g. open-ended survey questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Unlike some other qualitative methods that may require adherence to specific theoretical frameworks or data collection techniques, thematic analysis can be tailored to suit the unique characteristics of the data and the research aims (Braun and Clarke, 2017, 2022). This flexibility makes thematic analysis accessible to researchers from a range of disciplines and research paradigms, enabling them to explore a wide range of research questions and phenomena and this made it ideal to address the qualitative data collated in this study.

Thematic analysis offers a systematic and rigorous approach to data analysis, which enhances the trustworthiness and validity of the findings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006 and

2017; Whiffin, 2023), thematic analysis involves a systematic process of data coding, theme identification, and refinement, guided by clear steps and principles (see figure 21). This systematic process allows researchers to identify patterns and themes within the data in a transparent manner, enhancing the reliability of the analysis. It also encourages reflexivity, asking researchers for critical reflection on their own biases, assumptions, and interpretations throughout the analytical process (Nowell et al., 2017). In contrast to other qualitative analysis approaches (e.g. code book or coded by two researchers) aspirations of 'objectivity' are not embraced (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Whiffin, 2023) but the research gains its validity by being transparent about its subjective nature (which debatably more 'objective' approaches are as well but lacking the transparency and reflexivity). By engaging in reflexivity, researchers can enhance the credibility and rigor of their analysis, thereby contributing to the overall quality and validity of the research (Braun and Clarke, 2019). As this was initially criticized as a weakness, Braun and Clarke (2019) emphasised this reflexive element in what they then termed 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2022; see also Whiffin, 2023) which strongly resounded with my aspiration of conducting the study and data-analysis (see 1.3.).

Also, reflexive thematic analysis is well-suited for capturing the complexity and nuances of qualitative data, making it an ideal method for exploring multifaceted and complex research questions and phenomena. Unlike more prescriptive methods that may prioritize hypothesis testing or theory-building, reflexive thematic analysis allows themes to be identified (Braun and Clarke, 2022) in the data, reflecting the richness and diversity of participants' experiences and perspectives, as well as acknowledging the importance of the positionality of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006 and 2017, 2021; Hole, 2024). As Guest et al. (2011) argue, thematic analysis enables researchers to identify both common patterns and divergent viewpoints within the dataset, providing a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. This ability to capture complexity makes thematic analysis particularly valuable for research in areas where multiple perspectives or interpretations are present, such as health care, social sciences, and education, which are the domains that Ruskin Mill operates in.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2022) is an iterative process, involving multiple cycles of data coding, theme identification, and refinement. This iterative nature enables researchers to delve deeper into the data and uncover rich insights while also engaging in the reflexive process of reflecting on his/her own positionality, biases and interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020, 2022):

| phase 1: familiarising yourself with the data | → | phase 2: generating initial codes | → | phase 3: searching for themes | → | phase 4: reviewing themes | → | phase 5: defining and naming themes | → | phase 6: producing the report |
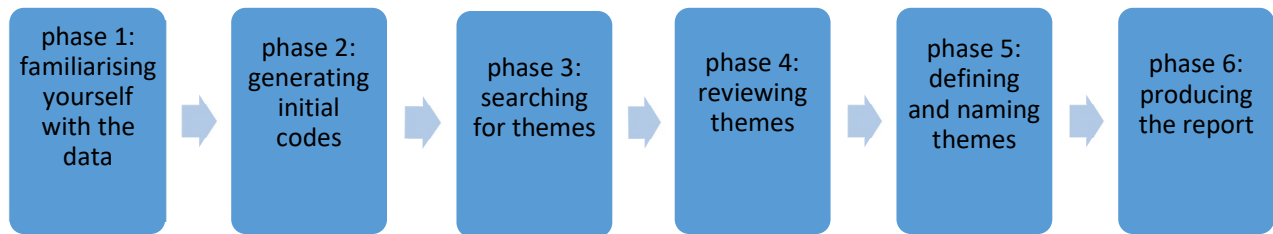
FIGURE 21 REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO BRAUN AND CLARKE (2006,2019, 2020, 2022)

1. *Familiarisation with the Data:* Through repeated reading I have immersed myself in the data, noting potential patterns and initial impressions. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) and others (Bird, 2005; Kowal and O'Connell, 2014) point out that transcription is already a key part of the interpretative analysis. In this study I have undertaken all the transcription myself and while at times painstaking and frustrating (listening to your own voice for hours!) this has been an intense familiarisation process. Furthermore, following the editing process I have read and re-read each interview, also often re-listened to the interview or focus group (sometimes in the car or on the train) to really live with the interviews. While there are various conventions of how a transcription should be undertaken, I have gone with a straight forward 'verbatim' transcription as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest. As part of this I also drafted a short summary of what the interview was about, partly for the reader, partly for myself to capture the essence. However, I was also mindful to keep an open mind to not 'decide on what the essence is' at this stage. Hence, I rewrote the short summary for most interviews and consciously treated them as drafts throughout.

2. *Generating Initial Codes:* The data was systematically coded to identify meaningful segments or patterns. I labelled and categorized data segments based on their content and relevance to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2023) and others (e.g. Terry et al., 2017) point out that this is a highly subjective process, and it is what is

meaningful to the researcher's interpretation of the data in relationship to the research question. It is this iterative process in which codes are 'tried out', followed by further immersion and trying again (Terry et al., 2017). This process of finding 'the best codes' is represented in appendix (Appendix 6).

In this process I have started with coding three interviews more or less independently of each other. I was keen to see whether codes can work across the different levels of the organisation, therefore, I chose one interview of the founder, one interview of a member of the executive team and one interview of a staff-member who works directly with students as a tutor.

When coding, I had always the current list of codes present in front of me. After coding three transcripts of different levels of the organisation (Trust leadership, local leadership and direct student contact staff), I reviewed, refined, renamed and collapsed codes or added new ones. This clearly was a highly subjective and at times messy process (phase 2, Braun and Clarke 2006, 2022, 2023; Terry et al., 2017). I coded the text segments according to what was meaningful and seemed significant to the research question from my perspective at the time. I then repeated this process with the next set of three transcripts (again from three different levels of the organisation), immersing myself in the data (Terry et al., 2017). This process of finding 'the best codes' (phase 2) and eventually themes (phase 3; see 3.6) is represented in appendix (Appendix 6).

3. **Searching for Themes:** I then clustered the codes together to identify overarching themes or patterns within the dataset. Themes represent recurring patterns of meaning that capture essential aspects of the data.

4. **Reviewing Themes:** Identified themes were reviewed, and I checked if they work with the original data (the coded extracts) and the whole data set. I generated a visual representation (appendix 6). Throughout this process of reviewing themes and codes (Braun and Clarke, 2022), the constantly moving field was very challenging. In the one review one code or theme seemed to be more fitting to a certain excerpt, while then in the next review another code or theme seemed more fitting. This process would settle with the 'best fit' eventually when in the analysis the specific excerpt was

reported on. The second challenge at this stage was that not all excerpts could (or should) be reported on and analysed. The third challenge, which indeed remained unresolved throughout, was that some excerpts were allocated to several codes, which therefore, also after checking and reviewing again, needed furthermore the decision in which code/theme it would be reported and analysed (if at all!). Therefore, I had to live with a constantly unsatisfactory and unresolved situation of 'best fit' in creating a meaningful report on the contents with interpretation and analysis of it.

5. ***Defining and Naming Themes:*** Identified themes were refined and named. I defined themes based on their coherence, relevance, and significance to the research question. This iterative process involved revisiting the data to ensure that themes accurately reflected the dataset. The visual representation or thematic map changed significantly throughout the process in some aspects, whereas other themes or codes remained the same (and only some of the excerpts might have been reallocated underneath).

6. ***Writing up the Analysis****:* The final step involved synthesizing the findings into a coherent narrative addressing each theme, supported by illustrative quotes and examples from the data. Drawing on the full range of data sources for this study, narrative provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon.

In the above process I used a software called Nvivo. To apply thematic analysis to large sets of data, Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programmes have been developed. Gibbs (2021b) describes the advantages and challenges of using software to analysing qualitative data. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programmes have been developed to assist researchers with the vast amounts of data that qualitive studies can produce and are widely used nowadays. One of the most popular is Nvivo (Gibbs, 2021b), which has been used also in this study to assist with the analysis of around 140 pages of interview and focus group transcripts, as well as the qualitative elements of the survey, and with the ethnographic field notes. CAQDAS programmes in the past have been criticised by researchers for creating distance between themselves and the data (Fielding and Lee, 1998), however, Gibbs (2021b) points out that since then the programmes have moved on, allowing for a much smother navigating between researcher, codes and the original data. Gibbs (2021b) also points out that while the use of technology is not neutral, it is a tool that

supports the organisation of thought for the researcher, as word-processing does with a written text. While I experienced, certainly initially, a lot of technical challenges (importing pdf with line-numbers, license update in the middle of the research etc) overall I have to say that the convenience in the end of being able to review the excerpts of a number of separate transcripts, or the instant change of a code or theme name across the whole dataset by far outweighed those initial difficulties.

In summary, reflexive thematic analysis emerged for me in this study as the preferred method of data analysis for large sets of qualitative data due to its flexibility to be applied to different methods of data collection and its ability to deal with complexity. As a more inductive process it allowed me to identify codes, themes and therefore meaning in the data. The iterative nature allowed me to stand back more and reflect on my own positionality and biases, hence, enhancing the validity of the analysis.

4.   Ethical considerations
4.1 Introduction

In considering the question how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation I had to constantly undertake ethical considerations. Ethics are dealing with what is good or bad in the widest sense (Cohen et al., 2018), what is good for the individual and society and prevent harm to be done to either (Torlone, 2023; Ramrathan et al., 2017). More recently it has been expanded also to include considerations regarding the environment (Head, 2020).

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) has published ethical guidance documents for researchers (BERA, 2018; Brown, 2022) which were considered throughout. It aims, through ongoing consideration as well as conversation with all stakeholders, to make ethical decision-making an "actively deliberative, ongoing and iterative process of assessing and reassessing the situation and issues as they arise" (BERA, 2018, p. 2).

This study was embedded in and accompanied by a great number of formal and informal ethical considerations from beginning to end. In addition to the formal approval of the ethics board of the university, which I experienced indeed as an arduous bureaucratic but rigorous

process (Head, 2020; Torlone, 2023), I also went through a less time-consuming process with the Ruskin Mill Research Ethics Board (RMCP, 2024). I had a lot of informal conversations before, during and after the submission of the ethics application and research proposal, in Ruskin Mill Trust, in the ethics application process, with my supervisor and with other colleagues. This greatly fostered my ethical formation and stance on an ongoing basis (Head, 2020; Cohen et al., 2018).

I submitted my approval from Sheffield University in addition to and in parallel with considerations which are Ruskin Mill specific, as the Ruskin Mill students are of course vulnerable young people, and also, as I hold a position of power in the Trust. Therefore, I would in summary conclude that the study underwent very thorough and relevant ethical considerations by a number of people, experienced academics and researchers inside and outside of Ruskin Mill Trust. While I consider the ethical implications at different points throughout this study, following the BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018) I shall consider the ethical implications of this study here more explicitly in full (see also for a critique of the BERA guidelines Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

4.2. Participants

4.2.1. characteristics of participants

A challenge in this study when investigating how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation was to involve as many participants as possible in order to have an organisation-wide view. I also wanted to stimulate organisation wide conversation regarding the implementation of PSTE while also ensuring a clear ethical approach where participants involve themselves explicitly with informed consent at the different levels. To explore the implementation of the method through all levels of the organisation in the different stages participants were recruited from the following groups/roles:

1. all staff in the all-staff survey
2. a cross section of staff and roles in the focus groups
3. individual tutors and teachers in the interviews and workshop observations
4. centre leaders (i.e. Headteachers of schools and Principals and colleges)

5. Ruskin Mill Trustees

6. colleagues of the Ruskin Mill Executive Team (Director of Schools, Director of Colleges as well as Chief Financial Officer and Trust Head of Human Resources)

7. Aonghus Gordon, the founder and CEO
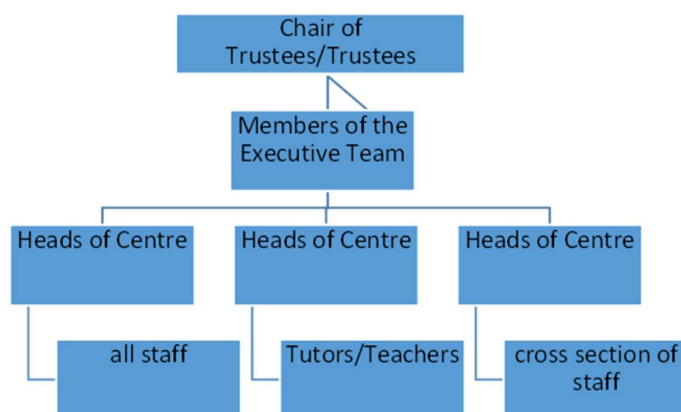
FIGURE 22 SIMPLIFIED REPRESENTATION OF POSITIONS OF PARTICIPANTS' ROLES IN THE ORGANISATION

With regards to personal characteristics of participants, only the ones which seemed to be relevant to the study were collated formally in the survey (i.e. role, site of work, department, length of service, contact time with students per week) and informally in the focus group and interviews. The typical categories of gender, age and ethnicity seemed to be less relevant in this study (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.2.2. The most important non-participants: the Ruskin Mill students

However, in the ethical application process, as well as, throughout the course of the study and especially the workshop observations, most conversations and considerations were about non-participants: the Ruskin Mill students (RMCP, 2024). As children and vulnerable adults who are in the vicinity and very close proximity to the research processes, it was clear that special care would need to be given to prevent students being involved overtly or

covertly, intentionally or non-intentionally. From my experience I knew that this can be a difficult process to plan for and control, as due to unforeseen circumstances such as tutor absence, logistical challenges, change of transport arrangements, timetable changes etc. additional or other students and/or staff can be in the session on any given day. While the focus of the study was on the understanding of the staff at different levels, it goes without saying that by applying the method or what staff understand the method to be, that they are also informed by the interactions with students. Feedback from the students forms an essential and significant part in furthering the staff' understanding of the method.

In the ethical application process and throughout the study the safeguards that were put in place were (in line with the Ruskin Mill Research Ethics Policy, RMCP, 2024, or its previous versions):

1. Discussions with centre leads and craft tutors about the focus of the study, ensuring that no data would be collected concerning students.
2. Clear information sheets being disseminated to centre leads and craft tutors beforehand.
3. Information sheets for parents and students disseminated to staff, students and parents before the workshop observations so that tutors could have the conversation with students in their sessions beforehand (see Appendix 3.4).
4. At the beginning of the workshop observation clearly stating my purpose of being there, that the understanding of the staff is the focus of the study and that no data from students would be collected (see script in Appendix 3.5).
5. Ensuring that everybody is comfortable with me being there.
6. During the observation: Ensuring that the students (and staff) feel free to voice their potential unease and feel free to either ask me to leave or leave themselves.
7. Following the observation: students can talk to their tutors or any other staff to let me know any concerns or questions they had.
8. Have a critical reader who ensures that no student data has found its way into the study (Bera, 2018; RMCP, 2024).

While initially I had a stronger wish to involve students, during the ethical application process and in conversations with my supervisor it became clear, that for ethical reasons, as well as, to focus the scope of the study, I should refocus the study on the staff only.

4.2.3. Ethical considerations regarding participants

The BERA guidelines (2018) name a number of ethical aspects for participants to be considered: namely consent, transparency, right to withdraw, incentives, harm arising from the research, privacy and data protection and disclosure (BERA, 2018; Brown, 2022). Before establishing informed consent from the participants, it was important to provide the fullest information possible for the different methodologies within the study (survey, observations, focus groups, interviews) (BERA, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). Furthermore, it was important to give participants opportunities to ask questions for clarification and/or to voice concerns, be it in person or via email (Cohen et al., 2018), also allowing non-participation or withdrawal before, during or after the actual interaction of data, also for the individual stages. This was to ensure that it was not assumed that somebody that was willing to give consent to and engage in the survey would automatically also participate in the focus group or an interview. With gaining firstly access to and secondly informed consent from participants the question of power was certainly a consideration (see 7.4.).

The most important principle of 'no harm' was in the context of this study also relating mostly to the question of power and my dual role as senior leader in the organisation and researcher. I had to ensure that there would not be any negative consequences for staff as a result of their participation (regarding harm, see also Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). On the other hand, there were also no physical incentives. However, again relating to the question of power, certainly approval from a senior leader might for some possibly have been a more intangible incentive.

Something that, reported through hearsay rather than as an official communication, was interesting early on, was the concern about anonymity in the participation of the survey. In an unofficial communication from a training coordinator I was told that some staff were concerned that the survey would be used as a performance management tool. Therefore, in the second follow up email (appendix 2.6.) there was another sentence regarding anonymity added (which was already addressed in the first introduction of the survey).

4.3.   Wider responsibilities and ethical implications

The BERA guidelines also stipulate the ethical implications and wider responsibilities to sponsors, other stakeholders, other researchers and those connected with dissemination and publication (BERA 2018; Brown, 2022).

There were ethical considerations which are relating to my dual role in the organisation and also to my own positionality. These are namely that the sponsor, Ruskin Mill Trust or its founder, Aonghus Gordon, who is also my line-manager, could have an interest in positive outcomes of the study. While this is certainly the case on both counts, this is something that has been monitored throughout, also by the critical reader, so that criticality is allowed and wished for. This is certainly on a cognitive level often voiced as a basis for ongoing improvement (see also interviews with Aonghus Gordon), while certainly on a personal and emotional level sometimes more difficult.

While there certainly has been impact on shaping the study from the sponsor, namely Aonghus Gordon, through conversations, this was always understood as a collaborative process and a strength rather than impacting negatively.

There certainly has been an ethical implication on myself as the researcher, to behave in a professional capacity as a researcher in the organisation as to not bring the intention of doctorate research into disrepute. This mainly involved explaining to colleagues who are not involved in this study what the benefits are, how it strengthens the position of the organisation when speaking to external stakeholders such as parents, inspectors or commissioners and that the beneficiaries of the research (as in deeper insights about what it is that we do and why we do it) are in the end the students and themselves.

Lastly, there are ethical implications for the anynomous treatment of any participants in any future publications or dissemination of the findings (BERA, 2018).

4.4.   Ethical implications for the researcher

The BERA guidelines also state the ethical responsibilities for the researcher (BERA, 2018; Brown, 2022). Firstly, there have been the considerations around physical risks in being around young people with challenging behaviour. Having worked in this environment for

more than 25 years I did feel well equipped to undertake this, but also being aware that it would not be my role to manage any behaviour other than being very sensitive to it and remove myself from escalating situations. Furthermore, when the ethical application was submitted some Covid guidelines were still in place which had to be considered.

A more prevalent issue was the mental pressure that, while working full time and having a busy family life, a doctorate study brought. While I undertook the doctorate the first two years without any time-allowances, some time was eventually needed and also granted when it came to writing the thesis which was very helpful.

5. Setting the scene: quantitative survey data and impressions from the ethnographic observations

5.1 Overall considerations

This study explores how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation and has used a number of different data sources (see section 3 and figure 23).

survey		interviews/ focus groups	ethnographic observations
quantitative data	qualitative data		
Discussion and integration of findings in context			
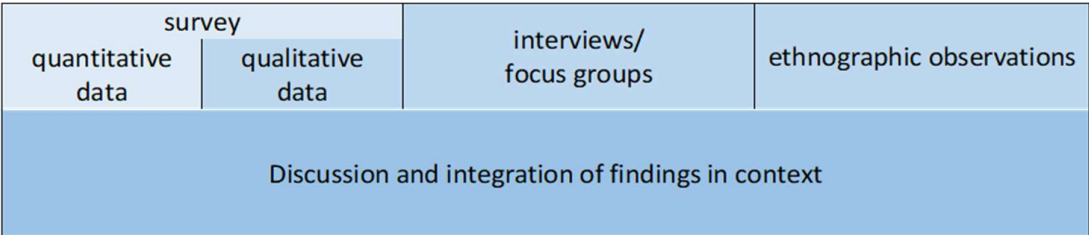
FIGURE 23 DATA SOURCES FOR THE STUDY

An emphasis is put on the understanding and meaning making of individuals in leadership positions and their impact onto the practice on the ground and vice versa. However, the findings and analysis of the quantitative data from the survey shall be presented here in brief form, only where I found it interesting, as it has not been the main emphasis of the study, could not be considered statistically relevant in any case and, as explained before (see 3.2.),

was more a means to create trust wide conversation and involvement of staff. Here they also provide an opening and foundation for the analysis of the qualitative data as discussed in section 6. The researcher's positionality (see 1.3.) must be taken into account in all of these decisions and discussions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2022).

5.2. survey-quantitative results

In order to explore how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation the following reported survey results largely serve to give the reader more of an orientation and 'flavour' of the kind of organisational structures, sites, roles and responsibilities are involved in a national organisation like Ruskin Mill Trust and to some extent how PSTE lives in it.

5.2.1. exploration of participants' background in relation to their understanding of the method

With 69 completed surveys out of approximately 1200 staff at the time (1131 to be precise on the 11/01/2023) the response rate was low (in the region of 6%) and statistically not significant. While there is not a fixed agreement on what an acceptable response rate is and debatably the response rate for voluntary surveys has been declining over the decades (Fulton, 2018; Stedman et al., 2019), this is still far below what is reported to be the average response rate (44% as described by Wu, Zhao and Fils-Aime, 2022). There are a number of possible causes that might have impacted on the overall response rate (Cohen et al. 2017):

- Free engagement: Despite holding a position of actual or perceived power in the organisation it was important to conduct this survey separate to my leadership role, i.e. leaving the participants' free choice to respond without any possible actual or perceived incentives or negative consequences.
- Survey length: while there was the aim that the survey length was about 20 minutes, some participants reported verbally taking more than one hour. However, it was felt that this was a risk worth taking in order to achieve some depth. In the pilot survey, which was already the length of the final survey, only one participant commented on the survey length with "Length of form is a little too long".

- Access to IT: While the survey was distributed to all staff via the central IT e-mail distribution list, some staff might not have accessed it as a great proportion of staff, such as day time and residential supportworkers, have little if any admin time and are possibly less likely to undertake a survey in their own time. Also, they might have overlooked the mail in their inbox. I attempted to mitigate this by having the training coordinators announcing the survey in the staff training and reminding staff that it is there for them to complete.

- Some staff might have started it but for the above or other reasons not completed; other reasons could be: being intimidated by the length or fear of embarrassment of their ignorance of the method, fear that their identity might not remain anonymous (Cohen et al., 2017).

On balance, however, given all the above factors, the survey has yielded a significant amount of data as well as supported the conversation about the method and the research into its implementation which was one of the purposes of the survey. Below I want to report some elements from the data concerning the quantitative part of the survey. Firstly, some data regarding the participant characteristics, to help the reader getting a better orientation of what kind of organisation RMT is, what structures and roles are available. Secondly, I want to correlate some of those characteristics with some initial findings of how these possibly relate to the understanding the method.

While these results are not really 'hard and fast' results of how staff understand the method, these questions on some aspects of the method and their relationship to certain roles and have generated some lines of inquiry to set the scene for the analysis in the discussion (section 6). There the qualitative data of the survey will be discussed in connection with the relevant research and the other qualitative data of the study. Furthermore, some aspects of the survey might form the basis for future research and application.

5.2.1.1. Question 1: Job role

roles of participants	no of responses	percentage
Tutor/Teacher	21	30.43%
Departmental/Senior Manager	11	15.94%
direct student support (support	11	15.94%
Manager	8	11.59%
other	7	10.14%
Director/Trustee	5	7.25%
Administration	3	4.35%
Therapist	3	4.35%
Grand Total	69	100.00%

TABLE 4 PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO ROLE

Most of the respondents were tutors or teachers (30%), followed by staff directly supporting students (16%) and departmental or senior manager (16%). The least responses came from administrative staff and therapists (4% each) (table 4).

It is important to consider that these job roles often have overlaps, some people have got several roles, hence accuracy is more approximate, for example an assistant principal should be classed as a "senior manager"/senior leader (I have taken the view in this case), or a "manager" is still a matter of ongoing discussion within the Trust. For the purpose of this survey roles such as "grower", "maintenance worker" or "researcher" I have classed as "other", as these roles neither belong to the group of staff with direct student contact nor do they belong to the leadership group. That is not to say that these are not overall important roles in the delivery of the method for the students and certainly further differentiation should be considered in future research. In reviewing some of the general staff data I have benefited from my insider position as a researcher and was able to draw on past and present experience as a leader and manager to give context to the data.

Row Labels	no of responses	Average of How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 1	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 2?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 3?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 4?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 5?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 6?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 7?
Administration	3	3.67	3.67	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Departmental/Senior Manager	11	3.55	3.73	3.64	3.36	3.64	3.55	2.91	3.55
direct student support (support worker/HEW/TA/RSW	11	3.00	2.91	3.18	2.91	3.09	3.18	2.82	3.09
Director/Trustee	5	3.80	4.20	4.00	3.60	4.20	3.80	3.75	4.00
Manager	8	3.75	4.13	3.75	3.88	3.75	3.75	3.38	4.00
other	7	2.57	2.86	3.00	2.86	2.71	2.57	2.29	2.57
Therapist	3	3.33	3.33	3.33	3.00	3.33	3.67	3.33	3.33

TABLE 5 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 1 AND 8-15: UNDERSTANDING OF METHOD COMPARED TO ROLE

Tutors/teachers assessed themselves to have the highest overall understanding of the method (n=21, 3.95) with Field 2 (4.14) being the highest aspect and Field 6 the lowest (3.35). Followed by Directors/Trustees (n=5, 3.80) who report their strongest understanding in Field 1 (4.20) and Field 4 (4.20). The lowest scores were found for "others" (n=7, 2.57) and direct student support (n=11, 3.00), both with most secure scores in Field 2 (3.00 and 3.18) and lowest scores in Field 6 (2.29 and 2.82). Therapists assessed themselves also below average (n=3, 3.33) with surprisingly their strongest Field of Practice being Field 5 (3.67) and not Field 6 as expected (table 5).

It is certainly interesting that Field 3 (Biodynamic Ecology) and Field 6 (Holistic Medicine) are the least understood in the self-perception, which does warrant further investigation. It is possibly a reflection of the general staff training, where most of the energy, attention and thinking, usually focusses on the crafts (Field 2-Practical Skills) and the sensory development and general child development (Field 4- Therapeutic Education).

5.2.1.2. Question 2: Place of work

Smaller and emerging Trust sites were grouped as one group to ensure anonymity. Staffing numbers were taken on the 11th of January 2023 (around when the survey was live) and are a constantly changing picture with staff joining, leaving and changing roles and sites every day. The sites with the most members of staff are Ruskin Mill College (21%), Sunfield Garden School (19%) and Glasshouse/Argent College (16%).

Trust Site	number of responses	percentage of responses	number of staff	percentage of staff	response rate
Brantwood Speciali	7	10.14%	74	6.54%	9.46%
Central Services	5	7.25%	83	7.34%	6.02%
Clervaux Garden Sc	11	15.94%	47	4.16%	23.40%
Coleg Plas Dwbl/Ty	2	2.90%	85	7.52%	2.35%
Freeman College	6	8.70%	125	11.05%	4.80%
Glasshouse College	13	18.84%	190	16.80%	6.84%
other	1	1.45%			
Ruskin Mill Centre f	3	4.35%	33	2.92%	9.09%
Ruskin Mill College	16	23.19%	243	21.49%	6.58%
Sunfield Garden Sc	3	4.35%	226	19.98%	1.33%
Trigonos/Catherine	1	1.45%	25	2.21%	4.00%
Trustee	1	1.45%			
Grand Total	69	100.00%	1131	100.00%	6.10%

TABLE 6 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES AND RESPONSE RATE ACCORDING TO SITE

The overall response rate is 6% (table 6) which is low compared to 44% in some research (Wu et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2018) but there is significant variation from site to site. With 23% Clervaux Garden School/The Fold/Rise having the best response rate and Sunfield Garden School with 1% which is the lowest response rate. This is likely to have been dependent on the conditions of the training day (i.e. Sunfield did not have a training day at the beginning of the year) and how the information was distributed, would warrant further investigation and suggests that possibly at Clervaux the request for survey completion has been taken really seriously and possibly even been undertaken in the training session (see deliberations in 4.2.2. survey construction and dissemination point 6). At Sunfield it might have been ignored to a good extent.

sites	number of responses	percentage of responses
schools	21	30.43%
colleges	42	60.87%
other	6	8.70%
Grand Total	69	100.00%

The options "other" and "Trustee" were given in the survey as the survey was also sent to trustees who are fully voluntary and have no place or site of work in the Trust or where staff did not wish to reveal their place of work.

TABLE 7 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES ACCORDING TO SCHOOLS OR COLLEGES

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Most responses came from staff from colleges (61%) (table 7), out of these from Ruskin Mill College (23%), followed by staff from Glasshouse College (19%) which represent roughly also the two largest colleges. From the schools (30%) most responses came from Clervaux Garden School (16%). Considering the size of the sites Sunfield Garden School (4%) could be considered underrepresented as it is in staff numbers comparable to Ruskin Mill College.

Row Labels	no of responses	Average of How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 1	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 2?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 3?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 4?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 5?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 6?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 7?
Brantwood Specialist School	7	3.71	3.71	3.71	3.57	3.71	3.86	3.71	3.86
Central Services	5	3.60	3.80	3.60	3.40	3.60	3.20	3.20	3.80
Clervaux Garden School/The Fold/Rise	11	2.91	3.00	3.00	2.64	2.91	3.09	2.55	2.82
Coleg Plas Dwbl/Tyr Eithin	2	4.50	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.50
Freeman College	6	3.67	4.33	4.33	3.67	4.00	3.67	2.83	3.67
Glasshouse College/Argent	13	3.46	3.46	3.31	3.31	3.62	3.31	3.31	3.54
other	1	2.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	2.00	1.00	3.00
Ruskin Mill Centre for Practice/Field Centre/Life Science Trust	3	4.00	3.67	3.67	3.67	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.67
Ruskin Mill College	16	3.63	3.75	3.94	3.31	3.56	3.63	3.06	3.63
Sunfield Garden School	3	4.33	3.00	4.33	4.00	4.33	3.67	3.50	3.67
Trigonos/Catherine Grace School/Pishwanton	1	3.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	4.00		3.00
Trustee	1	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Grand Total	69	3.52	3.63	3.65	3.36	3.57	3.43	3.09	3.52

TABLE 8 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 2 WITH 8-15: UNDERSTANDING OF METHOD COMPARED TO SITE

While there is a big range in the self assessment of the overall understanding of the method between sites (2.00-4.50) (table 8) there is no obvious pattern apparent within this small sample. The staff from Coleg Plas Dwbl/Tyr Eithin (n=2; 4.50), Sunfield Garden School (n=3; 4.33) and RMCP/Field Centre/Life Science Trust (n=3; 4.00) have the highest scores whereas other (n=1; 2), Clervaux Garden School/the Fold/Rise (n=11, 2.91) and the staff member from the most recently joined sites Trigonos/Cathrine Grace School/Pishwanton (n=1, 3.00) and the Trustee (n=1, 3.00) have the lowest scores.

5.2.1.3. Question 3: Department

participant department	no of responses	percentage
Day-time	41	59.42%
Residential	10	14.49%
Landtrust/Field Centre/Centre f	8	11.59%
Central Services	4	5.80%
Trustee	3	4.35%
other	2	2.90%
Day/Residential	1	1.45%
Grand Total	69	100.00%

TABLE 9 DEPARTMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Row Labels	no of responses	Average of How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 1	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 2?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 3?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 4?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 5?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 6?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 7?
Central Services	4	3.5	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.50
Day/Residential	1	4	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Day-time	41	3.56	3.58	3.66	3.37	3.59	3.37	3.03	3.51
Landtrust/Field Centre/Centre for Practice	8	4	4.00	4.00	3.63	3.88	3.63	3.38	3.88
other	2	1.5	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.00	1.50	1.00	2.00
Residential	10	3.4	3.60	3.60	3.20	3.40	3.90	3.30	3.60
Trustee	3	3.33	4.00	3.67	3.33	4.00	3.67	3.50	3.33
Grand Total	69	3.52	3.63	3.65	3.36	3.57	3.43	3.09	3.52

TABLE 10 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 3 WITH 8-15 UNDERSTANDING OF METHOD COMPARED TO DEPARTMENT

The most responses came from staff who consider themselves to be day-time staff (59%) (table 9) compared to 14% of residential staff, therefore, residential staff could be considered to be underrepresented as they roughly equal in numbers.

With regards to the self-assessment of the overall understanding of the method (table 10) day-time staff (n=41) rate their understanding slightly higher compared to residential staff (n=10) (3.56 compared to 3.4). However, residential staff feel more secure in Field 5 (3.90) compared to day time staff (3.37). Day-time staff feel most secure in Field 2 (3.66) and least secure in Field 6 (3.03). Residential staff feel the least secure in Field 3 (3.20). This could roughly reflect the training intensity that staff experience with residential staff generally having less access to regular staff training due to shift pattern. While this would warrant further investigation it is also reflected in some of the qualitative data of the survey discussed below (see 6.3.2.6. staff training).

Staff who are engaged at the Landtrust/Field Centre/ Centre for Practice rate themselves the most secure (average of 4 overall). This can be explained as they are involved in thinking through the method on a daily basis on a conceptual level. However, also here is Field 6 the least understood aspect (3.38).

While the three participants who identified themselves as trustees rate their overall understanding of the method below the average (3.33) they assess themselves to be the most secure in Field 1-Genius Loci and Field 4-Therapeutic Education (each 4) and the least secure in Field 3-Biodynamic Ecology and Field 7-Transformative Leadership (3.33).

The survey has given participants the opportunity to class themselves as day/residential as some staff work across, as well as "other", which attracted 1 or 2 responses. Looking at those outlier responses in context allows some further reflections.

1. Please click the boxes that best describe your job role	2.Which trust site are you based at (smaller emerging sites are grouped as one group to ensure anonymity) :	Which department does your role belong to?	How m.
other	other	other	20 +
direct student support (support worker/HEW/TA/RSW)	Ruskin Mill College	other	20 +
Departmental/ Senior Manager	Glasshouse College/Argent	Day/Residential	0-5

TABLE 11 CONTEXT DETAIL ON OUTLIERS ("OTHER" AND "DAY/RESIDENTIAL" IN PREVIOUS TABLE)

While one participant has answered "other" to the first three questions possibly in order to securely not be identified, the second "other" has the role of direct student support (either day or residential) and the person who answered "day/residential" is a senior or departmental manager who is apparently working across day and residential.

Looking through the answers of the second "other" has been interesting as it paints the picture of a staff member who, despite stating that he/she has been at RMT 3-7 years, engaged relatively little with the concepts of the method. Self-assessing understanding as "1" throughout, s/he also for example answers the question of "What is your understanding of the planes of space?" with "Unsure, Combat move for self defense? Mappa training" which could be seen as slightly provocative.

5.2.1.4. Question 4: Hours per week of direct student contact

hours of direct student contact per week	number of responses	percentage of responses
0-5	22	31.88%
5-20	12	17.39%
20+	35	50.72%
Grand Total	69	100.00%

TABLE 12 HOURS OF DIRECT STUDENT CONTACT PER WEEK

no of contact hours per week	no of responses	Average of How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 1	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 2?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 3?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 4?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 5?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 6?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 7?
0-5	22	3.73	3.95	3.86	3.73	3.86	3.55	3.33	3.82
5-20	12	3.42	3.50	3.42	3.08	3.25	3.25	2.83	3.33
20 +	35	3.43	3.47	3.60	3.23	3.49	3.43	3.03	3.40
Grand Total	69	3.52	3.63	3.65	3.36	3.57	3.43	3.09	3.52

TABLE 13 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 4 WITH 8-15: UNDERSTANDING OF METHOD COMPARED TO STUDENT CONTACT

The majority of responses came from staff who consider themselves to have more than 20+ hours of direct student contact (51%) (table 12). This makes the survey results more relevant as it is the assessment of staff who are directly delivering the method of RMT with students. 32% of the respondents have 0-5 hours direct student contact. Investigating this group further has revealed that this group mainly comprises senior and middle managers as well as trustees.

The staff with the least amount of student contact (0-5) (n=22) have assessed themselves to have the strongest overall understanding of the method (3.73) (table 13). This is possibly due to those staff having moved into leading roles in middle and senior management and governance.

5.2.1.5. Question 5: length of service

length of service	number of responses	percentage of responses	total number of staff	percentage of total staff
0-3 years	29	42.03%	475	42.00%
3-7 years	18	26.09%	350	30.95%
7 + years	22	31.88%	306	27.06%
Grand Total	69	100.00%	1131	100.00%

TABLE 14 LENGTH OF SERVICE

The majority of respondents have joined RMT more recently in the last three years (42%) but also about one third has been working at RMT for more than 7 years (32%). This could be relevant in the exploration of the relationship of length of service and depth of understanding of the method. Those percentages are roughly representative for the length of time staff have been working at RMT overall.

Row Labels	percentages of responses	Average of How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 1	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 2?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 3?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 4?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 5?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 6?	Average of How would you rate your understanding of Field 7?
0-3 years	42.03%	3.07	3.14	3.28	2.90	3.28	3.17	2.86	3.10
3-7 years	26.09%	3.67	3.88	3.78	3.50	3.61	3.50	3.18	3.72
7 + years	31.88%	4.00	4.09	4.05	3.86	3.91	3.73	3.32	3.91
Grand Total	100.00%	3.52	3.63	3.65	3.36	3.57	3.43	3.09	3.52

TABLE 15 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 5 WITH 8-15: UNDERSTANDING OF METHOD COMPARED TO LENGTH OF SERVICE

As one would expect the staff group who assess themselves to have the overall strongest understanding of the method are those who have been at Ruskin Mill the longest (32%, 4.00), their strongest Field is Field 1 (4.09) and weakest Field 6 (3.32). Comparatively the strongest Field of staff who joined more recently (0-3 years 42%) are Field 2 (3.28) and Field 4 (3.28) with the weakest Field again being Field 6 (2.86). This could warrant further investigation and reflection on different training opportunities for staff members at different points in their institutional journey.

5.2.2 example of some deeper investigation into question 8

The crucial question 8 "How would you rate your overall understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice" warrants some deeper investigation and reflection on a quantifiable self-assessment. While the scope of this study does not allow for this to be undertaken across all of the questions, this could well be the topic of further future research and applicable to future method surveys.

Having investigated the relationship of the self-rated depth of understanding of the method to other factors such as department of work, site of work etc, I was interested to look at some of the outliers in more depth and across answers. Overall 8 participants have graded themselves as having 5="deep" understanding of the method. Building on the view (Gordon and Cox, 2024) that PSTE is a unique educational method of Ruskin Mill Trust and therefore can only be learned at Ruskin Mill Trust at the moment. I was interested in the length of service of those 8 participants, therefore, I took a closer look at the two participants who have been in the organisation 0-3 years.

Participant 28 is certainly interesting. Declaring to have a "5=deep" understanding of the method, s/he also declared in question 7: "It is connected to concepts I worked with at previous organisations and in education, so I understand it. As a dyslexic, I can't hope to link each of the field numbers and terms in my memory, but I understand them." While there is some further understanding of Steiner's insights demonstrated, e.g. in the answer to question 42 "What is your understanding of the twelve senses?" Answer: "They are Steiner's understanding of the senses, which encompass the Five senses often taught in biology"; the actual depth of understanding is questionable, looking at other responses, e.g. question 36. "What would you describe is the difference between organic and biodynamic vegetables?" – answer: "Organic, plus extras." In summary the question remains how deep the understanding is and how far beyond the usage of words and concepts it goes, filled with differentiated meaning. Of course this applies to other participants in general as well.

There is also quite a critical attitude towards the leadership of the organisation shining through; e.g. question 95. "How would you describe your overall understanding of Field 7? What would help you to develop this further?"- answer: "I would love for all staff to be considered experts and leaders in their roles, and to be consulted and asked their opinions

accordingly". Or question 32. "How would you describe your overall understanding of Field 2? What would help you to develop this further?" – answer: "Very high. I would love to be asked which kind of craft trainings would be beneficial to my development, rather than told."

Participant 51 has an agency role and hence has been at RMT for 0-3 years. However, the answer to some of the questions could indicate that there is some deeper prior knowledge, e.g. question: 36. "What would you describe is the difference between organic and biodynamic vegetables?" – answer: "biodynamic allows the use of constellations and spirits to help grow". But also admitting that -despite having assessed themselves as having deep knowledge in all fields- some training in e.g. Field 6 would be helpful (question 78).

In summary, it suffices to say that, as in probably most studies more data was gained than can be analysed to the fine grained detail and correlation as shown in the two examples I have chosen above. However, these showed that length of service is not always a reliable indicator of depth of knowledge.

5.2.3. some further noteworthy points regarding the understanding of the method

The full results of the survey can be seen on request and not all results can be discussed within this study. However, some noteworthy points which highlight aspects of how Ruskin Mill Trust might ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation shall be presented here. They shall be explored in their relationship with other factors such as practical engagement and attendance of courses or training. However, given the initial comments on representativeness (see 5.1.) these numbers would also need to be taken with caution and should be further investigated before coming to fast conclusions. Especially with the small numbers of participants there might be other reasons why a staff have been able to participate in an activity such as the Genius Loci audit, even if it had been offered as part of the staff training (e.g. sickness, work pressures etc).

5.2.3.1. Field 1- Genius Loci
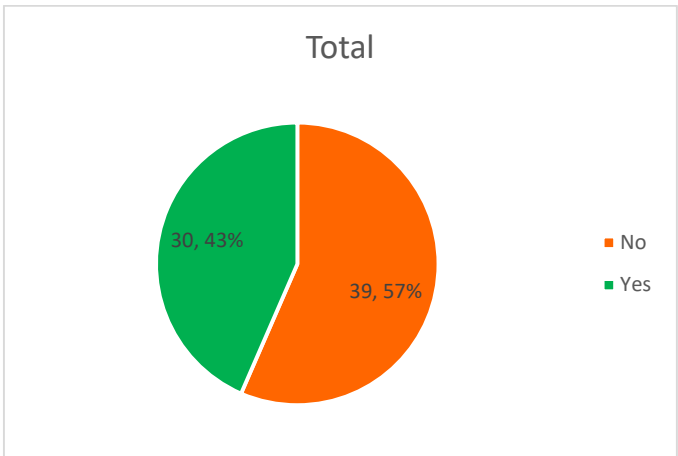
TABLE 16 QUESTION 16: OVERALL PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN GENIUS LOCI AUDIT IN THE LAST THREE YEARS (NUMBER, PERCENTAGE)[20]

With regards to understanding the method one can assume that an involvement in the Genius Loci audit would lead to a more thorough understanding. However, 57% of participants have not been involved in a Genius Loci audit themselves in the last 3 years.
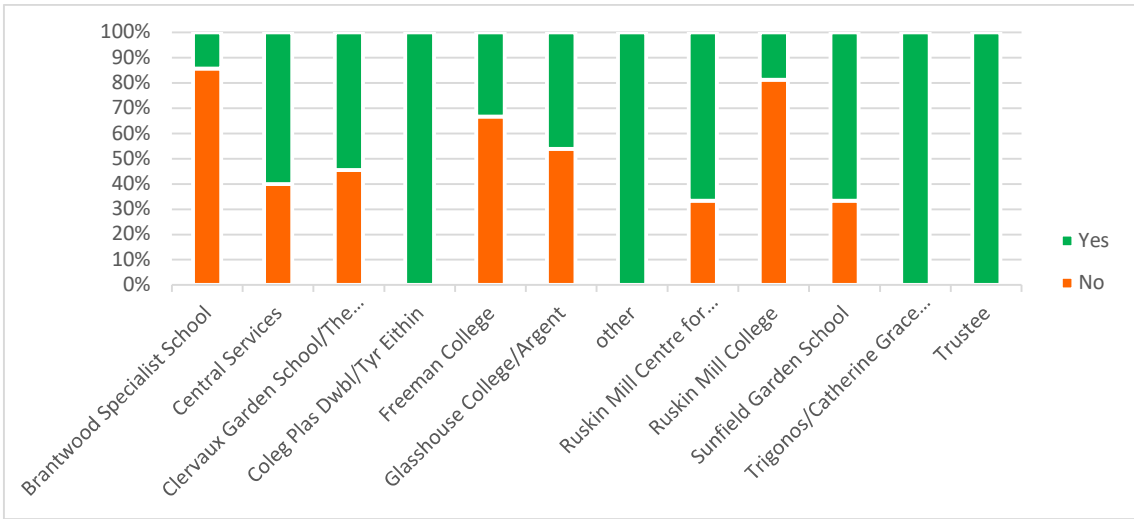
TABLE 17 INVOLVEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS IN GENIUS LOCI AUDIT IN THE LAST THREE YEARS COMPARED TO SITE

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[20] Please note that in this and the following pie charts the first number signifies the actual number of participants, the second number is this in percentage of the whole 69 participants.

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Investigating this further and correlating it to the participants place of work the above chart might reveal the workplaces of the participants that are in need of undertaking a further Genius Loci audit and involve the staff in this.
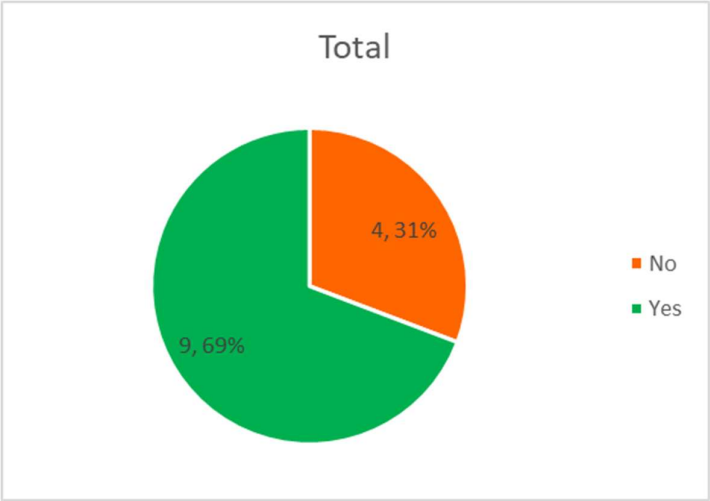
TABLE 18 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 9 AND 16: INVOLVEMENT IN GENIUS LOCI AUDIT IN THE LAST THREE YEARS COMPARED TO THOSE PARTICIPANTS WHO ASSESSED THEMSELVES HAVING 5='DEEP' UNDERSTANDING OF FIELD 1

It is interesting that even of those participants who assessed themselves as having 5='deep' understanding of Field 1, 31% had not participated in a Genius Loci audit in the last three years (table 16). It might be a question in how far in this self-assessment their knowledge is still relevant to the current practice of a Genius Loci audit, especially assuming that PSTE is a living and constantly evolving and developing method (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

5.2.3.2. Field 2- Practical Skills
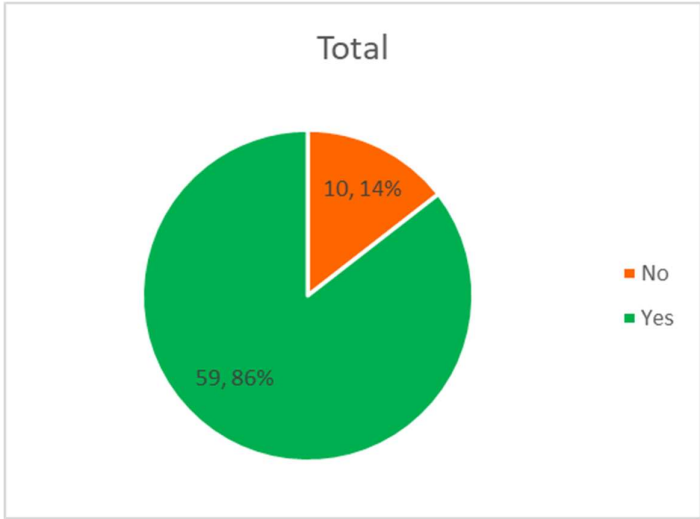
TABLE 19 QUESTION 26: STAFF WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A CRAFT SESSION IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS

86% of all participants have been involved in a craft session in the last 6 months. Given that the crafts are one of the unique and very immediate tangible differences in the Ruskin Mill approach this certainly is a strong point.
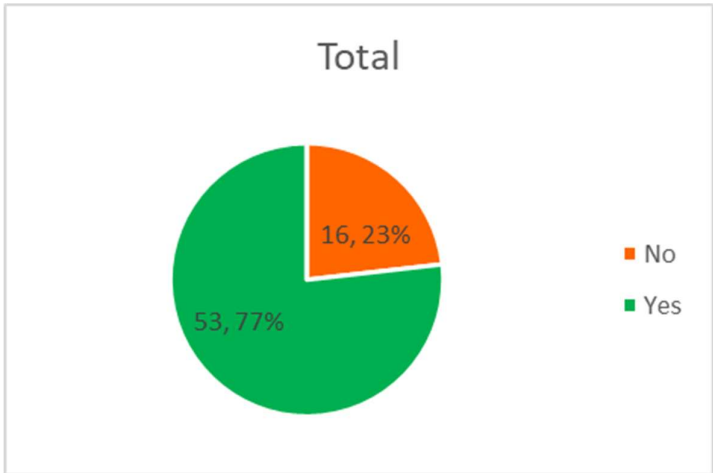
TABLE 20 QUESTION 27 PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE MADE AN ITEM OF SERVICE IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS

The next question (table 20) takes this one step further, as 77% of participants actually completed an item of service. It is of course possible that some participants are not conversant with the terminology but it might be noteworthy that not all craft sessions also lead to an actual artefact being produced, and hence falls short in the actual pedagogy (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

Total

29, 42%
40, 58%

- No
- Yes

42% of participants have or are undertaking the PPOC course (table 21). Given that this is a two year course with attendance of lectures and practical workshops as well as a final presentation by the participants this is a substantial number of participants.
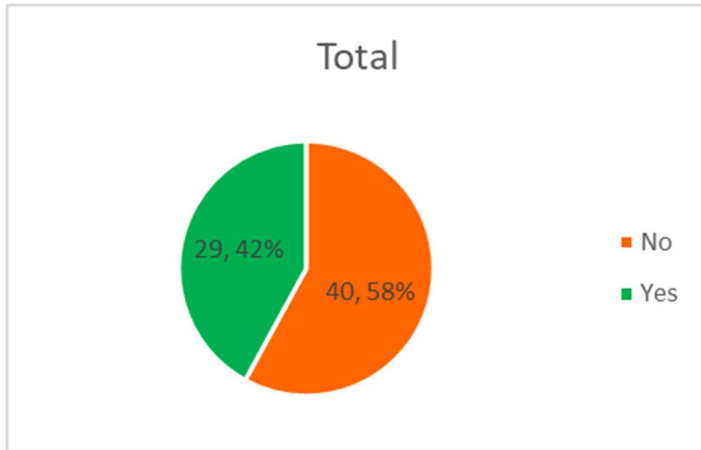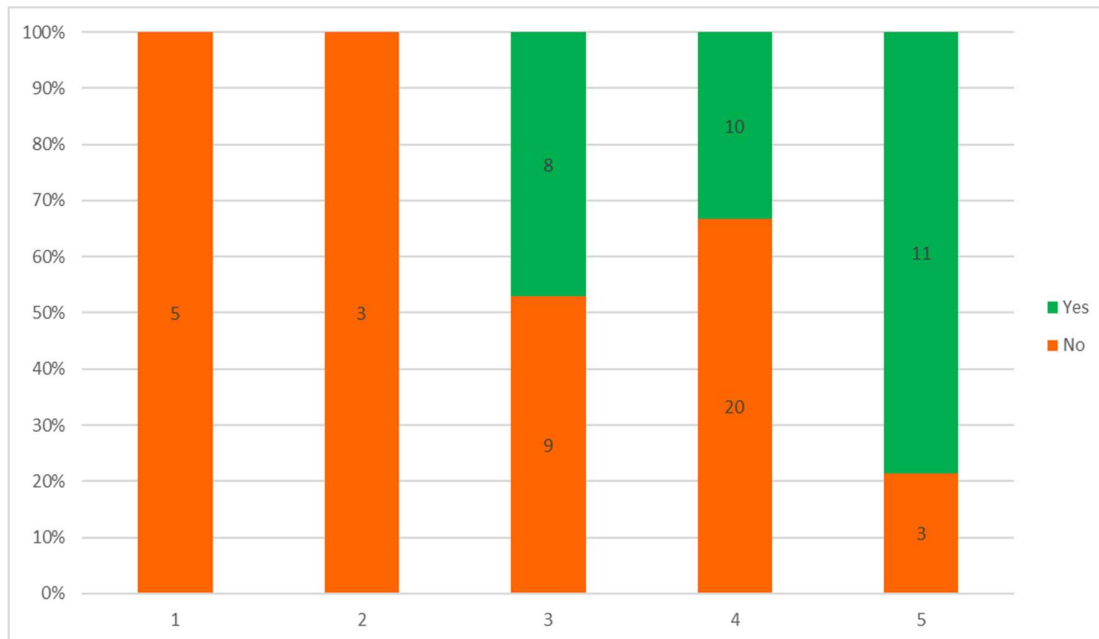
TABLE 22 CORRELATION OF QUESTION 31 AND 10: CURRENT OR PAST PARTICIPATION IN THE "PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF CRAFT" COURSE ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF FIELD 2

Correlating the participation in the PPOC course with the self-assessment of the participants' understanding of Field 2 reveals that all participants who have in the past or at the time of

the survey undertaken the PPOC rate their understanding 3 or higher which could be an indicator for the effectiveness of the training.

The above tables and their analysis serve as an illustration of in depth review of understanding of aspects of PSTE and the complexities that arise in doing so. This analysis is of course based on my perspective and possible through my years of experience of working in RMT and with PSTE (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Similar reflective and reflexive thoughts are possible around all of the questions and Fields of Practice, however, following this illustration we shall now move to Field 7- Transformative Leadership as this has the greatest relevance with regards to the research question of how RMT ensures coherence in understanding and implementing of PSTE, which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation.

5.2.3.3. Field 7 – Transformative Leadership

Count of 79. Do you have a copy of the vision and values card on you at all times?

Total

15, 22%

54, 78%

79. Do you have a copy of...
- No
- Yes
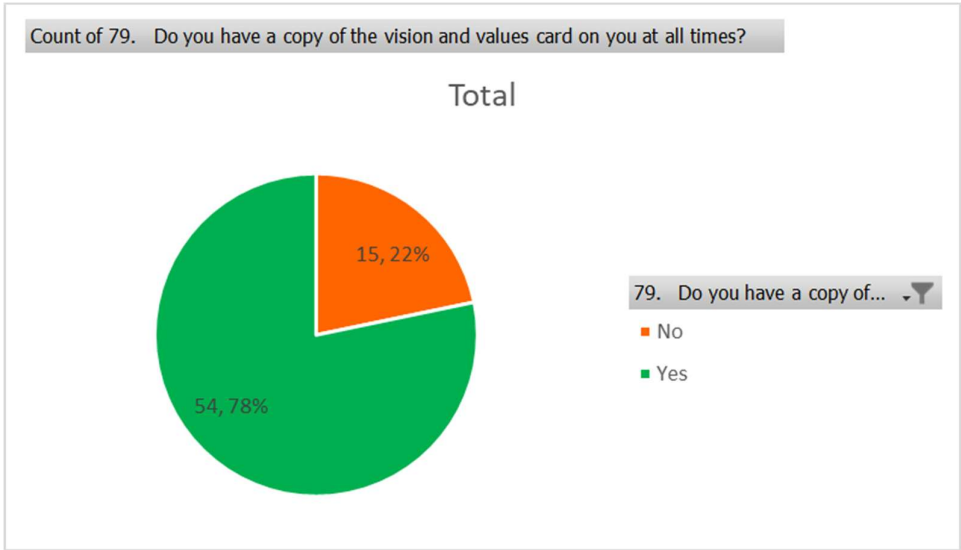
TABLE 23 PARTICIPANTS WHO REPORT THAT THEY HAVE A VISION AND VALUES CARD ON THEM AT ALL TIMES

78% of participants report that they carry a "Vision and Values Card" (Appendix 1.1) with them at all times. This small pocket card contains in a very concise form the main coordinates of the Seven Fields of Practice, the charitable objects, Ruskin Mill's Meta Diagram (Figure 23). As a physical representation of the Trust's method, this appears to be a high number of participants who carry this physical representation with them which could show a high commitment to the organisational culture (Laloux, 2014; Coyle, 2018) and alignment with the vision (Fry 2003; Samul, 2020; Hugo and Iverson, 2024).
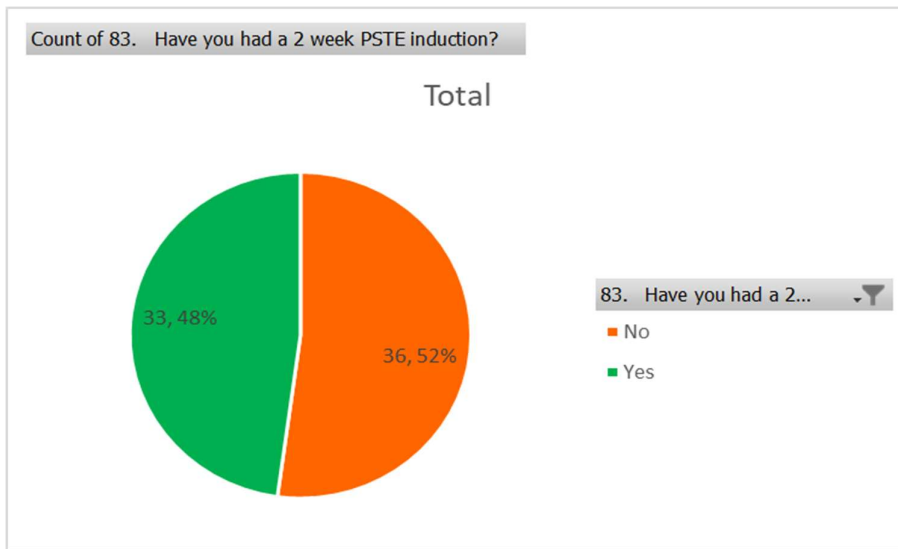
TABLE 24 PARTICIPANTS WHO HAVE HAD THE 2 WEEK PSTE INDUCTION

Interestingly, only half (48%) of the participants report to have had the 2 week PSTE induction for all staff (see also point 2.4.4. research and training as part of the method and 6.3.2.6. in the discussion). Upon further investigation, it appears that a good number of those who have not received a 2 week PSTE induction have been employed by the Trust for more than 7 years (see table 31), which is around the time when it was introduced. However, still only about 45% of the participants who have been with the Trust for less than three years state to have had the 2 week induction (table 23) .
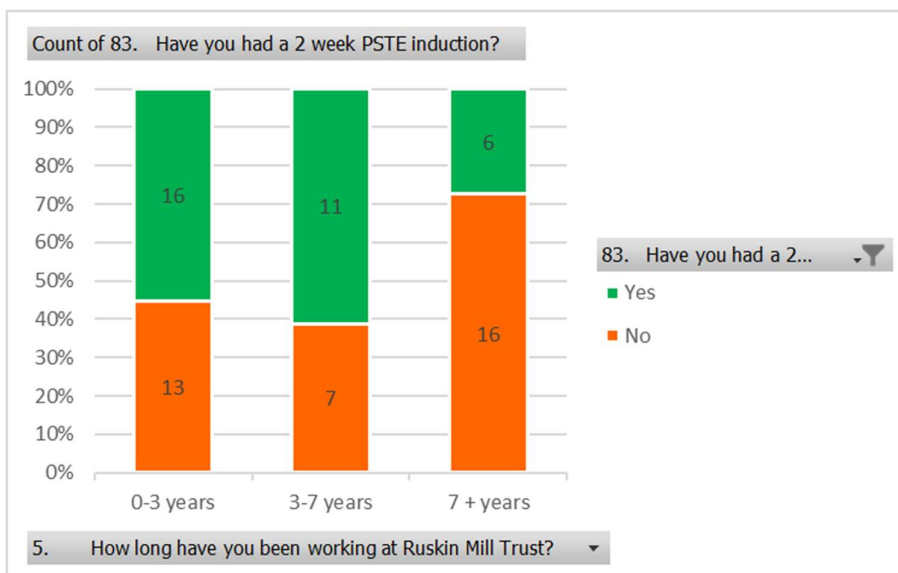
TABLE 25 CORRELATION QUESTION 83 WITH 5: PARTICIPANTS REPORTING ON HAVING HAD THE 2 WEEK PSTE INDUCTION COMPARED TO THEIR LENGTH OF SERVICE
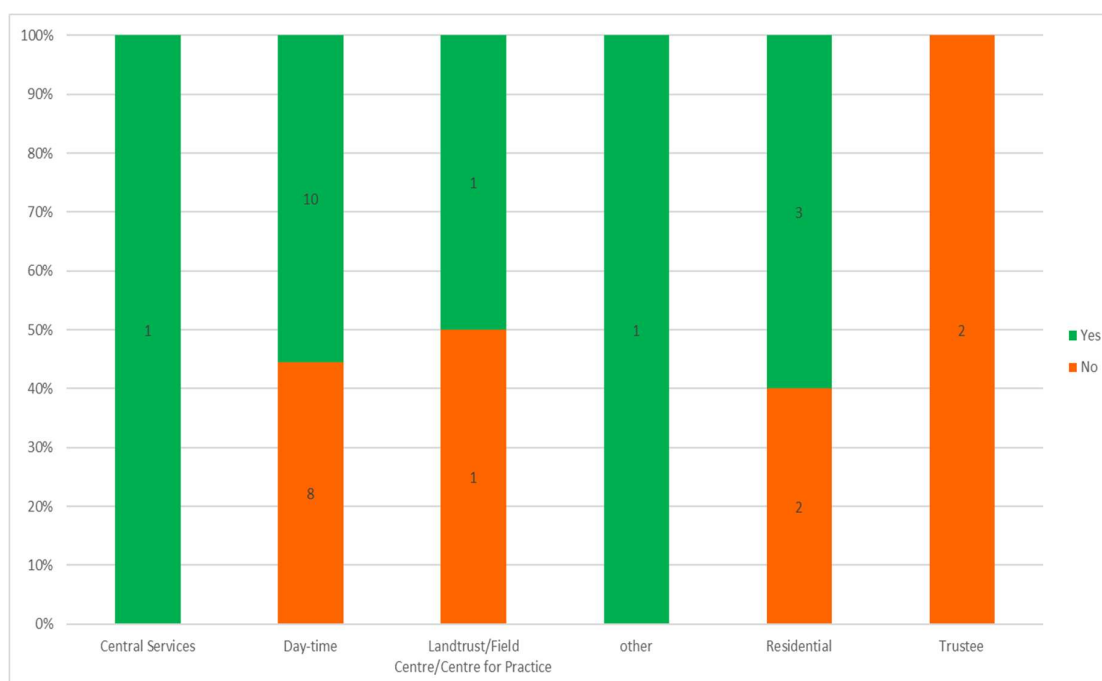
TABLE 26 CORRELATION QUESTION 83 WITH 5: PARTICIPANTS REPORTING ON HAVING HAD THE 2 WEEK PSTE INDUCTION COMPARED TO THEIR DEPARTMENT (0-3 YEARS LENGTH OF SERVICE)

Of the group of participants with less than three years of service, (table 26) considering their department two trustees have not had the induction which would not have been an expectation either because of the length of time. However, 40% of residential staff, 50% of the Landtrust staff and 45% of the day time staff report not to have had the 2 week PSTE induction. While I have since revisited those numbers in my managerial role (and am pleased to say that they have improved), it appears that this will need further investigation and conversation in the organisation and a review of the monitoring systems.

In summary, it can be said that this survey has yielded many interesting results and while only a small percentage of staff undertook it, it appears that this is something that could be expanded on in the future with various applications possible (see section 6 and 7.2.). While these survey results have hopefully given a good flavour of the complexity of the organisation, where areas of coherence could be (e.g. engagement in crafts, carrying the Vision and Values Card) and possible areas of development are (e.g. ensuring consistency in the staff induction, the quality of the course where staff do attend it) and have engaged staff from across the Trust at all levels and given the study a great breadth. The ethnographic workshop

observations have given it depth and were helpful in giving me once more impressions from the work on the ground.

5.3. impressions from the ethnographic workshop observations

In exploring the question how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, the survey has given me breadth of engagement and insights whereas with the ethnographic observations I wanted to achieve depth (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). The full field notes, which can be found in "Part III ethnographic diary", were recorded as described in section 3.3. Ethnographic workshop observations were coded using Nvivo and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, various) and will be discussed in the following section. However, while I do not wish to formally analyse the pictures of myself in the craftworkshop and the environment, I do wish to share them at this stage as they give the reader a good flavour of the places where staff, students, material and method come together.

5.3.1. Blacksmithing – making a hook- field notes (ll. 1-222)

FIGURE 24 MYSELF IN THE BLACKSMITHING WORKSHOP ON THE BELLOW

All three workshops offer different materials and processes and by doing so different sensory qualities (Gordon and Cox, 2024; Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021). As more explored in section 6 and the field notes (ll. 1-222) the forge offered me darkness and light,

warmth, moving with precision, listening to the sound of the hammer hitting the anvil while standing stable and balanced.

FIGURE 25 THE OUTSIDE OF THE BLACKSMITHING WORKSHOP

FIGURE 27 HITTING THE GLOWING IRON
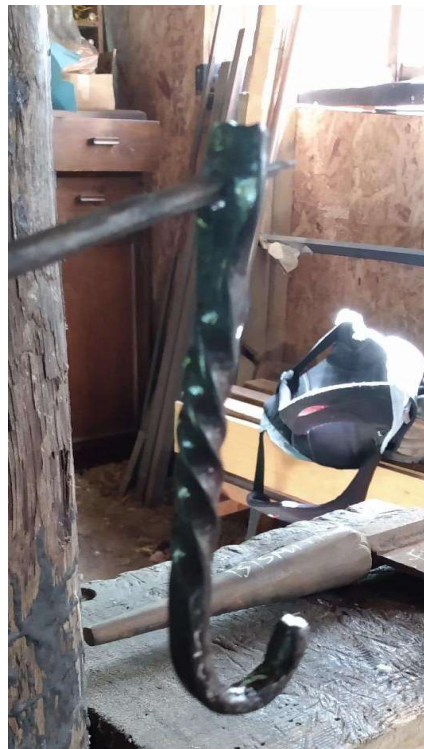
FIGURE 26 THE FINISHED HOOK

5.3.2. Greenwood working – making a stool – field notes (ll.223-538)

The Greenwoodworking offered different qualities: in the green, facing towards the trees, shaping a stool leg on the pole-lathe, moving legs, hands and focus at different rhythms, bringing together focus, grasp and step (see also figure 15 and section 2.5.3.)

FIGURE 28 STEP - THE POLE LATHE WHEN MAKING A STOOL LEG

FIGURE 29 FOCUS AND GRASP WHEN MAKING A STOOL LEG

FIGURE 30 THE FINISHED STOOL

The item of service, the traditional Sheffield cutler's stool.

5.3.3. Felting – making a pair of slippers – field notes (ll. 567-702)

FIGURE 30 THE WOOL-CRAFT WORKSHOP

Different processes of first wet felting and then dry felting. Warmth, wet, soapy water, very undefined, round movements, contrasted by later dry felting with stabbing movement, becoming more precise with the sawing and stitching in colourful surroundings.

FIGURE 31 THE SLIPPERS WERE FIRST WET FELTED AND THEN NEEDLE (DRY) FELTED

FIGURE 31 THE FINISHED PAIR OF SLIPPERS WITH THE ORIGINAL WOOL

The survey and the pictures have hopefully given reader some more breadth and depth of Ruskin Mill as an organisation and if not experiencing at least visually seeing some PSTE processes in practice. Into this context we now want to situate the discussion of the qualitative data, excerpts from the qualitative survey responses, the interviews and focus groups and ethnographic.

6. Results, analysis and discussion
6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will firstly outline the approach to analysis of the qualitative data across the different data sources of survey, ethnographic observations, interviews and focus groups and present code development (Braun and Clarke, 2022), followed by the themes, sub-themes and codes found and some initial interpretation of their relationship. From their relationship I will then discuss each theme in relation to the findings and analyse them in the light of the literature and my own insights.

This study explores how Ruskin Mill Trust can ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation. Therefore, an emphasis is put on the understanding and meaning making of individuals in leadership positions and their impact onto the practice on the ground and vice versa. As a result of this, from the wealth of data generated, I have given more attention (and space in the study) to the qualitative data of the survey, the ethnographic observations (see Part III), the interviews and focus groups (see Part IV). The codes and themes that I found in the data in this iterative process, shifting between more deductive and more inductive modes, I will present and discuss alongside each other, as Braun and Clarke (2022, especially p. 131 f.) suggested, as the data and the researcher's subjective and reflexive interpretation are crucial to the process. I also believe that this avoids repetition and allows a better flow for the reader.

The codes, themes and subthemes identified during the process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022 and various) and arrived at in the end can be found in the below table (table 27). Following Braun and Clarke's (2022) advice, I have left out the number of files and references

as not to confuse approaches of qualitative and quantitative data analysis and not lead the reader to wrong assumptions about significances and priorities.

Name
codes
1 understanding the method
1 practice
1 practical experience (craft,land, other)
2 motivation
2 emotional and social
1 helpful biographical experience
2 emotional engagement
3 social mentoring or apprenticeship
3 theory and cognitive
1 self reflection in the process
2 critique and challenge to understanding
3 language
4 Steiner and spiritual dimension
2 leadership and management
1 leaders and managers involved on the ground
2 attribute of successful RMT leader
3 (self) critique of RMT leadership
4 significance of governance, leadership and management
3 organisational structure and development
1 structure, systems and curriculum
2 financial structure
3 method and compliance
4 recruitment
5 succession and AG involvement
6 staff training
4 development of the method
1 research
2 organisational future challenge
3 feedback from practitioners

TABLE 27 OVERVIEW OF CODES, THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Through the iterative process of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022) I identified four themes with relevance to the research question:

theme	Characteristics
Understanding the method	the entry points as well as challenges to understanding the method (on a practical, emotional or cognitive level)
Leadership and management	significance and involvement of leaders and managers
Organisational structure and systems	Systems and processes around understanding and implementing PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice
Development of the method	Reflections on future opportunities and challenges (internal and external) with regards to the method

TABLE 28 THEMES IDENTIFIED THROUGH RTA

The codes, themes and subthemes were also applied to the ethnographic diary and the qualitative data of the survey to corroborate those findings. Using NVIVO allowed the codes and themes to be used to explore the different data sets together across the different research methods, corroborating and integrating the findings more in the following sections.

When choosing excerpts I tried to avoid repetition and tried to choose excerpts which are highlighting and representing the relevant theme, subtheme or code well. When giving the sources for certain excerpts I have used some abbreviations, e.g.:

"Excerpt" (Survey, Question 47, Participant 13) as (S, Q47, P13)
"Excerpt" (Interview 1, lines 234-237) as (I1, ll.234-237)
"Excerpt" (Focus Group 16, lines 135-138) as (FG16, ll. 135-138)
"Excerpt" (Ethnographic Diary, lines 67-69) as (D, ll. 67-69)

To aid further reflections, I have rephrased the four themes as questions. Furthermore, I have collapsed theme 2: leadership and management and theme 3: organisational structure and development under the question: How do we implement the method? While I had not set to structure the themes in what emerged as a process flow, I was pleasantly surprised to see that it made sense in the end:
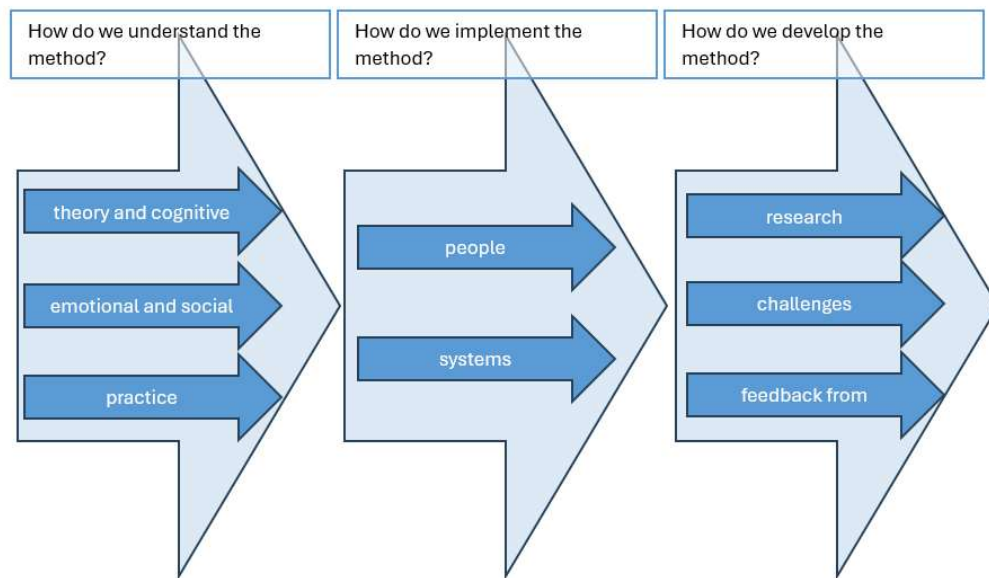
FIGURE 32 OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

However, I do not wish to evoke the impression that we are looking at a neat linear process. It is much more the understanding of the method which informs the practice and the practice which then shapes the method in return as well. There will be aspects which are more circular than linear, and the interplay of method, implementation, performance, research and reflection is no doubt multidimensional. Nevertheless, I found this a hopefully meaningful structure and way of presenting findings and their interpretations for the reader in the next sections.

6.2. Introduction to theme 1: How do we understand an educational method?

Considering the research question of how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation, it appears that before we can implement something we have to understand it to a certain extent (Bush, 2020; Lovell, 1994; Hersey et al. 2001). While not everybody has to understand the thing, approach, method to be implemented in its entirety, certainly those with considerable responsibility for larger parts of the organisation (e.g. a school or a college) have to understand more

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(Leithwood et al., 2008). Having said that, it is also conceivable that there are parts of the method, which the student is exposed to and hopefully benefiting from, that are less understood without it being to the detriment of the student. As one could also say that each of the Seven Fields in PSTE represents a specialism to some extent which then as a whole come together in the student experience, there are also people in the Trust who are naturally more versed in one aspect then in the other. Examples could be Field 3-Biodynamic Ecology and Field 6-Holistic Medicine where highly specialised staff deliver the aspect of PSTE which then possibly leads to a lower understanding of these aspects in the rest of the staff body as apparent from the survey (see table 2; section 5.2.1.1.), where staff report generally a lower understanding in these two aspects. Examples are the Biodynamic Landmanager, who is hopefully specialised in biodynamic landmanagement, growing and working with staff and students on the land and with animals whereas he has possibly less experience of Eurythmy therapy. Vice versa the Eurythmy therapist is an expert in Field 6 and particularly Eurythmy therapy but possibly not so much in Field 3 Biodynamic Ecology. Having specialists in these fields, where the training takes years, and the insights are not necessarily as accessible to the untrained novice as for example education (everybody has got some experience of education but not everybody has got experience of eurythmy therapy) then maybe also leads to staff 'leaving it to the expert'.

While students in their time in a Ruskin Mill provision most likely experience all of the Seven Fields, staff will have specialisms. Therefore, while not everybody has to understand everything, those in positions of significant responsibility have to understand the different aspects to a good extent, without necessarily having to be a specialist in any of them (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024c).

Equally, as individuals have their different biographies, they also find different entry points into the method (see point 2.4.4.). While overall in the coding I have taken a deductive, or bottom up approach, while still keeping the research question in mind, to further structure the codes I have chosen three subthemes for the first theme "Understanding the method", considering that people will have different preferences and ways of understanding (Hannon, 2021). Steiner on occasions will speak about the different qualities of thinking (cognition), feeling (emotion) and willing (action) and how these develop throughout childhood and are used as different modalities to further learning and understanding (see especially Steiner,

1985). There are also others who have taken this further, exploring how these preferences affect the vocational pathways we chose and how this relates to what is valued in society and what are culturally situated expectations (e.g. Goodheart, 2020). Aonghus also describes how the method evolved through doing it, the naming -the cognitive aspect- in fact came last: *"In all of these concepts, the insight comes afterwards as you name it, but the practice comes first"* (Gordon and Cox, 2023, p. 23).

While the interplay of action, emotion and cognition is also described in other learning theories (Bloom et al. ,1956) or also training evaluations (Kraiger et al., 1993). Ruskin Mill - based on Steiner's insights- speaks about the hands, the head and the heart:

> the physical activity (hands), oriented towards creating something that is meaningful and useful for others, and guided in a supportive environment, involves new learning and intellectual development (head), but the end goal is for the young person to be able to engage in "self-generated conscious action": to decide for themselves what they want to do in the world, to become able to do it, and to carry that out (heart). (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 96)

Therefore, these three categories seem to be apt as subthemes in attempting to answer the question how staff find access to the method, starting with practice.

6.2.1. Practice

When considering what has been helpful and what has been challenging with regards to furthering the understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice there are a number of topics that have recurred in the conversations (as well as in the initial survey and workshop observations). Clearly one dominant sub-theme that I identified was that of practical experience.

6.2.1.1. Practical experience

The actual physical immersion into a practical activity, side by side with other staff and students, "experience what the students experience" (I 12, ll. 124f.) and being immersed in a craft environment, feeling the resistance of the material and dealing with the subsequent successes and frustrations appears for many staff to be a good entry, especially as it is directly applicable to the student and the day to day work. During their initial induction and the ongoing staff training days (see 6.3.2.6.) staff have got the opportunity to immerse themselves in practical workshops:

> […] They won't get it until they literally get their hands on it. And getting into the workshop can be a revelation. You sometimes even hear people saying, that was amazing, I really get it now. But being in a making environment, using their hands skillfully, possibly for the first time or after a very long time, is almost a healing for their intellect. (I 14, ll. 47-53)

This strongly resounds with the insights of Gordon and Cox (2024) and is of course at the heart of PSTE as a practical method (see 2.5.2.). Rist and Schneider (1979) refer to the enjoyment and meaning making people can experience by being involved in craft processes from start to finish which resounds also from this excerpt. The workshop is the place where in the practical experiences the student and (staff member) meet the "lawfulness of the material" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.55), literally growing in the process of meeting resistance (Biesta, 2012) and through this building resilience (Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021) and growing as a whole person (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

However, while for those who are inclined that way practice is a preferable entry route, for those who are less inclined and possibly have chosen a career that involved more working with their head rather than their hands this appears to pose considerable challenges:

> Senior leaders, say, have already proven themselves in education, in academia, in previous life, so they are already accomplished people. Otherwise, they would not be senior leaders. It is probably a bigger challenge for them anyway. So, putting yourself back in a position of vulnerability is possibly an even bigger ask for them then asking some kid who's been checked out of school: 'I'm a failure anyway'. So, we're all very much like the students, just a matter of degree. Senior Leaders are much more skilful at coming up with very creative excuses. (I 14, l. 82-88)

The implications of senior leaders engaging in the practice are discussed more later (see 6.3.1.1.), however, considering that our overall lifestyle has changed considerably to a more sedentary lifestyle (Sigman, 2023) and the general tendency to more headwork and less hands-on, practical work (Goodheart, 2020; Wilson, 2010), this is concerning society at large and all of us.

Beyond learning about PSTE, staff learn on those occasions also more about the challenges the students are facing on a day-to-day basis, moving from appreciating their challenges to real admiration on overcoming them. It is a very humbling exercise to engage in something you are not naturally good at, that pushes you out of your comfort zone.I It is great for staff

to see staff and senior leaders role-modelling this engagement (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024c) as the below excerpt illustrates:

> […] but I think it's putting you into the students' boots as well and going, wow, if I'm struggling and I'm capable, I drive a car, I can do the multitasking type thing. How do some of these students going to cope with pushing the leg [of the pole-lathe], getting at the right angle and sheer frustration of some of the situations that you put yourself into? (FG 16, ll. 233-240)

It is also in the practical skills where staff see firsthand how fast on occasions students make progress, become confident, develop self-esteem (Sigman, 2023) and practical skills, all of which is often in stark contrast to the challenging behaviour they first experienced from them:

> I still remember even a picture of a certain student and was kicking off. […] And you can see the reasons going on and the benefits of actually cutting the wood and then taking the wood and making something like a rolling pin. And you're there thinking 'Oh God, I cannot do it' and they take the room, actually showing you how to do it because they're quite good at it. (FG, ll 273-279)

With staff and senior staff often being out of their comfort zone and learning something new, being in the students' shoes I also observed and reflected on the interesting dynamic that then develops through the craft process. The usual hierarchies (see also Goodheart, 2020) between senior staff, staff and students are dissolved if not even inverted, which is something that some innovative organisations have certainly found contributing to their success (Laloux, 2014; Coyle, 2018). While this is maybe not a general experience in RMT, it is however something that is the case for the time that people are in the workshops as I have found myself (D, ll. 24-29).

In the practical experiences staff can also experience the successes of young people who usually will have had a not very successful career in education where the focus was on the accumulation of knowledge -the 'banking concept of education' as Freire referred to it (Freire, 2017) rather than acquiring skills. With PSTE creating an environment where the emphasis is on learning skills with the knowledge to follow "[…] it takes away the anxiety of having to learn something" (FG 17, ll. 66-69) as I experienced myself:

> There was also something around the balance and how you stand while you hammer[21] so it is a real whole body experience and it becomes a very centering thing where you have to stand well you have to focus and look well on the point where you're hitting.

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[21] In the blacksmithing workshop; see 5.3.1.

> You have to be at the end of the hammer. When you do something wrong you hear it so you work a lot with the sound. […] you do work with the visual sense in terms of the colour. When the iron gets darker it needs to go into the forge again so it is a real multi sensory experience. (D, ll. 61-66)

It is in the practical experience (see also 5.3) where the learning takes place in a multisensory and embodied way (Grimm, 2011; Savin-Baden, 2020) which goes beyond purely cognitive processes.

It is also the practical work <u>in nature</u>. Participants report that it is the whole setting that matters (see also Savin-Baden, 2020; Dahlin 2017 and 2.4.), the workshops which are practical but also set into the landscape, often close the source of the materials that the students work with.

> You can see the change. You can see the change from leaving here, getting into a car, stepping out when they get to, say, [name of market garden/outdoor education site]. It's almost like they're shedding. You can see them sort of shedding things because they've got freedom and they've got more connection to nature. There's not so much tension, there's not so much… the energy is different. It really is different. (FG16, ll. 312-316)

A craft workshop is a complex environment (see 2.4.). In considering the impact of the practical experiences one can even go beyond the interaction between participant and material and the immersion in nature. Other factors are being negotiated, internal and external to the student:

> But the things of negotiating with the material. Dealing with the tutors. Dealing with the resistance are all skills that the method gives the student to survive in a different kind of survival situation. Which is after the college […]. Have to deal with those quite complex negotiations which are as complicated as trying to work out what to do with this piece of metal. (I 6, ll. 87-92)

In the process of sourcing the raw material (Gordon and Cox, 2024) experiencing the resistance of the material to making an item of service (Biesta, 2012) which then has permanence and is used in the community (Wenger, 1999), participants can have profound experiences and reflections which are difficult to explain if not experienced directly. They are also difficult to plan for as they depend on the individual's own reflective capacity:

> Quite impressive, what a profound ceremony to make the whole stool. Making from the tree. Actually, killing something. […] And carrying, like, a pole bearer, carrying the log. It is like you would with anybody that's passed away or some living thing that's

passed away. Trying to manifest something new and reshape and reimagine and all the things that we do. It was a really, really deep contemplation. Quite the sort of sombre to start with, because it is not nice to kill something. That's what we were doing. So that was a helpful experience. So, yeah. Those are two big ones from my induction. (I 9, ll. 98-104)

By making tangible items of service the learning process is immediately accessible (Sigman, 2023); also a long time after it has been undertaken: "For me to have that stool in three dimensions in the corner of the office every day and I show people, in the world it stands, proud. And it makes me think about those three days in the woods" (I 9, lines 92-96). Experiencing the finished item of service in exactly that: service, can be very powerful (Gordon and Cox, 2024) and is something that could be built on by consistently using and exhibiting the finished artefact (D, ll. 687-694) (see 7.3.).

6.2.1.2. Motivation
Staff report on the motivation they experience from engaging in practical experiences:

> All of the stuff you've asked me to do has been a pleasure, and therefore it's not actually been any chore to go, oh, this spoon[22], this spoon, 40 hours of my life. And it's like, okay. Yeah. She gets out the spoon, which she carries everywhere, because everybody should see this is 40 hours of their life. [takes out the spoon of her bag] (I6, ll. 53-57)

The motivation that staff find in and for practical experiences is something that also senior leaders -once they have literally come over the threshold of the workshop- and entered the 'flow state' (Sigman, 2023; Alameda et al., 2022) find difficult to leave:

> Well, I still did not finish because I ran out of time. [laughter] I still have to go back and finish it but I will do that. It wasn't through my own design. Literally the day I had no lunch. I didn't want to stop for anything. I was just keep going with this thing. (I9, ll. 53-55)

It is also the practical that attracts staff to work at Ruskin Mill Trust in in many cases, and even for those who have gone through degrees etc as qualified teachers: "The underpinning philosophy and bravery of the organisation in a challenging educational landscape" (S, Q6, P30). For those staff who can identify with it, this educational method gives them purpose and engages them: "I believe that the Trust's ethos and philosophy is correct. What the Trust

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[22] "Spoonforging" is one of the craft session at RMT, based on the traditional cutlery making

offers the students and staff is incredible and I feel thankful to be a part of that offer and experience." (S, Q6, P4)

For those staff the Trust's method puts the traditional crafts into a pedagogical and therapeutic framework, beyond just enjoyable tasks for themselves: "It offers a great balance between challenge and satisfaction. It enables me to share my craft knowledge and expertise, not only with students but with colleagues through PPoC and Induction Programme too." (S, Q6, P6)

One tutor who is involved in inducting other staff to the method describes how sometimes staff struggle to find the motivation to move their understanding to a deeper level, possibly because they have frustrations of a more logistical nature connected to the organisation (Lam et al., 2010) or they simply focus on the crafts, rather than its pedagogical application or because it takes a lot of mental effort:

> There's a lot of effort involved in increasing your knowledge and they might not want to do that, they might want to just focus on their craft [...] they might just want to dig deeper into how to make this thing, not how to make the student. (Interview 11, lines 160-163)

This emphasis on the practical is also reflected in the survey answers as participants stated that out of the Fields of Practice Field 2 Practical Skills is the one they understand best (see table 6). In conclusion from the excerpts above it can possibly be said that while the practice draws staff in, it is firstly not easy for all staff to engage in the practice due to logistical challenges, personal preferences or perceived loss of power and status (Goodheart, 2020). The latter applies especially to leaders (Laloux, 2014). Usual concepts of understanding and implementing change in management theory (Bush, 2020; Lovell, 1994; Hersey et al. 2001) are not really addressing the issue as the engaging in practice is possibly diametral opposite to the conceptualisation of being a leader and manager (Goodheart, 2020), but newer concepts such as spiritual (Fry, 2003; Fry and Slocum, 2008) or servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2008) are possibly more appropriate to encourage staff to 'get their hands dirty' in order to understand the method through practice but require rolemodeling (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

6.2.2. Emotional and social

Under this theme the codes and excerpts were grouped where staff were speaking about their emotional engagement with the method, as well as social and relational aspects and where it aided their understanding of PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice.

6.2.2.1. Helpful biographical experiences

As the biography and positionality of the researcher in the study is important so is the biography of every single staff member (and of course student) essential in how one connects with the method. There are no two biographies the same. Ruskin Mill indeed emphasises the consciousness of working with the biography of a person, be it student or staff member and also the biography of the place (see also RMT, 2023, e.g. pp.34ff.; Gordon and Cox, 2023, p. 17). While the literature appreciates prior experience as an important building block to further understanding (Hannon, 2022; Anderson, 2013; Grimm, 2011), little is revealed about the impact of life events and biography in context.

Considering one's biography with regards to connecting to the method, staff will often draw on elements that they had always enjoyed and found an affinity for which has now drawn them to Ruskin Mill and they find in different constellations. Starting from the love of making and feeling agency in the past: "I've always loved making things [...] it was always one of my earliest memories of making things [...] and of what making things gives you and being able to slightly shape your world" (I13, ll. 9-17) to having worked in similar Steiner inspired environments (Camphill in this case):

> But in terms of my engagement with workshops, PSTE. I haven't really got engaged. But also, I am a craftsman. I was a potter for ten years. There's a good deal that I get about that because I've lived it. And I have a certain feel about my relationship with people with challenging behaviour because I've spent like, nearly 40 years one way or another. (I5, ll. 150-153)

For others it was the change towards a more bureaucratic, cerebral way of the working environment in the profession they once chose that attracted them to find something more hands-on, engaging hand and heart, as well as providing fun and enjoyment (Laaksonen and Hietala, 2023; Zhang, 2024; Thakuria, 2024):

> Because the thing about the transition in social services land is it's become very much more about head stuff. It certainly was more heart stuff when I started in 1985, but now we've gone down a different route, and I think I was trying to find a way of surviving that very much kind of sending it into your head. […] And I think because I've served so long, I was definitely starting to feel that I needed to do something that actually, literally got me out of my head. And the thing about learning how to use an axe and other bits and pieces is you can't let your attention slip. (I6, ll. 11-19)

But also, other life events can lead to Ruskin Mill. For example, one participant reported that having a child with a disability himself has given him helpful insights into the effectiveness of the method:[23]

> […] I have a special needs child myself, you can see how the difference between the standard normal school with the Ruskin Mill, […] If you send my son to the school locally, they just use the iPad, laptop, there's no connection, human connections, animal connections, relationship and friendships does nothing. The relationships is made between the computers, between the computer and them. (I7, ll 39-45)

For this participant the observation of his own son being able to experience "meaningful relationships with universe, earth and people" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 31) instead of the ipad was helpful in understanding the method better.

The notion of the connectedness of the biography of a place and the biography of a person also resounds in many interviews as an initial engagement with the method through engaging in Field 1. It is often an entry and a point of interest that then led participants deeper into the method: *"On a personal level, I'm probably most interested in genius loci out of all of the Seven Fields of Practice, partly because in my life, I was born in Nether Edge, that's 2 miles from here."* (I12, ll. 139-141). Hence, leading the staff member through life events into understanding the method, as an entry point and possibly less through practical or cognitive but more through the emotional engagement that resulted from this which is discussed in the next section.

6.2.2.2. Emotional engagement

It appears that during the opportunities to experience the student curriculum in a practical way that it can really enthuse staff and help them to connect theory with practice:

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[23] English is not the mother tongue of the participant

I went off on my own to go do this rolling pin and I had an amazing experience. It was just like the whole smell of the wood and the feel of it, the texture and just watching, sort of getting to grips with the real basic lathe work. (FG 16, ll. 229-231)

Working with young people can be emotionally taxing as well as very rewarding. Staff have their own emotions that they go through when engaging with the material as well as when supporting the young people dealing with their successes and frustrations. The tutor also describes that PSTE and the practical work does need the full emotional commitment which is different to supporting a young person going onto a machine, leave alone a computer or Ipad:

It can be frustrating as a tutor. It is an opportunity to use this technology [i.e. the greenwood work pole-lathe][24]. Which is what it is. One of better ways to describe is rustic technology, but it's off grid and it requires operation from the individual. It's very intentional. You're not just going on a machine and doing it half hearted. You have to really engage with the whole leg and it is frustrating. They don't come in [easily], but conversely it is very satisfying when they do and when you can sort of coach them through the making of the craft item, which is the vehicle for the self development. (I 12, ll. 97-102)

It is exactly this emotional engagement in the "*coach[ing] them through the making of the craft item"* in which the pedagogical power of PSTE lies, the developmental space in which so many things happen, one of them being the emotional development. Aonghus describes this already earlier on in his first written explanation "Recovering Gifts" which was only published internally in 2012: "Thus apprenticeship is much more than simply the learning of skills: it is about the transformation of relationships and attitudes." (Gordon, 2012, p.12).

Clearly for staff, and also for staff in senior positions, the direct student contact and the benefits that the educational approach has for them, their achievement and their development is what motivates staff generally to engage deeper (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Bush, 2020) and on an emotional level with the method:

The other thing that that kind of training [i.e. practical engagement in the workshops] would do is more contact with students and more experiences of seeing their development. […] I mean, [name of the Principal; *at a drama-performance] […]* just observed the kind of compassion between students. One of them would get up and the encouragement and the applause and then the pride. And I looked over at [name

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[24] See figure 27-29 in 5.3 for the mechanics of the pole-lathe use

of Principal] and I could see he was almost starting to cry. And it's like, this is why we do it. […] yes, we have made a difference." (I 8, ll. 117-1280)

While this particular description might also be observed in other educational establishments (i.e. seeing a student performance) what the participant is highlighting here is the emotional engagement of staff and senior leaders when being in direct student contact, witnessing and being part of their developmental journey while also putting their own emotional stresses and frustrations into context (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023 and 2022). The context of the student development here is also the journey from a mostly very dire starting point. There will usually be major trauma due to neglect, forms of abuse, mistreatment from adults who should have cared or -if not- bullying due to disabilities. From this starting point seeing students on stage in a performance or finishing a high-class industry standard item of service is moving and an experience of shared purpose (Fullan and Quinn, 2015).

6.2.2.3.   mentoring or apprenticeship learning

While rarely the focus in studies on professional development (Guskey and Yoon, 2009) and while there were formal opportunities to engage with the method such as induction and trainings, many staff mention that often it was the mentoring that helped them to understand PSTE and the student experience better (see also Rawson, 2018). In informal meetings, conversations and the working alongside more experienced staff or just spending time together, for example on college trips as participants mention below:

> I have reflected because I've gone through it with [name of training coordinator], but I would love to be able to do even more of that because I think you suddenly become a little bit more aware of the students and what they struggle with. (FG 16, ll. 239-241)

Those informal mentoring conversations can then also lead to a deeper understanding (Hudson, 2013) of PSTE and further individual research into aspects caught interest

> Something that I like then, number one, my first port of call is always I go to see [name of training coordinator]. Okay, what's this about? That's interesting. Can you recommend any books? […] I will just keep plugging away a little bit and a little bit. (I 11, ll. 123-128)

For some of the staff, also in the most senior positions, it was also this working alongside each other (Wenger, 1999; Cox, 2005; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014) where a lot of the perspective and paradigm of the method could be learned:

And even in that post I benefited first hand from seeing Aonghus and [name of staff member] at work. […] I saw down in the first very early premises, everybody worked very first hand. I experienced it with them. And then even in those early times, I was fortunate to do one of the trips[25]. So, I did the Sinai trip with Aonghus and [name of staff member]. (I 10, ll. 24-27)

While I also had a similar valuable experience of undertaking a college trip with the founder and seeing his pedagogical talent with young people in action in this particular interview, being in researcher mode, I was surprised to be named as a mentor myself:

And then I had mentoring. I remember you as being a positive mentor, put you in that, you were, with some particular students, I know I would come back to you and ask you and check things. (I 10, ll. 29-31)

Wenger (1999) explains how through working alongside each other social learning can be facilitated, naturally this is informal and reciprocal and not a one way, linear learning experience. The working together of staff with a sound understanding of the underlying principles of PSTE, namely Steiner's insights, and those who are experts in their field (e.g. a more compliance focussed role) can be powerful as the participant reflects: "Alongside that, I have had colleagues who have been more experienced in an anthroposophical background and they have been very helpful. […] but he's also a colleague that brings a depth into my understanding" (I10, ll.54-57).

As described by Wenger (1999), this can also happen in a person's private life:

To kind of draw back from the kind of headstuff into the handstuff has been a pleasure. [name of staff member] […], and she's always been my 'Sensei'. In a martial arts sense it's not master, it means 'one who has gone before'. Right? So she'll go, you need to think about this. And I will studiously think about whatever it is that she's told me to do. (I 6, ll. 63-66)

While the above participants describe this mentoring as a more longer term situation of either meeting the same people in the same place or in a friend relationship over a period of time the below excerpt is from a participant who can recall the first specific encounter of an aspect of PSTE (Field 5) and homemaking in a care environment that he did not know from his professional life:

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[25] The participants here is referring to "cultural trips" abroad that the RMT students and staff in more generous funding times undertook.

> I visited [name of tutors] just as a social thing. They said, come around for dinner but we've also got some students here. There were three students, they were houseparenting[26] at the time and I was working in a psychiatric hospital in [name of city]. That was my first exposure - this was totally different to anything I had seen in care as a model. (I 8, ll. 69-72)

The participant also pointed that the learning from really experienced and sometimes senior staff is not something that is exclusive to Ruskin Mill Trust but also happens in other industries and fields of work such as NHS or technical businesses:

> At the end of the day after 4 o'clock I would go to her workshop, she would make me a cup of tea and we talk about the day. She basically coached me through the Ruskin Mill version of Steiner's pedagogy. […] As I say, it was not formalized at all, other than we enjoyed talking. And I don't think this is exclusive for Ruskin Mill at all. Most of what I have learned I have learned through an apprenticeship type model. (I 8, ll. 78-89)

Another interesting informal way of learning about Steiner's insights was reported by one of the participants who used social media for this. While appreciating the possible challenges of this it had proven useful to him in its informal and bite-size way of transmitting information in the business of life:

> I struggled to get the time and patience to sit and read [Steiner books]. I'll be honest. What I do, and this is probably not very in line with the method, I joined a load of anthroposophic groups on Facebook.[…] I used to be an avid reader until I had children. I absorb nuggets or pick things up, whatever insight from other people I talk to. But yeah, that's helpful because what will happen is on my phone in the morning will flash up with a quote or lecture. (I 9, ll. 171-186)

While RMT in general certainly is more critical towards the omnipresence of handheld devices and social media and advocates for real life engagement with people, the senses and materials (Gordon and Cox, 2024; Sigman, 2023; Children Sensory Therapy, 2021) this senior leader highlights a potentially contemporary and for many staff very accessible way of engaging staff in aspects of the method and learning. The times where staff went in reading groups through large numbers of lecture cycles of the 6000 lectures that Steiner gave on the various topics might have passed and people nowadays might prefer to absorb knowledge in shorter chunks.

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[26] Care model that the Trust (as well as Camphill) were operating at the time which has become unfeasible with the introduction of the European working time legislation. At RMT it has now been replaced with the Shared Lives Model.

6.2.3.   Theory and cognitive

This sub-theme is about the engagement and struggle participants were talking about on the more theoretical and cognitive level. In this section I want to explore those struggles firstly when directed more inwards as self-reflection, questioning or transforming their identities over time, how the practical engagement enhances their conceptual understanding over time, leads them to a deeper reflection on the students' challenges or in fact leads them to the place of acknowledging that they just don't know as a powerful starting point. Secondly, I want to explore what participants found when the struggle was directed outwards and/or towards the organisation or method itself. Then we want to look at the area of language and the challenges (and solutions) that occurred there and lastly at the tension that arises from encountering Steiner and Steiner's spiritual science.

6.2.3.1. Self reflection in the process

How much change some staff undergo in a number of years by changing their perspective of what they do and understanding and applying more of the method , even sometimes changing the view of who they are and what their professional or even personal identity (Wenger, 1999)is, is illustrated by the views some of the participants give:

> So again, I don't see myself as a blacksmith anymore. It has only been four years, but I don't see that anymore. My craft skills have depleted because I spent more time doing therapy with students, you know what I mean? So, I class myself more as a therapist than a blacksmith. (I 11, ll. 59-62)

In this context Gordon and Cox (2024) talk about the "therapeutic educator" (p. 116) as an aspiration who is cognisant of the student's challenges and trauma as well as their professional boundaries.They can work with the student in an empathic but not naïvely sympathetic or sentimental way, hence supporting their development. This is certainly an example of a transformation of a staff member who has deeply taken to the method.

Another example is where a participant, albeit before joining Ruskin Mill, talks about discovering crafts for herself, whereas previously she had never thought that this was something possible for her and while this relates to practice as an entry of to understanding the PSTE (see 6.2.1.1.) her description possibly goes a bit further as her definition of identity (Wenger, 1999) changes and she becomes somebody she never thought she could become:

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> I grew up in Sheffield and didn't think that people from here, especially me, could be like an artist or a craft person. It wasn't a part of my worldview, it was like, oh, well, if you're incredibly privileged or if you're phenomenally talented, that's what you do, but that's not what I am. (I 13, ll 18-21)

Even for some of the most senior staff like directors and centre leaders learning about and understanding the Ruskin Mill method and Steiner's insights that underpin it is an individual journey. It is also a journey that is not clearly laid out as you set off but is a path that develops while you walk it (Fullan and Quinn, 2015), as it is difficult to describe it before you have experienced it. The progressive understanding has been described well by one participant:

> I'm beginning to build the back picture. And that's so satisfying. […] I'm beginning to learn some quite tricky concepts. You go in there and you have a [name of lecturer] lecture on the higher beings and then many threads that come into it, alongside some very solid Goethean Observation from [name of lecturer] and that kind of exploration. […] So it's never going to be necessarily something that comes first and foremost, because in my job, the PSTE and Seven Fields come front and foremost. But I'm finding it really helpful because maybe that wasn't in the Masters. It's a framework. (I 10, ll 69-77)

As in PSTE the understanding comes through understanding the underlying concepts but also through the physical engagement in the practice it is -especially for people in senior positions- often the trepidations around this practical engagement that hinders the deepening of understanding. Where staff engage, it can lead to profound realisations about themselves and also personality traits they were not aware of before. The entry-point is often through picturing student in their mind and what the potential benefit could be for them, and then applying this to themselves:

> And then all these things started to come to mind about time and the slow pace of things come to fruition and it made me check myself and I felt really guilty for having the thoughts I've had. Who do you think you are? […] And I always bring it back the student, a student I have known and trying to think, actually, I can see the benefits of this for the ADHD condition. (I9, ll 46-51)

Just going into a workshop and working alongside students and staff on equal level can already be challenging and humbling for senior leaders, some who are possibly used to a more corporate hierarchy. Leaving all this behind and stepping into the student's shoes requires a lot of humility:

My moment of despair came at [name of the college] in spoonforging. He told me that I'm very impatient and although I didn't think I was at all. If you had asked me to list my idiosyncrasies, or failings, or whatever you want to call them, until it was revealed through metal work. (I9, ll. 11-16)

Having this humility and vulnerability is again a trait that is something that is described in certain leadership styles such as servant or spiritual leadership (Samul, 2024; Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2008). It also allows staff to not be knowledgeable in certain aspects and to simply not know and (as hoped for, see 3.2.) the survey has generated some useful self-reflection. For example, asked "How would describe your overall understanding of Field 5? What would help you to develop this further?" one participant answered "From the questions asked, I now feel like there is a lot more that I don't know." (S, Q71, P53) or "I be honest, these two sets of qualities are still a little unclear to me"(S, Q49, P5). Moving from self-reflection and considering the more inside focussed struggle to understand PSTE, in the next section we move towards a more outwards directed or experienced struggle and critique that participants voiced about the method, the organisation or other aspects that impacted on their understanding or implementation of the PSTE.

6.2.3.2. Critique and challenge to understanding

As with understanding many other things it does take time and effort to understand the Ruskin Mill method of education (see also Gordon and Cox, 2024). But we live in a time where instant access to information is a given (just 'google it') (Gordon and Cox, 2024; Sigman, 2023). It might be that as all staff who come to Ruskin Mill have gone through an education and have an experience of education that it is more difficult to withhold judgement about something 'one knows', maintain openness and live with discomfort while one is learning the method:

But you go …you listen to a lecture by ….well… perhaps none other than Aonghus …. and are prepared to admit that you missed 95% of it. […]You will find things repeat and eventually it's a shorter or longer time, depending on the individual and their history, it's almost as if the penny will drop.[…] There is this general openness to challenge and discomfort which I think all staff have to come to grips with. And I think the higher you are up in the organisation, the more uncomfortable it can get. (I 14, ll. 17-30)

A lot of critique was voiced from staff about "when it's really heavy lectures I just…I do switch off" (F 16, l. 326) where the staff clearly struggled to find firstly practical relevance and transfer it to their practice and secondly an entry point to the concepts:

> "somebody will say something and I would go oh, that's quite interesting. […] I remember when so and so did that, but then I lost the next bit and so I'm back to square one again. […] I know what I enjoy doing, which is the hands on very much so. (F 16, ll. 326-331)

This also resounds with some answers from the survey *"I still feel very unsure about how it feeds into daily work with students"* (S, P 54, Q 7) where staff state that they struggle with the transfer of the training into the day-to-day work.

One participant identified that being too versed in the current paradigm can be difficult and that thinking and knowledge can in fact present an obstacle, even if they are exposed to a lot of training on PSTE:

> I think it takes a long, long time and I think you can be very young and get it, and you can be very young or not, but if you come in with a lot of baggage or thinking or thoughts, then it's quite difficult to get down to it, isn't it? Because I can think of colleagues who have done the courses and they've done the PPOC[27] and they've done the Goethean, which I thought would be really helpful, and yet I don't know that they really get it. (I 10, ll. 274-279)

While the phrase "they don't get it", what is termed "the transfer problem" (Michalak, 1981) has been described a number of times throughout the interviews. This concurs with my own experiences; however it might be worth considering this more differentiated as understanding PSTE appears to be a gradual process. What specific aspects of the method is that specific staff member not "getting"? On the other hand, the "not getting" of aspects of the method might also lead to a more general distancing form those staff from anything that is called "the method". Training science (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas et al., 2012; Michalak, 1981) emphasises that organisations spend a lot of resources on training staff of course with the view to enhance practice. Hence this transfer from theory to practice is the key interest (Salas et al., 2012; Grossman and Salas, 2011; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023), how the training affects job performance. However, when considering training science we do need to consider the difference between learning about legislation of the European Union (Jansen

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[27] Paedagogic Potential Of Craft; staff training course to understand the educational application of the crafts offered in RMT

in de Wal et al., 2023), the polishing of shoes (Michalak, 1981) or the understanding and implementation of an educational method that is based on Steiner's educational insights (also see 2.5.4.; 2.6.4.; 6.3.2.6. and Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016; Entwistle, 2022) which appears to be much more complex. Therefore, the comparison with insights of a training science covering more mundane topics (as Ruskin Mill of course must cover as well) needs to be seen more critical and is explored below (6.3.2.6.).

There are also challenges to overcome which are on the surface of a logistical nature such as working time patterns (e.g. of residential staff who often work 'unsocial hours'), releasing tutors from the timetable and generally a lot of demands and little time to do these. However, underneath there are competing priorities and a possible avoidance to engage in things which are outside the comfort zone:

> But yeah, finding time, it is time that is the difficulty. And releasing people off school timetable. But residential[28] it's a nightmare to penetrate that. Their shift patterns are so at variance with everybody else's. Pinning them down to do any sort of craft is near to impossible. But I'm trying to find a solution. (I 14, ll. 102-105)

The approach to learning about the method apparently can also be divisive amongst colleagues between those who wish to dive deeper into it and those who do not as the survey excerpt shows:

> I would like to work directly with people that support the Trust's philosophy. The two colleagues I have that support my role show no interest in what the Trust is trying to provide to the students. As a result I struggle. I get a lot of support and insight from other people around the college and I take a lot of inspiration from what I see around me (both from nature and from craft skills being taught), but I cannot make positive changes in my area due to the resistance to change I face from my departmental co-workers. To deepen my knowledge, skills, and understanding of the Genius Loci I need to be able to experiment and reflect on that application. Without the support and willingness to try something new from my colleagues there is no experimentation, no reflection and consequently no growth or further development. (S, Q24, P4)

While I found this a highly interesting comment it does leave me with a lot of questions and the wish to explore those further. It is clearly an instance where shared vision (Bass and Riggio, 2006) of organisation, line-manager and employee is not the case. It also confirms the view that in implementing approaches or structures the environment and the attitude and

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[28] This refers to the staff who work in the residential households (care homes) working with students

approach of the line-managers is of great significance (Lam et al.,2010; Breadley-Levine et al., 2010; Hutchins and Burke, 2007; Blume et al., 2010). While there are possible questions in how far the comment reflects the actual lived experience and in how far this reflects the actual situation (see also considerations regarding survey construction in 3.2.1 and Poncheri et al., 2008) I have also found in other conversations that indeed the method can be divisive. This is not so much that those gaps are created by conversations, training and thinking about the method but those gaps are exposed. This possibly goes back to the underlying gap in paradigms about what the human being is as discussed in 2.2.2.

6.2.3.3. Language

Many staff find the language that Ruskin Mill uses to describe concepts in PSTE difficult:

> I am new to PSTE since joining the trust - previously working in a mainstream setting. Previously I have found it intimidating due to the amount of content and specialist language used - it can be quite exclusionary to people trying to learn about it. (S, Q7, P 22)

While this applies to PSTE, it certainly also applies to the language that the underlying insights, namely Steiner's, are expressed in which indeed does not make it very inclusive unless one puts the effort in. Also, for some it can too much too soon:

> But for me, if you're new to the Steiner thing, there's a lot of jargon that you have to get your head around. So you've got Seven Fields of Practice, you have seven care qualities, you have seven something else, you have twelve senses, you have four phases of being, threefold human, two fold animals[29][…] it is overwhelming, isn't it? All the different bobs… (FG16, ll. 340-355)

Hence, as with Steiner Education indeed as well (Ullrich, 2014), there are understandably advocates who wish to do PSTE without the 'Steiner thing', focussing on the practical here and now, what and how it benefits the student (see 6.2.3.4.). Another participant offered a solution:

> […] Steiner is very difficult to read. […] I've had moments of flow and then moments where I get really stuck and it's difficult to get over the stuckness. So writers around

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[29] While PSTE (and Steiner mostly) talk about twelve senses, the seven are qualities, the fourfold and the threefold human being (see also 2.3.2. and 2.5.3.) there might be some exaggeration here to emphasise the confusion experienced

Steiner are good and helpful, […] the language and the translation of Steiner makes it difficult. (I 10, ll. 216-222)

While language and challenges around it came up a lot in the interviews and focus groups it is interesting that in research around training transfer (e.g. Grossman and Salas, 2011) this is not an area of challenge at all. This could support the view that PSTE is a matter of greater complexity, especially with regards to the underlying paradigm (see 2.3.1.) compared to European Legislation (see previous section, 6.2.3.2.). However, having some background in Steiner's educational insights does not always seem to make the language of PSTE more accessible either:

I did a degree in Steiner Waldorf Education, so I have some background in it. But interestingly I still feel that lots of the training is pitched really high and despite having an undergraduate degree when there's Steiner terminology flying around or online lectures to watch I find them quite inaccessible […] (FG16, ll. 98-102)

The organisation specific language for Ruskin Mill Trust and PSTE and the Seven Fields has moved significantly (Gordon and Cox, 2024; see also Interview 4) from that sometimes challenging language (and possibly even more challenging translations) of Steiner's (see 2.2.3.) and has developed out of and in conjunction with the Ruskin Mill practice. It is still evolving and changing as many participants comment and in fact might be different again in a few years (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Having said all this, there are also staff member who feel that Ruskin Mill actually gives the language that they have been looking for intuitively to describe their views and experiences:

I am thoroughly enjoying exploring and becoming familiar with PTSE (sic), I feel it resonates with unspoken thoughts that I've held for a while but puts them into a tangible framework. (S, Q7, P 20)

While language has been named numerous times as an area of challenge, the opposite appears to be the case as well. The above comment is one that resounded a numerous time, and with many staff staying a long time, a continuous growth and now over 1200 staff one can assume that the majority of staff wish to be here. However, I was more interested to present some of the challenges that staff have with regards to language. In the next section we shall explore some of the origins of a slightly different organisational language.

6.2.3.4. Steiner and spiritual dimension

Given the emphasis in the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' Steiner's insights required special attention throughout the study. This feels justified, given the prevalence that the founder gives to Steiner's insights (see interview 2; Gordon and Cox, 2024) and the fact that Steiner is the only influence explicitly named in the objects of the charity (see 2.1).

As discussed in the literature review it is here where paradigms collide, and people go different ways (see 2.2.2.). There is the foundational question: "What do you believe that man is?" that informs the way that education is designed and delivered. Is man a machine, a brain with neuronal circuits like electrical circuits (e.g. Kahnemann, 2012) that can be altered and improved and possibly very soon outperformed by Artificial Intelligence (see for example Harari, 2015 and 2018 or Kurzweil, 2000; Chaudhry and Kazim, 2022; Ng et al., 2023)? Or is man a being of an individuality that exists beyond matter but living in a material body as Steiner thought (e.g. Steiner, 1985 or 2011; see also 2.3.2.)?

Depending on how you answer this overtly or covertly posed question will change the way you design and deliver education, even how you relate to other people, the world around you and yourself (Gordon and Cox, 2024). Of course, there are many different nuances between those two basic positions and in the end every single person creates their own position. In the end one can also assume that certainly every person working in education and care has somehow come to a position and answer to this question, possibly on differing degrees of consciousness and ability to verbalise it (see also 2.2.). This is certainly something that I was interested in and tried to elicit from the participants. Often overt, but also sometimes the question remained just in the back of my head when engaging in activities and conversations (see also 1.3.).

Following on from the above discussion about the challenges of the transfer of training (6.2.3.2.) which exist already about more mundane themes (such as polishing shoes) (Michalak, 1981; Salas et al., 2012), it is not surprising that some participants struggle to see the application of Steiner's educational insights:

All those like really practical things I'm really into. Because Steiner does sort of go into the occultic side of the thing and I'm not really there yet for that. And I get it. But at the minute, because I've only been doing this for four years, the question is: 'How is that going to help a student right now.' (I 11, ll. 51-54)

Taking this train of thought further, when it comes to the possibly even more difficult to access parts of Steiner's insights such as (re)incarnation and in how far they are applicable in education (Tyson, 2023b and 2024b), there were different voices in the group, from an initial interest to also criticism with regards to the 'scientific' value.This has also come through in the survey and is possibly the explanation why staff feel that their understanding of Field 3 is lower compared to the other fields: "This is the field I really struggle with as I have difficulties recognising the actual proven scientific merit of the biodynamic process above and beyond the organic." (S, Q40, P66; see also FG 16, ll. 148-153).

Having said this, some participants have taken this 'not-knowing' also as an incentive to learn more and integrate it into their own spiritual concepts:

I feel like this is a world of complex webs of interactions that I need to know more about - this has created a need within me to identify the place in the world that I want to die in. I feel an ambition to contribute to a healing of traumatised land, that I can settle into and be a part of. (S, Q40, P61)

For some staff there is also the recognition that one can consider the Seven Fields of Practice as a developmental pathway:

[…] that can take a long time and be quite a challenging process, I remember somebody saying that it's like a spiritual path and those who come here expecting they're just doing a job and getting paid for a job and they go home and that's the end of it. I'm afraid it's for a bit of a rude awakening because it requires a lot more than that. (I 14, ll. 25-28)

To the conception of the biography as a pathway to understand the method as explained by Aonghus (see Interview 1, ll. 117-135):

But it is much trickier, because I think people have to get hold of the fact that it's… it's a spiritual concept, isn't it? You are asking people to work out of their higher consciousness and by their higher consciousness you mean their spiritual self. (I 10, ll. 146-149)

In summary, to the question of how we understand the method we can probably say that there is no one size fits all answer. While there are on the one hand many different entry

points, there are also on the other hand many different aspects in the very complex educational method PSTE which can lead to the feeling of never fully understanding PSTE as a whole (see 6.2.3.2.). Many people are drawn to the practical element and like the practical application but there are also some who are not engaged in the hands-on practice on a daily basis (some of them narratively in leadership positions) who are avoidant to engage in this core aspect of PSTE (see 6.2.1.1.). Many staff engage through the social and emotional domain, through collaborative learning (Wenger, 1999)   in more informal ways. Mentoring seems to be an important element to progress the understanding of the method (Hutchins and Burke, 2007; Blume et al., 2010). With regards to the more cognitive entry to understanding PSTE some staff report having had transformative experiences to the extent that their professional and personal identity was shaped and changed by this, while others report that they found it difficult to access especially the theoretical aspects (see 6.2.3.3.). For some this has been exacerbated by the PSTE and Steiner specific language and even more so by 'esoteric' concepts whereas others report that PSTE has finally given them a language for thoughts and experiences they always longed for. This brings us now to the next theme/question: How do we implement PSTE?

6.3. Introduction to theme 2 and 3: How we implement an educational method?

Moving on from the individual understanding of the method in considering the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' we will now consider the aspects around people, namely leaders and managers, and the organisational structures and systems that support this implementation and have been purposefully put in place to support the individuals' understanding of the method (such as staff training as further considered below in 6.3.2.6.).

6.3.1. Theme 2: People - Leadership and management

Looking at the theme of people first, the significance and involvement of leaders and managers shall be explored, taking into consideration the insights from section 2.6.. As described above (6.2.1.) there certainly appears to be a common denominator that staff who

wish to work at Ruskin Mill support the idea of an embodied form of practical education. Therefore, we firstly explore the involvement of leaders and managers on the ground. From 17 years of experience I would say that it is difficult to be indifferent to either method or organisation. I would also say that Ruskin Mill and PSTE is not for everybody and therefore we shall explore whether there are attributes of a successful RMT leader. This leads to the considerations of (self) critique of RMT leaders and the significance of the wider governance and leadership.

6.3.1.1. leaders and managers involved on the ground

While staff generally feel drawn to the practical experiences in Ruskin Mill Trust, which also includes people in leadership roles (see 6.2.1.), there is a conflict emerging in so far that 'front-line staff' are actually involved in the practical experiences, the workshops and mostly with working with students and materials whereas leaders in their day-to-day work are not. From comments from participants as well as from my own observations, however, there are some interesting observations of what happens on the occasions when they are:

> We did talk about the induction of senior leaders and it was an interesting reflection we had in terms of the tutor was actually not very cognizant in terms of what role or what stages people hold in the organization […] that actually hierarchy more or less disappears in the workshop and what matters is actually getting on with the task and the processes and the material. (D, ll158-163)

The involvement on the ground in the workshops with students, staff and materials is facilitated by the senior leadership induction (see 2.5.5. and Appendix 1.5). This flattening of the hierarchy is certainly something that I experienced as very positive. It is noticed by tutors and also resonant with the literature that emphasises the positive outcomes of practice-based leadership training altogether (Lacerenza et al., 2017; Arthur et al., 2003). Contrary to my experience, there is also the view that unless the organisational hierarchy is actually taken into account consciously mistrust and anxiety can go alongside leaders engaging on the ground (Chaston and Lips-Wiersma, 2015).

From the survey it could be gleaned as well that engaging on the ground for leaders is a learning experience that is effective and appreciated:

> Trustees have a chance to participate in making an object as in my making a spoon at [name of college], it is a very satisfying experience and with the students who can do it much better than you, a learning experience as well. (S, Q 33, P36)

For staff members and especially for senior staff members to step into the space of the student, engaging in the craft process and in doing so, experiencing their own limitations, having very different experiences to the day in an office (see 6.2.1.) is powerful from the point of view of being perceived by staff but also in terms of what the senior leader could perceive:

> We do not have student contact unless it is a serious crisis or exclusion which is not good enough. Imagine if we started the Executive Team with an hour, we moved around the different colleges, and each one we just say we need five sessions available in the first hour and that is what we do. […] And it would be quality assurance. (I8, ll. 28-33)

Interestingly the realisation that more exposure is necessary, even with more concrete ideas of how to do this as well as the insight that it is needed in order to "understand what's really going on" (I8, l.36). The participant also highlights that this needed connection to the ground is not specific to Ruskin Mill as "a lot of businesses do, have senior managers return to the factory floor. And we don't really" (I 8, ll. 23f.). While this is maybe not the case for all senior managers in Ruskin Mill, it is not something that is systematically fostered other than in the senior leadership induction phase (see 2.5.5. and 6.3.2.6.4.) In addition to the benefits of learning for the senior leader there are many more to the organisation and the other employees as Wenger (1999) points out. Engagement on the ground fosters a sense of belonging, a community of practice (Wenger, 1999), and overall coherence and alignment (Mogren et al., 2019; Holst, 2022; Hugo and Iverson, 2024). Apart from what and how a leader can learn we also need to consider what leaders possibly bring with themselves that might be helpful or a hindrance to engage in the method, what are the attributes a leader in RMT should have?

6.3.1.2. attribute of successful RMT leader

Aonghus described regarding Field 1- Genius Loci (Gordon and Cox, 2024) the importance of discovering what is already there in an empathetic way, with its strengths and dark sides, in a place but also in oneself and from there imagining its potential. Aonghus refers back to a story, where Ruskin walked the streets of Sheffield:

So he sees opals as he stretches his legs in trying to avoid the muddy sooty puddles in Sheffield. Now, to be able to have this capacity in the moment, to be able to translate one thing into a new possibility is one of his great gifts. It's also one of the strap lines that I've drawn into Ruskin Mill which is "re-imagining potential". So his opal experience in Sheffield is really correlating to this idea that whatever situation you find yourself in, you can choose to move it forward into a future transformative potential or you can get stuck in the mud. This same skill set has been applied through my own biography in looking at the heritage of industrial buildings which were once subject to the division of labour. (I2, ll. 120-127)

However, opals are not always recognisable at first sight and sometimes we also do not see this in ourselves or others, hence the capacity to imagine potential is an important attribute as one leader remarked: "[…] but I know because look at me. You find it in the most surprising places, don't you? It's not always the people in the role as you see it at that time" (I10, ll. 268f.). This does resonate in some of the leadership approaches described above (see 2.6.2.) such as transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006) and spiritual leadership (Fry 2003; Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023 and 2022).

Attributes of these leadership approaches such as positive role-modelling, humility as well as confidence (Samul, 2020 and 2024; Sendjaya et al., 2008) are also important attributes and resounding from the survey when asked about their own experience of developing self-generated conscious action: "I aspire to positive role modelling at all times - from picking up litter in the courtyard to gaining both confidence and humility in my leadership." (S, Q 92, P, 65).

Taking this one step further one leader remarked that as the goal of PSTE is to create the conditions to support the development of self-generated action for the student and with that positive development, the (self-)development of the staff and the leadership of the organisation is a condition of that (as discussed above in 2.5.6.; RMT, 2024c; Gordon and Cox, 2024).

In addition to this one leader adds 'spiritual capacity' as an important attribute: "I do think it comes down to having spiritual capacity. […] If you're entirely earth bound, you're not going to be open to thinking in the same way, are you?" (I10, ll. 268-272). This does address the elephant in the room in the question whether a successful leader in RMT would need to be a Steiner follower (Tyson, 2023b; Goldshmidt, 2017) and does seem like a good compromise as

it describes the openness to the thinking of those concepts but not necessarily agreement in all points.

Also, not everybody agrees that Senior Leaders in RMT need to have an understanding of Steiner's insights as one of the trustees adds, but in her view, this has to be replaced by a thorough engagement with the material:

> CC[30]: Do you actually think a senior leader needs to understand anything about Steiner in order to understand PSTE?
>
> TR[31]: No. […]. Because if spirit is matter you don't need to understand it intellectually. But if you're not engaged with matter in a full sensory way then you're going to miss the connections. (Interview 4, lines 275-279)

Also, Aonghus points out that having a grounding in Steiner's concepts and language can in fact be an obstacle to understanding PSTE in depth: "[…] you cannot assume that being interested in spiritual science is actually going to deliver the method. In fact, it's often the case that being interested in the spiritual science may be a blocker to delivering the method" (I 3, ll. 92-94). However, it does appear difficult to qualify when it is helpful to have a grounding in Steiner's work or spiritual science and where it becomes an obstruction.

6.3.1.3.   (self) critique of RMT leadership

Throughout the study I have been mindful to allow voices to be heard that are critical of the method as well as of the leadership of RMT. I have been mindful of my position (see 1.3) and actual and perceived impact that it could have and therefore, while, also not actively inviting critique I hope I have signalled openness also to views which are not aligned to my own or the actual or perceived views of the organisation.

Going back to the earlier point of senior leaders on the ground in the workshop (see 6.3.1.1.), for some participants that seems to send a strong signal of connectedness, hence the obstacle of not engaging in this way does feel like an unmet need:

> I think there is more we could do around Field 7 and the style and method of leadership that that informs. We could be clearer about that. Again, what I'd love to do is to spend some time at the Executive Team to spend some time on how do we want to be perceived? How do we want to be experienced as leaders by staff? And

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[30] CC= author

[31] TR = trustee

going into workshops is a great example. And it's tricky stuff because I feel guilty about not doing it. (I8, ll. 142-146)

This does also resound from some of the survey participants who deem themselves to have a good understanding of Field 7 -Transformative Leadership but highlight that the leaders could be better role models: "Good understanding. Better role modelling by senior leaders of their own use Field 4 in the management of themselves and staff." (S, Q, 47, P 13)

Other leaders, however, also do show the wish to engage but are equally conflicted because of day-to-day duties, stating also that "the organisation does offer plenty of opportunities for me to practice leadership although this can be a bit unfocussed" (S, Q95, P44):

> This is about finding your voice and role-modelling qualities needed to lead students into the world. It may be that we are caught up in day-to-day housekeeping and maintaining and finding challenge to develop leadership. (S, Q95, P44)

Also, in my own experiences (e.g. D, ll. 167-173 and ll. 569-575) I can confirm that role-modelling engagement in the craft workshops, on the land or in the home is of unparalleled benefit for all involved (student, tutor, supportworker, leader) and is staff training, quality assurance, leadership training, coherence making and alignment (e.g. Wenger, 1999; Hugo and Iverson, 2024) all in one (see 7.3.). However, I can also confirm that as a leader one is experiencing a lot of conflicting demands, time pressures and priorities and simple guilt when it does not happen. A way forward would be to clarify and communicate clearly to all involved the expectations around this (Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Harris and Muijs, 2005).

6.3.1.4.   significance of governance, leadership and management

Undoubtedly leaders and managers have a major impact on how most organisational changes happen (Laloux, 2014; Coyle, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Implementing a method is one of these organisational changes but in Ruskin Mill's case, it is an ongoing continuous process as its method sits at odds in many ways with the way 'how things are done' in the education and care industry as discussed above (2.2. and 2.5.). It therefore is an organisational change on one level but it also requires a change from the individuals who come from the education and care industry, will have been educated and received training in it, possibly had their professional formation in it and their formative career years -and especially for staff who join

in a leadership position such as Headteacher or Principal- will have proven themselves as a successful representative of this industry, its approaches and values.

To then embrace a different method, that is only possible to learn in Ruskin Mill Trust, as PSTE is currently not available outside of Ruskin Mill Trust, requires a lot of humility, the ability to be open and ask questions, make mistakes and also to 'not know' some things. This often sits at odds with the self-perception of power and being able to have the answers, to respond and be responsible that goes along with being a leader for dozens if not sometimes hundreds of staff and students.

The challenge of staff entering the organisation at a senior level which, with regards to their turnover, is unfortunately in many regards in line with national experiences (see 2.6.4.; Weale, 2022) while also being expected to have a deep understanding of the method. Therefore, Aonghus sees this also pragmatic that due to the high turnover in the industry, senior leaders who stay for longer are rather an exception than the norm which does limit the depth of understanding of PSTE that a senior leader can achieve; namely "coasting with the method" (I 3, l. 82).

This does stand in stark contrast to the expectations of the person who holds it all together, debatably the centre leader, understanding why the Seven Fields are there, which Aonghus also only identified through his Masters: "But when it became clear in 2011 that you couldn't actually do all those fields and maintain them unless you had somebody who understood why they were there." (I 1, ll. 24-28) In Gordon and Cox (2024) he describes this expectation as "a leader with therapeutic capacity [who] has to be able to translate this seeing into a curriculum, and that's tricky" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p. 190).

This complex picture of contrasting expectations around senior leaders is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Professionally competent, with a deep understanding of PSTE (which can only be learned while at RMT), taking informed decisions out of their understanding of the method with one in three secondary school leaders in England quitting in five years following their appointment (Weale, 2022) is indeed challenging.

Therefore, this puts more emphasis on the surrounding structures (see below 6.3.2.) to hold the understanding of the method in order to ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of PSTE (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Holst, 2022), which is informed by Rudolf

Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation. Aonghus points us towards the trustees, Steiner as the foundation of PSTE and research:

> I think if trustees aren't able at the time of crisis to know what's what then the inevitable potential hijacking of the organisation is potentially imminent so things can run quite smoothly until there is a crisis. […] So, the answer is because they have the ultimate power that they are steering an organisation based on Steiner, the second one is still not good enough which is what aspect of Steiner? And if the Trust has spent hundreds of thousands in researching its method, then they need to have honoured the results of that research. (I3, ll 42-55)

It appears at this point that significant resources (time, training) are invested into the development of senior leaders in general which is in line with many other organisations (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas et al., 2012; Lacerenza et al., 2017). However, at RMT this goes well beyond the statutory or sector specific requirements or even best practice as a lot of the training is designed to more specifically enhance their understanding of PSTE, even when they join the trust at a senior level with significant leadership experience in the 'education industry'.

In summary, while undoubtedly senior leaders hold an important position in the implementation to the method, the turnover of senior staff and hence the depth of understanding of PSTE which needs time (see 6.2.3.2.) remains challenging in an 'industry' with high turnover in general as well as at senior level. Therefore, other safeguards have to be put in place in order to ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of the method through all levels of the organisation (see below especially at 6.3.2.1. and 6.3.2.5.) One is at trustee level with a requirement of the majority of trustees having a good understanding of Steiner's insights as the underlying principles to PSTE (although Aonghus remarks that there is still scope for further differentiation)(see 7.3.). A further safeguard or mechanism to ensure a coherence of understanding of the method through all levels of the organisation lies possibly in the systems and structures which we will explore in the next section.

6.3.2. Theme 3: organisational structure and development

This theme is addressing the organisational structures and the mechanisms of organisational development that are supporting the understanding and implementation of the method. In

this section we will explore these systems and structures and how they relate to PSTE, starting with the ones which are closest to the student experience such as curriculum and quality assurance of the student experience, then moving the underlying infrastructure, e.g. financial structures, the tension that debatably can arise between method focussed and compliance focussed systems, recruitment, structures that where necessitated through the founder succession and finally staff training addressing the different levels of the organisation.

6.3.2.1. structure, systems and curriculum

It is possibly fair to say that there is a tension in Ruskin Mill between system-based approaches and creative intuitive approaches and it remains an interesting and ongoing challenge how to bring those two together. One participant remarked in the context of leaders from the 'education industry' that "many of us are coming from [...] a systems based society. And we [i.e. Ruskin Mill] go back to something which nurtured humanity before the intellectual systems of the European Enlightenment" (I. 14, ll. 53-55). This notion introduces the challenges in Ruskin Mill of firstly creating 'systems', which is in the excerpt but possibly more widely not necessarily seen as desirable and positive (see 6.3.2.3.) and then secondly maintaining them over longer periods of time which is by a necessarily creative staff body received slightly suspiciously. There is also a possible tension between systems and frameworks which people are encouraged to follow, i.e. be compliant, and the notion of what PSTE tries to bring about, namely self-generated conscious action. Bearing in mind that Ruskin Mill however brings these two approaches together very successfully, we will find this tension again in some comments regarding the relationship of compliance and method (see 6.3.2.3.).

Most importantly, I want to consider the systems which are impacting directly on the student experience, namely the day-to-day timetabling and overall curriculum structure. This is something that the whole organisation is focussed on and indeed it is of course its primary purpose as expressed in the charitable objects (see 2.2.). Hence, I was keen to experience this on the ground or 'step into the student's shoes' as some of the participants have phrased it before in the ethnographic observations in the workshops. It is certainly where the tensions of organisational systems, the desire to implement a method, the laws of the particular craft

and material (Martin and Rawson, 2008; RMT 2024; Gordon and Cox, 2024) and of course the needs and wants of the individual student are coming together:

> […] the logistical and administrative challenges,[…], the length of the sessions, there's something about the natural processes that things take and things do. […] fire needs to get started. That needs to go to a certain temperature. Then the iron needs to be heated, needs to be forged until there is a finished product. So that has a certain length of time which sometimes maybe cannot really be put an actual time. […] And then[…] there's the man made time, which means that students are arriving at College at 09:00. (D, ll. 199-205)

Therefore, the craft process moves or 'metamorphoses' from the ideal, pure process that is determined by the material (figure 14) to the process that sits in an educational context (figure 34 below). These craft processes are then framed in the day-to-day work with the students through the timetable. While I often perceived logistical challenges to the implementation of the method during observations, i.e. with a not helpful impact on the student experience, it was refreshing to hear the -at least aspirational- therapeutic design thinking that stands behind the timetable design in many cases:

> My considerations when timetabling PSTE for student takes into account his/her diagnosis, wishes and aspirations. I consider a range of factors: was the childhood chaotic? Does the individual have autonomy? Are physical disabilities a factor? What about sensory integration? I assist and support students in several instances where they reconnect with who they really are and to find ways in which I can help them to achieve their full potential. (S, Q7, P 5)

With regards to the curriculum, tensions can emerge between what is considered 'academic' and what is considered 'method based learning', especially when externally recognised qualifications are involved which are assessing learning that usually happens in desk based classroom environments (see Illich, 1973 and 2002; 2.4.4.; 2.5.3.) and a different educational paradigm (see 2.2.), suggesting that PSTE is possibly not something for 'higher' achievers:

> I have got students who are wanting to do GCSE as well […]. So they're sort of like a high achiever, […]. And to tie that in with the Seven Fields, […] it's really challenging. […] I do feel as it is much easier to embrace the Seven Fields and incorporate that into what you're *[sic!]* trying to deliver with a craft curriculum (FG16, 172-183).

Interesting here also the distance the participant has, rather than stating "what *I* want to deliver".

Furthermore, medium- and longer-term structures that impact on the student experience are the curriculum design, the design of the assessment process and lesson observations and quality assurance, also as part of the preparation for inspections (Fullan, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019). Again, this stands in a relationship to the needs and wants of the student and the aspiration of implementing PSTE and can either result in tensions, be meaningless and 'just another thing to do' or be supportive of the student's development and aligned with the method (see figure 34):

> I think personally there should be PSTE observations, watching a session, how you incorporate PSTE into your session. I know it sounds like a bit hardball, but it would make the tutors think more about incorporating those things rather than just going, I don't get checked on it, so why am I doing it? (I9, ll. 215-223)

While I certainly had experienced and implemented this myself a few years back I learned here that this practice seems to have been eroded again and is certainly not used consistently across the Trust (see 7.3.). In another site a participant reported that this is much more used in the lesson planning and reviewing but struggled to find the meaning in it and as it is used rather superficially:

> We had Ofsted in a few years ago, and I think that sort of like comes to the foreground. Ofsted, they're going to come back and we need to be on it. […] And PSTE, as mentioned, it's like a tick box. Is PSTE done in session? Of course it is, because it's already there, but not as a …., you know, when it's innate in the session. But if you're not actually using it physically, mentally, then it's there, but it's not implemented. (I9, ll. 229-233)

It appears that relating the elements of students' needs and wants, the craft process, logistical considerations (e.g. bus transport between sites, lunch times etc), timetable considerations, longer term curriculum and assessment in a meaningful and mutually supportive way that supports the development of the student through the implementation of the method is the challenge.

FIGURE 33 SOME FACTORS IMPACTING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

With regards to systems that support the coherence of understanding and implementation of PSTE it might make sense to start with the 'Ruskin Mill card' (see Appendix 1.1.). Following the Masters (Gordon and Bulow, 2012) which led to a clarification of the language of the method as well as its structure in naming the Seven Fields of Practice (see 2.5.3.) one of the first cross Trust measures was to issue a card with the key-principles of the method as a general orientation point for all staff In terms of coherence making this was a significant step as one of the trustees remembered: "I realised not very long after managing to complete the Masters, that we were needing an aide memoir pocket card for the new language" (I4, ll. 107-110). Fullan and Quinn (2015, p.89) describe this as working with "simplexity": identifying the smallest number of key principles to then work with practitioners to become clear about. This card then became the focus point or starting point for most training sessions since then and is still referred to as "the card" with in fact very little changes since its inception. In this context it also seems significant and aid the coherence of the organisation that 78% of the survey respondents said that they would carry 'the card' with them at all times (see table 23).

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A further system which has been mentioned is that of The Seven Fields Standards (see 2.5.5. and appendices 1.2-1.5). As described above (see 2.5.5.) this is currently used as a self-assessment system which has been developed on request of the Trustees by myself in collaboration with a large number of colleagues to support the provision leaders to self-assess the implementation of the method. They can then weave their findings of strengths and areas of development into their self-assessment report and development plan for their centre. One of the senior leaders described (I9, ll.110ff.) how one of the questions in there sparked a series of further conversations and investigations: "I didn't know what that meant, really. So that's been a bit of a journey" (I9, ll.116). At times the results of the self-assessment have been aggregated (see appendix 1.5.), however, this system can possibly be developed further with regards to quality assurance and organisational development (Fullan, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Bush, 2020) (see 7.3.).

Furthermore, while Ruskin Mill can be experienced as a not very system led organisation, the founder is recognising the importance to strengthen this element overall, especially in the context of his succession (Tuomala et al., 2018; Santora et al., 2015; Elkin et al., 2013) in some of the central staffing structures:

> So the civil service which creates an opportunity in which individuals are no longer in a way, so decisive in the future of the organisation. I include [in] that myself. Whereby the intelligence of the organisation is distributed into administrative and visionary functions. In which the civil service is also informed by active research will be, in my view, the succession opportunity that avoids rupture in departing from the organisation, which, of course, I will be doing. (I 1, ll. 236-240)

With the term 'civil service' RMT describes a number of roles that work cross trust and could be described as central or corporate services such as IT, Finance, HR, Estates etc. The conversation about the trainings of those members of staff and their relationship to the implementation of the method is still ongoing (see 7.3.).

6.3.2.2.   financial structure

One crucial organisational structure to implement PSTE that Aonghus was interested in from early on is the financial structure with its budgeting processes (Kotter, 2012; Bush, 2020): "in undertaking the research for the Masters a few years ago, […] you begin to observe that there

are budgets in what we might call for certain fields of activity" (I1, ll. 14-20), hence the observations of the financial structures have helped him in his own reflective process in fact to establish the Fields of Practice altogether. This is also resounding in the current financial systems by those responsible for them (I7, ll. 59-66).

In connection with the financial systems and structures the importance of leadership shines through again and the importance to invest in high quality leadership who are cognisant of how the method is held by the structures:

> [...] so you don't realize the significance of the actual cost centre of leadership. But when it became clear in 2011 that you couldn't actually do all those fields and maintain them unless you had somebody who understood why they were there. (I 1, ll. 25-27)

Therefore, there are clearly some structures in place that hold and support the method of Ruskin Mill Trust which do not need the consciousness of the individual on the ground but which possibly need to be held at a higher level (see 6.3.1.4.) especially in the context of his succession (Tuomala et al., 2018; Santora et al. 2015; Elkin et al., 2013). Failure to do so could have serious consequences as Aonghus outlines:

> And you'd lose a lot of money, partly because you would lose identity and therefore the integrity of what people are currently purchasing, because it's very subtle what people are purchasing. So, if you change it for whatever reason, without knowing the why, then you will have a rupture. But that's how most organisations go forward. (I1, ll.93-97)

6.3.2.3. method and compliance

In the efforts to implement an educational method which is rooted in Rudolf Steiner's educational insights the main tension which also shines through in the previous points is that of an internally motivated and constructed method and compliance, which is to the greatest extent following and framed through external pressures, regulations and requirements. Braiding those internal and external expectations leads to the tension and risks as expressed by participants earlier and summarised well by a trustee below:

> [...] we've [...] created a very functional, accessible concept where you can prove efficacy, which is what the world wants. We know that. Especially if you want money from them and you can do it in the context of spiritual science. To me, maybe that

already is a kind of evolution, but also maybe sooner or later it's going to fall foul of the evolved resistance to that. (I5, ll. 59-64)

He also points towards the fine balance of meeting external requirements while not giving up the internally motivated vision as "[…] if the business loses its sense of meaning, if it loses its sense of cohesiveness, […] it becomes a machine" (I5, ll. 124-126).

Where staff struggle to engage with the method on a theoretical basis and cannot progress their understanding (see 6.2.3.) it is possible that those elements which are perceived as 'the method' over time will attract a negative connotation, lacking meaning and becoming a simple tickbox exercise:

> I think you can certainly look at your activities and then you can tick a few boxes that you think it might mean. Okay, well, we planted out the beans and then we kind of watered them. So okay, you got biodynamic ecology; […] Took the watering can himself; so there's some transformative leadership, tick, tick, tick. (FG 16, ll. 184-187)

Hence the costs of staff not engaging or understanding the method -and vision- of the organisation are considerable (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Fry, 2003; Mogren et al., 2019).

6.3.2.4. Recruitment

From some survey comments it also becomes apparent that challenges on recruitment can impact on the implementation of the method as

> understaffing means staff are on duty supporting individuals above and beyond the hours we are contracted to work. Training required by law takes priority over RMT training and it feels as though residential staff are not given opportunities received by other staff (S, Q25, P69).

Bearing in mind that this comment was from a time (2022) when vacancy rates in the care sector as a whole were on a record high (CQC, 2024).

However, also in the education 'industry' recruitment can be a challenge (see for example Adams, 2023), especially in the educational leadership with one in one in three secondary school leaders in England leaving in five years following their appointment (Weale, 2022). This high turnover impacts on the depth of understanding of PSTE that can be achieved in that time, as Aonghus summarizes:

> Centre leaders are also quite complicated. […] The question is how do you train up a centre leader for a research position that takes two years to complete [*i.e. the*

Masters]? And the turnaround of their position is actually relatively short term. It's where the greatest turnover is at the most senior level and I haven't squared that now. In the care it's pretty shocking, in the education it's stabilizing, but it's not particularly good. (I 3, ll. 73-77)

Furthermore, the recruitment process is where the individual first connects with the organisation and "actually, how do you do that interview process? You think you've come for a job, you have. What are the technical things that you need to be able to show us that you can do that we need you to be able to do? And what else do you think you've come for? And you'll need to be able to do both" (I4, ll.270-274). 'Both' referring here to the high level expertise in the sector specific requirements as well as gaining an understanding of PSTE and aspire to its implementation.

Hence, while the applicant might be excellent in the sector specific requirement, be it a residential supportworker who started her career recently or an Executive Headteacher who has got years of experience, both will have to undergo significant amount of training in and indeed learning of the method (which as a fact can only be learned in RMT) which requires unusual amounts of openness and humility (Samul, 2024; Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya et al., 2008; see also 6.3.1.4.) and possibly a clash of paradigms (see 2.2.; 2.3.1.). Whether this is always communicated and understood in the recruitment process is questionable.

6.3.2.5.   succession and AG involvement

With only 23% of non-profit organisations having succession plans in place (Santora et al. 2015), the fact that RMT has been thinking about and planning for succession for years is already commendable. Many of the above structures and mechanism could be considered as what Rothwell (2010) defines as succession planning: "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2010, p. 6). However, in RMT considerations have gone far beyond the usually aspired success criteria of growth of revenue, retaining the successor, and overall self-reported performance (Tuomala et al., 2018) and focussed on the continued development and implementation of the method. Within this, how the above discussed tension, risks and

balances are developing into the future will be no doubt vital for the organisation and the coherence in understanding and implementation of the method. Aonghus hopes that

> as the research develops and the civil service develops, it enables me to be less attached and connected to everyday function. So, I suspect there'll be a natural opportunity of the functions of research and the civil service actually doing some of the work better than I could. That has to be the ultimate positive exit, which is what I'm after (I1, ll. 241-244).

Aonghus therefore sees those functions of research (see 2.5.4.) and 'civil service' (see also 6.3.2.1.) replacing to some extent his own activity. However, he is also very clear about the risks of this succession movement as

> there is as yet [an] untried reality check of whether the succession is sufficiently conscious and embedded to hold the framework of the Trust. The difficulty is that nobody really knows until the founder's disappeared or found a way of acquiescing out of involvement (I1, ll.68-70).

The point of exit is determined by the "direct relationship between the capacity of the team and the confidence that that generates for a kind of stepping back out of the insight of decision making" (I1, ll.71f.), therefore beyond some of the generally perceived challenges of succession (Tuomala et al., 2018; Santora et al. 2015; Elkin et al., 2013) are determined by the competence the team holds of the operational as well as PSTE related expertise.

With regards to research Aonghus sees his task close to completion which

> was to build the body so that the University could emerge, which my view is, needs to operate in every centre. So, my job is only a quarter of the project, which is getting the physical body. I'm good at putting the physical world [...] I'm fairly good at collecting the physical body of the world because I'm a potter, but I'm a potter who also wants to see light through the material world, which is why I studied Chinese ceramics. So how do you bring spirit into matter and how do you bring matter into spirit? That is my contribution (I1, ll. 197-201).

Hence building a distributed university that is not only caught in a materialistic paradigm but allows Steiner's spiritual insights in has been the task (see also 2.3.2. and 2.5.6.).

Having said this however, Aonghus, also acknowledges that he wishes to be involved in the next phase, drawing on Goethe's (see 2.4.1.) and Ruskin's (2.4.2.) thinking on morphology and architecture as well as Steiner's insights (see 2.3.2. and 2.5.3.):

> […] can the Executive Team, can the trustees find a way of using the morphology which lives in each of the fields and in the joining fields in such a way that you move from a Romansque body into a Gothic etheric, which is the power of life. So, I would say over the next 20 years, the Trust's task would be to move out of the physical body -and it is- into a new order of life force, which is "How do you learn to think in a new way?" […] So, it looks as if I'm also responsible, but this time with a team, because I can't do it myself, which is also the etheric, which is how do you create a life force of collaboration in which to hold the next step of the organisation, which is to extend its life force energy into the world. (I1, ll. 163-174)

In summary, it can be said that the succession planning process with RMT moving from an organisation that has been strongly led operationally as well as in the development of its method PSTE by the founder goes beyond what is usually aspired for in succession processes (Tuomala et al., 2018; Santora et al. 2015; Elkin et al., 2013) and focusses on the ongoing development and implementation of PSTE. One important mechanism of this is furthermore the staff training which shall be discussed in the next section.

6.3.2.6. staff training

6.3.2.6.1. General aspects

Moving on from the individual understanding of the method of staff members and leaders (see 6.2.) in considering the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' we will now consider the organisational systems that purposefully were put in place to support the individuals' understanding of the method, namely staff training.

To strengthen the understanding of the method throughout the whole staff body (see 2.2.; 2.3.4.; 2.5.3.), support the organisational growth (see 1.1.) and succession planning (see 6.3.2.5.) Ruskin Mill Trust has been developing a range of staff training and professional (and personal) development opportunities for its different staff groups at different levels in the organisation with ongoing all-staff trainings, one off events, longer courses, externally accredited and not accredited up, to Masters level and more recently also supported staff to undertake PhDs and EdDs (see RMT, 2024d):

> What's clear is that we will not be able to expand unless we can train quite effectively new leaders and senior leadership teams and guys on the ground. So, the next phase of development is what can you achieve through an in house training program on the ground? And if Ruskin Mill can support that financially, then it's got a good future. (I. 3, ll. 162-164)

This notion is in line with many organisations who invest large amounts of resources of time and money into staff training, with the biggest part being allocated to leadership training (Salas et al., 2012; Grossman and Salas, 2011). While the staff training has developed well in the last decade in RMT and grown with the aspiration of the 'Practitioner University' with "practitioner-researchers" (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.156; Wenger, 1999) (see 2.5.4.) and the content goes beyond trainings which are usually offered in schools and colleges there is also possibly room for improvement considering insights of training science on the implementation of insights from the trainings, i.e. transfer (Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023; Hutchins and Burke, 2007; Blume et al., 2010).

6.3.2.6.2.   Induction training

For a number of years Ruskin Mill Trust has had the ambition that all staff receive an induction into the method of 2 weeks before they start their actual role (see 2.5.4.). While this has been the ambition, pressures to also ensure that staff have got all the externally required trainings for their role (often referred to as 'mandatory trainings' or 'compliance trainings'; see 6.3.2.3.) -whether actual or perceived- as well as recruitment pressures to fill a certain role (see 6.3.2.4., Weale, 2022; Adams, 2023; CQC, 2024) can on occasions lead to this being shortened or omitted altogether as evident from the survey results (see table 25 and 26) and stated by some of the participants: "I have received no training in this and can only say that I observe from an outside perspective as the practitioners interact with the adults I support" (S, Q7, P67).

Even staff who first meet some of Steiner's insights at RMT and for whom PSTE has some very foreign concepts appreciate that there is a build-up of concepts and deepening of understanding over a period of time (see also Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016; Entwistle, 2022):

> Well, it's been a big sort of hit and miss with the training. Some of it is great, and how you're pitching it at people who have been here for a long time, as well as people have

been here for a week, to get that level. Because sometimes when you first start, you're like, I don't know what's going on. And I know the sort of messages just like flow over you and it might come back to you when you've been here a while and you learned a bit more. (I8, ll. 20-24)

However, these comments exemplify how important it is to lay the foundations in an accessible form for experiences and concepts to evolve from (Sava and Novotny, 2016), which was the intention of the induction training.

6.3.2.6.3.   ongoing staff training

Following on from the induction training there is also ongoing staff training for all staff (see also Salas et al., 2012) that can possibly facilitate an ongoing deepening of the method. The all-staff training that consists for colleges of a "training week" at the beginning of the academic year as well as 9 inset days and for schools of 5 training days per academic year goes through the Seven Fields of Practice, generally focussing on one field per half term. The idea would be that this creates a spiral curriculum where a staff member who is with the Trust over a longer period of time for example goes through Field 4 three times in a decade, each time experiencing it with lectures and practical experience over a term, hence with opportunities to deepen their understanding and look at it from different perspectives (also echoed in FG 16, ll. 116-120).

This has also progressed in the last decade with a central training department so that themes can be held consistently across the Trust (see 2.5.4.). This pace with several sessions focussing on the method per term as well as the recurring of themes for those staff who stay longer than 3.5 years (7 Fields, 3 per year equals a recurring all 3.6 years) allows for a slower but deeper 'digestion process' and deeper understanding (see also Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016; Entwistle, 2022).

However, participants reported that training used to be much more practical and, possibly through Covid has become more "cerebral" and more on screens:

> We used to do a lot more in house training, which was craft. The craft sessions were much more so the training sessions were much more craft based and we would maybe do a carousel and where teachers would be split into groups and we utilize the craft teachers within the building. I think some of the training has turned more into much more cerebral training, but then COVID probably has something to do with it, things

are always on screens and I don't think you get the same sensory experience of actually doing the craft and then balancing off how you feel and how that affects students. (FG 16, ll. 242-248)

This is also echoed by participants from the survey: Field 4 – what would help you to develop this further: "Practical training rather than a PowerPoint" (S, Q47, P2). Training science echoes to "use technology wisely" (Salas et al., 2012, p.93) and firstly consider the instructional strategies that stand behind the technology and how appropriate and helpful to the learning it is. While we also need to consider that many RMT staff especially prefer practical hands on training (as they have chosen to work in a hands on education), some of the conceptual training is more unusual, it is also worth noting that there is already a lot of practical training happening. Participants also made suggestions to progress this even further, e.g.:

> You can always bring in seeing things in action, bringing a craft into the dining room. I'm quite happy to bring an anvil, and a hammer and a bellow, […] Look what is happening here when it comes to PSTE, twelve senses and all, so they see it, it's physical rather than just talking. (I.8, ll. 261-264)

The survey gives some interesting insights into where staff consider themselves to have a strong understanding of the method and where there are still areas to develop. It appears from the results above (see 5.2.1.) that especially Field 3 Biodynamic Ecology and Field 6 Holistic Medicine are Fields of Practice where staff consider themselves to have gaps in understanding. Comments like "I understand it is a field for specialists" (S, Q77, P65) are possibly quite telling in so far as staff, while being interested in learning more about it, consider this an aspect of the method which is very much held by specialists and hence justifies not having to understand it further.

6.3.2.6.4.   Senior leadership induction

There has been a recognition of the organisation that staff who have not 'worked their way up' in the organisation but are joining from the outside with relevant experience in the relevant 'industry' -education and/or care- at a senior leadership level will need a deeper understanding of the method and also have the idea of being part a wider Trust (Lacerenza, et al., 2017; Grossman and Salas, 2011). These roles include for example provision leaders and their deputies as well as Heads of Care as well as cross Trust roles, i.e. Heads of Departments.

Bringing this loop of engagement in the method, understanding of the method (see also Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016; Entwistle, 2022), better performance in implementing the method, better outcomes for students in practice as well as into the consciousness of the decision makers is still ongoing work (Botke et al., 2018; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023).

However, with the Masters in PSTE the organisation is moving towards ensuring that long-standing leaders have a sound understanding of PSTE (Rothwell, 2010):

> The paradox of Ruskin Mill leaders let's say the two directors only just having joined the masters is a very late development, but better late than never. So I think the organisation, with the advent of the two directors joining, has finally arrived at a point where there is likely now to be a functional understanding as to what it is that they are expected to increasingly deliver as well as the external. (I 3, ll. 64-67)

Similar and often greater pressures apply to the the general PSTE 2 week induction for all staff. These are the pressure to start in the role, possibly because the previous incumbent had to leave the post at short notice, the need to provide leadership to a site, often the lead in time and recruitment times for senior staff are very long (three months plus) necessitated through the longer notice periods in those roles (see also Weale, 2022; Adams, 2023). Also, there is often more time for a complex handover needed. Hence allowing for senior staff for a longer induction period (about 20 days in total) not to perform and fulfil their role is a big commitment of the organisation in wishing to bring about coherence (Fullan and Quinn, 2016). However, on the other hand, having a centre leader leading a centre not out of the method of the Trust but out of the paradigm that is alive in the relevant industry is possibly riskier than having to wait for another few days or weeks (Rothwell, 2010). Hence it remains a difficult balancing act with unsatisfactory decisions on either side.

6.3.2.6.5.   Ongoing courses

In addition to the ongoing staff training, Ruskin Mill has also developed a range of courses for the specific Fields of Practice, which allow staff who are active in those to deepen their understanding (RMT, 2024d). Some of the courses are also open to interested members of the public who then on many occasions at some point have become members of staff at Ruskin Mill Trust, hence were supportive of growth strategy (see above 6.3.2.6.1.; I. 3, ll. 162-164). The courses are of differing length and intensity, some with some without externally recognised accreditation, overall well-structured and well resourced and led by internal and

external experts in the relevant Fields. Attendance at these courses allows staff also 'time out' from their day-to-day work, step back and reflect and try to look at their work and the context from a different perspective, hence there can be the aspect of wishing to value the staff (Savas et al., 2012) and wellbeing (Watson et al., 2018).

However, the logistical questions can remain challenging for some such as travel, staying overnight somewhere else, family arrangements, attendance in the staff's own time:

> Some staff say, why do I want to go into all [*that*] effort? Why do I want to go down to the Field Centre using my whole weekend because people are very, very hot on the work-life balance. I don't want to use my whole weekend going to the Field Centre, so thank you. (I 11, ll. 187-189)

While it appears impossible to 'get it right for everybody' with 1200 staff having a palette of courses as well as sponsorships to external events appears to have a positive impact on furthering staff's understanding, especially senior staff and especially with the more difficult elements of the method which do take longer time to digest:

> It's when you're able to put yourself in and do all those odd little things that come up, those little weird ones, so that you get the parts of the whole. You can't just work here and think that's it. It's around, making yourself open to the parts of the whole. So odd little conferences that I've kind of ended up at, odd little conversations, the odd guest speaker [...]. (I 10, ll. 208-212)

It does remain about this moment of openness, the right place the right time and the right content coming together for that specific person, finding the right entry point. As Aonghus put it in an earlier interview:

> So the availability of the Masters, the availability of short courses, the availability of very tangential entry points and I think tangential can be considered biodynamics, Goethean Science, PPOC. But [...] if you don't know the why of doing descent into matter, craft, it can be over within a couple of years because it will be seen as occupational therapy and it's going to be difficult to argue the fees for occupational therapy so Field four becomes the elephant in the room as it is the lens by which you can justify in the inspiration of the Trust particularly Field two and three. (I 3, ll. 95-101)

Here Aonghus points towards the importance of a number of entry points available while also ensuring that these are sourced from the same coordinates, i.e. Steiner's educational insights and his insights into human development (Field 4) and spiritual science, "so that participants

become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions and practices" (Wenger, 1999, p. 179; see also Bush, 2020; Mogren et al., 2019; Hugo and Iverson, 2024).

6.3.2.6.6.   Masters in PSTE and doctorate students (PhDs and EdDs)

Ruskin Mill endeavours to bring PSTE and Steiner's underlying insights to Higher Education came to first fruition around 2010 in beginning collaborations with other Higher Education organisations which were also working out of Steiner's insights[32]. This resulted in more the first iteration of a formalised Ruskin Mill Masters programme, which in turn enabled Aonghus to experience firsthand the benefits of a Higher Education programme. This then led to a much clearer articulation of the Ruskin Mill method and firstly named the Seven Fields of Practice (Gordon and Buelow, 2012). The language developed as part of this process "we were then working with the new language that had been developed through Aonghus' and Charlotte's Masters" (I 4, ll. 98, 99) and was further developed in subsequent Masters iterations and is currently deepened through the commissioning of doctorate studies, PhDs and EdDs in the relevant Fields of Practice and aspects of the method, one of them being the current study.

However, as one participant remembers, it went well beyond transmission of knowledge or academic engagement:

> And I have had my moments of dissent and rebellion. [...] I think the Masters saved me. The Masters came at just the right time. And I am grateful for Aonghus, for intuiting that. [...] It brought me back in just at the right moment. They were the happiest years. [...] Going down very early down at the Field Centre. Being at the Mothership in its inaugural year. It was very privileged, actually, and having those conversations with Aonghus [and others...] those kind of mind expanding moments. You suddenly think, oh, yeah, we were in a group. (I10, 244-254)

In summary, drawing on Wenger's (1999) the process of academic engagement at Masters and doctorate studies ensured the development of a community of practice of staff engaged in RMT and PSTE, with an in house faculty of staff who have got years of experience in Ruskin Mill and PSTE and who are then also able to deliver the Ruskin Mill Masters programme

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[32] As one participant recalls: "We were working at the time as well with what was called 'The University of the Spirit'. Which was a development with different anthroposophical initiatives. With Alanus University, with Norway with Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo, with various academic people that came together in a group". (I 4, ll. 79-81)

(RMCP, 2024b; see also Gordon and Cox, 2023, especially pp. 155ff.; Cox, 2005; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014).

This is extended to the training for all staff, induction training and senior leadership induction as well as ongoing courses (RMCP, 2024d) which are all sourced from the same principles, namely PSTE and the Seven Fields with Steiner's educational insights underlying. Therefore, staff training is an important factor in ensuring coherence of understanding and implementation of PSTE across all levels of the organisation (e.g. Fullan and Quinn, 2016; Salas et al., 2012; Botke et al., 2018; Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023). It complements other efforts of implementation of the method such as educational, financial, and quality assurance (i.e. Seven Fields Standards) structures. All of those efforts can be examined light of the founder succession (e.g. Rothwell, 2010; Santora et al. 2015) and the tension between internal vision which is grounded in Steiner's spiritual science and external pressures, many going back to the initial discussion of different paradigms (see 2.2. and 2.3.2.).

6.4. Introduction to theme 4: How we develop an educational method?

This theme talks about reflections of the participants on the future opportunities and challenges (internal and external) with regards to the method PSTE. These were identified under the codes research, organisational future challenges and feedback from practitioners and shall be discussed in the following sections.

6.4.1. Research

In considering the research question how Ruskin Mill Trust ensures the coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation and having established the importance of ongoing research for the staff training (especially 6.3.2.6.6.), it seems important to emphasise that this is also a mean to keep PSTE as an educational method vibrant and developing into the future:

[...] without research you can't really navigate the future until you can name what it is you got and answer the question, so why do you do it and what is it and how you do it. So, with the answering of those three questions, you could then start to put [together] a program of teaching staff. (I1, ll. 33-36)

While it informs the staff training this is not a one-off activity but an ongoing invigorating process. In creating a culture and organisational structures in which 'research that enhances practice and practice that enhances research' (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.180) staff training is the mediator (2.5.4.) in creating a community of practice (Wenger, 1999; see also Cox, 2005; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014).

6.4.2. organisational future challenges

Without any doubt Ruskin Mill will face challenges in the next years and decade, especially in the context of the founder wishing to withdraw from the day-to-day business if not eventually completely and succession is considered.

So what does it look like in the next few years? [...] What could go wrong is that the research and the practice split, which is very common, and that can happen under a number of stressful situations. The misappointment of senior leaders. A financial crisis that starts to appoint utilitarian thinking. So, all the creative individuals run probably actually on their own accord potentially. Or they're sacked. A kind of sloppiness in which the universities and the authorities start to counter challenge about the method; that is quite possible. Not having sufficient connectivity within the organisation to defend itself. 80% of the challenge of the trust will come from within, [...] (I 1, ll. 222-229)

This goes beyond challenges mentioned in the literature (Tuomala et al., 2018; Rothwell, 2010; Santora et al. 2015) which focus on the succession of a charismatic leader and do not address challenges that emerge through the clash of paradigms as described above (2.2. and 2.3.1.). In addition to those, no doubt that those organisational more internal challenges will sit within the wider economic, ecological and educational challenges ahead as one of the trustees remarked:

I put the main challenge as a kind of global one. I think we're getting very near the edge of an exponential curve. So, if climate changes [is] just on that point where it's about to sort of zoom off to the infinity point, I think socially and economically [...]. The World Economic Forum will hope that with the combination of artificial intelligence, media control and gene editing that we can be controlled one way or the other, so we're not going to fall apart. What's coming can be contained primarily in the interests of those who already own the wealth. But I'm not sure that that will be possible. (I5, ll.158-163)

While there might still be disagreement about which form of challenges the future presents (see for example Harari, 2015 and 2018; Kurzweil, 2000) there is agreement that individual (Sigman, 2023) and organisational (Fullan and Quinn, 2016) resilience will be of utmost importance. PSTE as a method that aims to support students and staff in the development of self-generated conscious action seems to be a timely development on the individual level, at the same time ensuring a focus on organisational coherence (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Hugo and Iverson, 2024).

6.4.3.feedback from practitioners

In this study, I have not made a secret out of the fact that I am highly emotionally involved in PSTE, that I believe that it works and that it is to the greatest benefit of the people who engage in it, students and staff. When considered alongside some educational establishments and practices that I have met in my career, I struggle to find something that can generate that amount of enthusiasm, engagement, warmth, focus on developing the humanity in people (Biesta, 2014).

Furthermore, it is fun! (Laaksonen and Hietala, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Looking at other companies (Thakuria, 2024), one thing that RMT possibly could cultivate more, is its perception of the things it does for all staff, such as risky activities, working with heat and fire, machinery, such as glassblowing and blacksmithing. And how 'cool' is that when a leader or manager can legitimately say: "Today I am not in the office, but I will be blacksmithing or glassblowing". In the view of some practitioners (and mine), an organisational culture where this would be the expectation, would easily overshadow some of the supposedly most innovative and fun workplaces with giant slides and skateboards (Thakuria, 2024): "Right now: Blacksmithing is cool. There's so much on the television, Games of Throne, […]" (I. 11, l. 310).

Like in many other organisations (Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; De Vries et al., 2010) practitioners felt that communication and collaboration is something that can be improved with regards to implementing the method. Although the Seven Fields of Practice provide a multidisciplinary, integral structure where a number of different aspects and viewpoints are coming together to constitute the student experience, when asked for what could be improvedsuggestions were generally around increasing connectivity and communication even further. Examples were bringing together different paradigms as "speech and language

therapy and occupational therapy do not always seem align with the understanding of the human being from spiritual science. […]" (S, Q78, P 24) or also joint planning as "therapists need to be involved in planning classroom environment please!!!" (S, Q78, P42). No doubt more examples can be found on many levels where the integration of views, those based on Steiner's insights and also those based on other paradigms can be improved to be even more integrative.

7. Conclusion
7.1. Summary of discussion and integration of findings in light of the research question

This study has explored the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?'. The discussion has drawn together insights form participants from all levels of the organisation across all sites, drawing on data from an all-staff survey, ethnographic workshop observations, interviews with senior leaders such as the founder, trustees, members of the Executive Team and centre leaders as well as individual craft tutors and focus groups of a cross section of staff. The Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) undertaken identified four themes which were re-phrased in three questions:

1. How do we understand the method?
2. How do we implement the method? (people-systems)
3. How do we develop the method?

With regards to understanding the method, three possible entry points were identified (Steiner, 1985; Goodheart, 2020; Bloom et al.,1956; Kraiger et al., 1993; Gordon and Cox, 2024):

a)   practice (hand)
b)   emotional and social experiences (heart)
c)   theory and cognitive (head)

The practice resonated with many participants, especially those working directly with students as an immediate entry to understanding the method while for senior leaders it

appeared more challenging to engage in the practice on the ground. Once logistical, status related challenges (Goodheart, 2020) and personal uncertainty is overcome, participants report profound insights that stay with them for a long time and inform their day-to-day decision making.

The entry through emotional and social experiences takes place reportedly through life events, connection with previous experiences, informal mentoring and coaching by more experienced staff and understanding the transformation that the students undergo.

The entry through the cognitive and theory related pathway for staff takes place through deep reflection on their own transformation and change of identity and insights into their own challenges. Challenges that participants report are related to language and to Steiner's insights which are based on a different paradigm which goes beyond the prevalent materialistic worldview (Steiner, 2007; Goldshmidt, 2017; Tyson, 2024b; Sheldrake, 2018) (as explored in 2.3.1).

With regards to implementing the method, tensions between external requirements and pressures and the method emerged. With people, especially senior leaders who join the organisation and are already accomplished leaders a significant amount of humility is required (Fry, 2003; Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023) to engage in the method as they literally get their 'hands dirty' (practically) or realise that they still learn the theory of what they are supposed to implement (PSTE, the Seven Fields, Steiner's insights, cognitively). The significance of alignment (Wenger, 1999; Hugo and Iverson, 2024) of the individuals, leading to organisational coherence (Fullan and Quinn, 2016) cannot be underestimated. The governours have the role of safeguarding this.

With regards to systems which support the implementation of the method and hence on occasions can scaffold the 'deficit' of the individual leader, especially research and the 'civil service' are named. But also training, especially the senior leadership induction, the Seven Fields Standards as a quality assurance tool. This needs to be seen in the context of the succession of the founder (Rothwell, 2010; Tuomala et al., 2018; Santora et al. 2015).

This does overlap with the third question "How do we develop the method?". Again, research has been named here, invigorating training and practice (Gordon and Cox, 2024) but also being informed by practice, hence creating a community of practice (Wenger, 1999).

Furthermore, challenges (and opportunities) internally through the succession process but also externtally and societal (Harari, 2015 and 2018; Kurzweil, 2000) will test and shape PSTE. However, with the focus of developing self-generated conscious action in the individual and hence resilience in the organisation, RMT and PSTE are set up relatively well to meet those.

7.2.   Contributions to knowledge

This is the only study on PSTE and its implementation. I hope it has become clear throughout this study that the way we educate young people is based on a series of choices. There is not one way and there is not necessarily one right way. All approaches, methods and modes are situated in a certain time and a certain place and need to be cognisant of those in order to support the development of a young person in the best possible way for what s/he wants to become. I hope it has also become clear that those choices are rooted in a series of underlying assumptions, sometimes explicit and -more often- implicit and that it is of the utmost importance to trace those back to their sources which in the end will reveal a certain picture (i.e. series of assumptions) about what 'man' is. These choices are also made within an environment of external pressures and demands that can be supportive of the educational method and aspiration but also unhelpful and obstructive. While educational ideas and enacted practice are not always as logically and causally connected as one might wish to think (see discussion in 2.2.), it is worth considering the underlying often implicit assumptions.

I believe that the original contribution to knowledge by this thesis is firstly, using Ruskin Mill as a case study, to show that it is possible to run (very successfully) an educational endeavour which is in many ways very different to the 'average' (if such an establishment exists) special needs school or college in 21st century Britain. Although this research did not explore the efficacy of the method for students, I hope that this encourages practitioners, academics and researchers to walk the road less travelled, to be bold and courageous to investigate the themes that nobody wants, that are complicated and that require effort (and you hopefully will not lose your job or be ostracized, as Dahlin (2017) feared). This broader choice of paradigms benefits all young people and their parents, practitioners and academics as there is a broader palette of approaches which brings us full circle as only this enables us to have freedom of choice. If there is only one paradigm, one method, one approach there is no free choice how a young person should be educated and how a school or college should be run.

Secondly, I hope that this study has shown, no matter what educational establishment you are working in or what educational research you are undertaking, the importance of questioning and investigating the -explicit and implicit- underlying assumptions of the educational approach as well as the external pressures and requirements and in how far these are shaping the educational approach. Relating research studies and practice back to its underlying key insights, considering ontology and epistemology, is mostly ongoing practice. However, it appears that this often can still go several levels deeper asking what the actual view of the world and the view of the human being in this study/approach is and thinking this through to the end. What is the purpose of this educational approach, does it support, serve and sit within the existing power and knowledge structures. Or does it aim to develop truly "free human being" as Marie Steiner put it (Steiner, 1923) or individuals capable of self-generated conscious action as Ruskin Mill puts it (Gordon and Cox, 2024), individuals who have true agency in the world? Or is it based on the latest fad (Salas et al., 2012) of AI supported education or training, reprogramming the neuronal circuits (Harari, 2018).

Thirdly, and most obviously, as mentioned before (see 2.5.4.), there is a paucity of research into PSTE but also education that is based on Steiner's educational insights in general in the English language in the UK (Dahlin, 2017). While this is the second doctorate study that has been completed in Ruskin Mill Trust it is the first that actually explores PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice. It therefore should not only serve the practitioners and researchers in Ruskin Mill but in fact the educational and academic community to give insights as well as pointers for further research into the entanglements of practice and research of 'standard' but even more importantly 'non-standard' educational approaches.

Lastly, this study makes the case that a different spiritual paradigm can inform an educational approach which would be worth investigating further. While we are not short of different faiths and spiritual beliefs (Wadibia, 2024), it remains questionable to what extent these actually inform the content and mode of delivery. In the design thinking of Steiner Education and PSTE (both based on Steiner's educational insights) the spiritual insights inform the actual contents as well as the mode of delivery of education to a good extent. For example, learning to write in Steiner schools is done in a way that is supportive of the development of the etheric body (see 2.3.3.); Greenwoodwork in PSTE in Ruskin Mill schools or colleges is done in order to support the development of the ego or self-generated conscious action (Gordon and Cox,

2024). What would education, Maths, English, Geography look like if one thought through the spiritual insights of Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian (Wadibia, 2024) into their educational delivery rather than -as in many faith schools- have faith lessons that intersperse a fairly standard curriculum. Would that not be interesting?

7.3. Recommendations for research, policy and practice within and beyond Ruskin Mill

While appreciating how much Ruskin Mill and PSTE have developed in the recent decade, in exploring the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?' through the literature and research, some areas of future development have emerged for RMT as well as for the wider academic community:

7.3.1. Strengthen the craft engagement culture

Given the importance of practical engagement in the workshops, land and households as highlighted by the insights from senior leaders and staff RMT should work on developing a culture where it is 'cool' to engage -especially for senior leaders- in the craft workshops alongside the students and master craft people. With now more than 1200 staff and being one of the biggest national charities, with the publication of the book (Gordon and Cox, 2024) and its founder receiving an OBE award, having a (as far as possible) consistent and coherent culture is important (Laloux, 2014; Coyle, 2018; Fullan and Quinn, 2015). Ruskin Mill not only can afford to be different but in order to bring PSTE as an educational method (which is distinctly different to others) into the world it has to work out of full conviction, authenticity and staff on all levels need to be able to stand for what PSTE is. This can only be achieved through performance and celebration of and immersion in practice. This could possible further developed through:

- Senior leaders and civil service staff participate in workshops as a matter of course on a regular basis

- Present case studies on staff, especially leaders, who got into the method as successful case studies

- Review office constellations to ensure senior staff with different expertise share experiences and collaborate to build communities of practice and enable informal mentorship

- Scaffold and support senior leaders in doing so in order to lower the engagement threshold

- Ensure that this is communicated well throughout the recruitment process

7.3.2. Strengthen the systems that support the implementation of PSTE

The evidence shows that, while systems have been developed (such as the Senior Leadership Induction, the Seven Fields Standards, finance systems, staff training and induction reporting systems) these are still largely fragile and depend on the good will, initiative and energy of individuals. While self-generated conscious action stands at the centre of PSTE the systems supporting the development of PSTE should be held by the organisation as a whole -as well as individuals- as rigorous as the other systems concerning for example finance, safeguarding, health and safety and other compliance. It is not a question whether at the end of the month staff get paid, safeguarding referrals are made or fire-alarms are tested on a weekly basis. Neither should it be a question whether staff receive an induction to the organisation and PSTE, whether the Seven Fields Standards are implemented, or a senior leader or manager engages in a craft workshop on a regular basis. This could be further developed by:

- Make PSTE part of the overall quality assurance and monitoring cycles, systems and dashboard with equally robust actions taken as in other areas of compliance

- Be 'finished-items-orientated' as the pedagogy is implicit, including exhibition at the end

- Undertake a further audit of systems and dashboards and design a Trust-wide PSTE development plan

- Ensure that 100% staff (including residential) undertake the PSTE induction training; further investigation and conversation in the organisation and a review of the monitoring systems.

- Ensure that systems around the method remain meaningful to staff

- Ensure that the trustees are clear about their responsibility to safeguard the implementation and development of the method and that the majority of the trustees have a good understanding of PSTE and its underlying principles
- Provide ongoing training for civil service staff on PSTE and its implementation

7.3.3. Further enliven the staff training

Given the strong comments of a number of staff and senior leaders of what did work well for them and what was challenging, it appears that the all staff training as well as some of the courses would benefit from a review while keeping the following in mind:

- There is a place for the 'heavy lectures', the 'sage from the stage', however that would need to be complemented with other modes of teaching and learning drawing on relevant research on adult learning and teaching and learning in Higher Education (e.g. Russell, 2006, Sava and Novotny, 2016) and training science (Jansen in de Wal et al., 2023; Hutchins and Burke, 2007; Blume et al., 2010).
- Given the highly appreciative comments, consider formal and informal mentoring throughout
- Review the staff training with the consideration of a spiral curriculum with different training opportunities for staff members at different points in their institutional journeys (see length of service table)
- Given that there appears to be a generally lower understanding, create more training opportunities especially around Field 3 and 6
- Give space for digestion groups and group work
- Consider the use of modern technology such as social groups and bite sized aspects of the method to engage staff (see 6.2.2.3.)
- Strengthen systems to monitor attendance at courses and induction

7.3.4. Intensify and further professionalise 'research enhances practice and practice enhances research'

Given the growing research competency in the Trust as well as the paucity in peer reviewed publications it might be the time to take the next step. Ruskin Mill has taken great strides with regards to the 'Community of Practice' (Wenger, 1999) that Aonghus already in 2012 (Gordon and Bulow, 2012) envisaged, if not already in his collaboration with the Painter David Newblatt 1995 (see email in Appendix 5.4 and figure 15), in which 'research enhances practice and practice enhances research' (Gordon and Cox, 2024, p.180). This emerging research culture that brings more consciousness into the practice and connects the practice well with the research and through this enhances the way that PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice are worked with, creating the environment for staff and students to move towards 'self-generated conscious action' could potentially take further steps. As part of a research strategy, doctorate candidates could undertake individually, collaboratively with other universities as well as with successful Masters students' research projects on aspects of the practice of the Trust. The peer review process would ensure the academic and methodological rigour and completion:

- Undertake and stimulate research projects that enhance policy development and change practice (see Appendix 8) and that would -while doing them- implement PSTE even further and more robustly through all levels of the organisation
- Further research into the actual student experience of the method and the impact of logistical challenges and external accountability (reporting of progress etc)
- Undertake further exploration in how far the survey questions or a variation of them could be used in the organisation

7.3.5. Recommendations for research, policy and practice beyond Ruskin Mill

Education has been driven in the last decades towards a knowledge economy (MacDonald, 2005) by international comparison (Lewis, 2017), measurement and assessment criteria (Biesta, 2007, 2015b, 2017). Following this development, compounded by rapid development of AI, its application in education and teacher training (e.g. Chaudhry and Kazim, 2022; Ng et al., 2023) and the significant economic interests connected with this, the question that we returned to throughout this study which is emerging globally for research, policy and practice

is: How do we develop what is essentially human? What Ruskin Mill calls self-generated conscious action (Gordon and Cox, 2024), what Steiner Education calls education of the free human being (Steiner, 1923), how do we develop human agency, choice, initiative, creativity, responsibility and connection? Therefore:

- within research, studies, teacher training etc., the underlying paradigm of child development should be explored explicitly to ensure clarity of intentions, purpose and methods as well as the impact of methods on child development
- educational approaches (such as Steiner Education) that are not based on the assumptions of mainstream education but on spiritual conceptualisations of man should invest in research and studies, especially in the English-speaking world
- policy makers should consider freedom of choice in the educational arena so that parents can chose between educational approaches and the underlying paradigms
- education policy and practice should move towards considering the whole human being, character development and practical skill-based learning

7.5. Reflexivity and generalisability of the study

The validity of qualitative research such as data from open-ended survey questions, focus groups and interviews is a long-debated issue (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Victoria Clarke (Whiffin, 2023) acknowledges that qualitative research has got subjective biases as all research has (even 'sciency' quantitative research) but it is about acknowledging them and being reflective about them, hence terming her research Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

While wishing to be precise in the coding and reviewing the coherence of codes and themes so that themes represent the codes in the best possible way (Braun and Clarke, 2022) I felt it was a fairly subjective process in itself and a different researcher might have chosen different codes or different excerpts and interpreted them differently. However, while the findings and insights need to be seen with my positionality and resulting biases in mind (see 1.3.) the potential difference in coding and interpretations would be within an acceptable range considering the quality of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Therefore, given the transparency of the process as described in the study, the fact that half of the trustees (4 out of 8) and a good proportion of centre leaders (3 out of 11) were interviewed, staff from across the Trust participated in the study through the survey (see table 3) and/or interviews and focus groups, the range of data sources it does appear reasonable that the study can offer trustworthy and credible insights (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017).

7.6.   Dissemination strategy

Throughout the development of this study, I had the privilege to grow into the Ruskin Mill research community. By giving regular updates on my study and receiving feedback from fellow academics and researchers as well as trustees and colleagues, by working with other colleagues who are also going through doctorate studies as well as by becoming part of the faculty for the Masters in PSTE with the University of Huddersfield, leading a module. Therefore, I feel that already good parts of the research have informed the organisation and colleagues to some extent. As to the study as a whole, some thoughts have been formed -also with colleagues to some extent- to support the dissemination:

1. Making the study accessible to colleagues across the Trust.
2. Holding presentations to colleagues across the Trust, starting at Trustee and senior leadership level.
3. Leading working groups to follow through the recommendations given-also with smaller and collaborative studies as suggested above- impacting on policy and practice of the organisation.
4. Working parts of the study into a (or several) peer-reviewed papers as well as internal publications, e.g. the *Field Centre Research Journal* as well as standalone publication.
5. Organising and presenting at a Ruskin Mill Higher Education conference.
6. Engaging into collaborative research and publications with partner universities (e.g. Sheffield, Coventry and Huddersfield).

7.7. Conclusion

This study has explored the research question 'How can Ruskin Mill Trust ensure coherence of understanding and implementation of its educational method (PSTE), which is informed by Rudolf Steiner's educational insights, through all levels of the organisation?'. For this it has explored the underlying insights of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), namely that man is made of more than matter (Steiner, 1994, 2011), how this consequentially impacts on his educational insights (Steiner 1985; Goldshmidt, 2017); and how this view can be seen at odds with the general contemporary scientific and educational paradigm. We furthermore explored how Steiner's and other's (Ruskin and Morris to name but a few) insights have informed Aonghus Gordon and Ruskin Mill Trust in developing its unique method Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE) and the Seven Fields of Practice to support the student to develop 'self-generated conscious action' (Gordon and Cox, 2024; RMT, 2024c; Sigman, 2023). The study draws on insights from the literature on leadership (Fullan and Quinn, 2015; Coyle, 2018; Fry, 2003; Santora et al., 2015; Lacerenza, et al., 2017), social learning, understanding and the implementation (Savin-Baden, 2020; Hugo and Iverson, 2024; Wenger, 1999), also of other educational methods (e.g. project based learning; Bouhuijs, 2011). The research question was explored through a mixed method approach: using an all staff survey in order to get maximal participation across the Trust; ethnographic observations in the workshops in order to explore the method on the ground; and interviews and focus groups in order to understand how staff of all levels of the organisation make sense of and what are the things that are helpful and the challenges in understanding and implementing PSTE and the Seven Fields of Practice. 69 surveys were completed. Over the course of 13 days of ethnographic observations I made a hook, a stool and a pair of slippers alongside students and directed by Ruskin Mill Tutors and many interesting observations and I conducted 15 interviews and 2 focus groups. The quantitative survey data was summarised to give context to the qualitative data of the survey, the field notes and the interview and focus groups transcript. The qualitative data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006 and 2022). Four themes were identified and discussed as three essential questions: How do we understand the method? How do we implement the method (people and systems)? How do we develop the method?

While participants understand and engage with the method in different ways, they often stumble when it comes to the underlying assumptions which challenge their current worldview and often prefer to remain with the day-to-day practical applications which convince. Senior leaders can take this one step further if they firstly are open to and engage in the underlying assumptions and secondly engage with the crafts in processes that transform the materials into items of service as well as themselves by supporting the development of self-generated conscious action. Ruskin Mill Trust has also developed a number of systematic approaches to implementing the method, some of which need more rigour, e.g. the overview of inductions, others need to be taken to the next step, e.g. research projects into policies and peer reviewed publications, to maximise the impact, disseminate PSTE and research into it, to continue to develop the method, the organisation and the offer for students, and to ensure 'research enhances practice and practice enhances research' (Gordon and Cox, 2024).

7.8. Postscript

It would not be a study on PSTE and self-generated conscious action if I would not reflect on how it has shaped me.

While this process is certainly still unfolding, and many aspects are still in the process of becoming conscious even for myself it was surprising to me in how far this study has changed me as a person, leader and researcher. It has amplified my thoughtfulness, reflectiveness and yearning for understanding that I always had but also moved it from opinions to deeper and more careful insights which hopefully benefit the people I work with, the people I live with and the projects I take on. It has also opened up my views on many things, research, education, PSTE, Steiner's insights and situated them in a much broader context, giving me the feeling of being much more grounded and well rooted in those areas. I had not expected that academia would ever be able to provide me with this as I had more the view that academia is something that happens in a lofty ivory tower.

Lastly, this study has -once more- fanned my passion for PSTE, a form of education that deviates from many things provided out there, making me hope that now I can be an even stronger ambassador for the method and the young people it serves so that -with the words

of Marie Steiner- become as free as possible to be "able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives" (Steiner, 1923).

The very last words of my wordcount I want to give to you -the reader- and want to thank you that you made it to the end! I do hope that you enjoyed the journey and wonder what has changed for you?

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